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Dissertation on the progress and prospects of medical science

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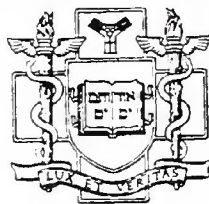


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The Progress & Prospects of Medical
Science — Attempting to trace
the profession of Medicine to its ori-
gin would be like attempting to trace
a great and mighty stream to one
distinct and definite source. its
practice is founded in the benevolent
instincts and sympathies of human
nature and is to be found in the
history of every race and in every
condition of man. The rude Indi-
an in addition to his wild mean
fations and senseless mummeries over
the sick, derived from his fathers
some simple knowledge of the uses
and effects of certain roots and herbs
untrammelled probably by any theo-
ries culminated to being and mis-
had him, — The ancient heathen
while examining so religiously and
so minutely the entrails of animals

for the purpose of divining the dis-
ease of some superstitious patient
certainly had the opportunity before
him of making some practical
observations in anatomy such as
might be of essential service in ex-
ercising his professional skill.
how much of importance the mas-
ters of their art attached to these
ceremonies or in what right they
regarded them may be a matter of
some question - it is probable that
there were some philosophic minds
who perceived how mighty an en-
gine was mystery in their hands
and employed it in connection with
other means to accomplish their
ends. "omne ignotum pro magnif-
ico" is a maxim the truth of which
has been as thoroughly demonstrated
in medical history as in any other
and that too whether we look at

it in a barbarous age or in an age of the highest civilization.

But medicine as a science is now by universal consent considered as beginning at the time of Hippocrates and from his time forward may be regarded as both a science and an art. with this Philosopher and Physician originated practices and doctrines which have held their credit for over two thousand years and are likely to do so till the end of time - his division of the temperaments into Sanguine Phlegmatic Choleric and melancholic with little modification is still considered worthy to be made in treatises upon Physiology, while blood letting his chief remedy in acute inflammation after many seasons of popularity and neglect is now advocated as a remedy not sufficiently practised in the New Eng.

land states at the present time
From Hippocrates ^{to the time of Galen} ^{500 years} to Galen, there
is no great light in medicine, in
the results of his observations and
the multitude of his works he
overshadowed his successors like
a Colossus, as an observer of nature,
a practical philanthropist one to
whom nations looked for relief
when suffering with plagues and
epidemics he bore the palm alone,
till Galen appeared, and in the spirit
of the same philosophy, widely
extended the bounds of medical
knowledge by the dissection of the
human body. The introduction of
dissection was attended with a
two fold danger - the opposition
of a superstitious and infatuated
public and the risk of poison
from the virus of the recent sub-
ject - but it is this that has been

the means above all stress of throwing light upon the character, and designating the seat of disease and thus affording indications for its treatment - here it was that the temple of the human body began to be unlocked and its hidden mysteries revealed - since its practice to any considerable extent it has been attended with a series of observations and discoveries following each other in quick succession, that have aided much in dissipating the doubt and uncertainty of the Physician's work - it has now been proved and most clearly within the last centuries that success in this as in all other arts is attained by diligent toil patient investigation and sound reasoning - The most brilliant disclosure perhaps that has ever been made in medical science

and the most complete as it emanated from the mind of one man was the circulation of the blood as explained by Harvey in the seventeenth century - dating from this time the advance which has been made in the profession has been by far more rapid than at any previous period - in the wake of Harvey's discovery naturally follow that of the aeration of the blood the office which it performs in assimilation and excretion and the various changes which it undergoes in disease - the progress of medical science is now intimately and inseparably connected with the departments of Chemistry, Philosophy and mechanics - the increased power and perfection of the microscope has introduced a field for observation such as we may

reasonably believe that but just be-
gun to be occupied while Chemis-
try is unfolding the intricate
complications of the elements as
they exist in the healthy body
and the diseased - it is reasona-
ble to suppose that the closer
we can perceive the first depar-
ture from normal action in cell
life, the stronger probability there
will be of success in counteracting
it - To this end should the use
of the microscope the arts of per-
cussion and auscultation and the
science of Chemistry be cultivat-
ed by medical men - The ancients
with their imaginative and specu-
lative habits of mind have hand-
ed down to us models of art in
Sculpture and Painting and mod-
els of literature that have been
unsurpassed in modern times

but for those numerous applican-
ces of art to the relief of human
suffering and to the increase of the
common good we must look to
a comparatively late period in
the world's history - the early
standard writers being to a great
degree ignorant of the functions
of the human body and of those
first principles of anatomy and
physiology which are now made
part of a common education -
indulged in idle theories and vain
speculations - they wandered in
labyrinths of error and uncer-
tainty and unworked the known
world for drugs and specifics -
the current of investigation at the
present day sets in a different di-
rection - new remedies are looked
upon ^{with} distrust while many of the
old ones are regarded as more -

ceremonial, than useful and are administered out of respect to the Fathers and in answer to the demands of those who take them there are but few remedies for which some substitute cannot readily be obtained. They are administered with the view of producing a definite effect in a definite way - not only may the remedies of a certain class be varied to a great extent but the general means may be varied for accomplishing the same end, as for instance depletion may be brought about by venesection by cathartics by diuretics or by diaphoretics. There is a disposition to simplify rather to classify - instead of Dr Cullen's useless list of diseases with names which exhaust the vocabularies of two dead languages we are approaching

ing to the principles which underlie them all - the effect of this change must be radical as respects the treatment of disease - it is like tying the trunk of an artery instead of attempting to secure a hundred bleeding branches. The simple termination "itis" applied to the name of a tissue or an organ indicates, precisely both the nature & the seat of the affection and includes diseases similar in their nature that under a different nomenclature were distinguished with much less accuracy - Cicero said that the first and most important thing in debate was that the parties should have correct definitions - the same is true of medicine and whatever tends to uniformity in the use of terms and a system founded upon general truths

is to hailed with joy in the pro-
fession—

George Clary.



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