

times, namely, that the very highest moral qualities and standards of life were required of those who entered upon the work of healing.

Medicine as Transformed in Greece.

It has been necessary to glance at the foregoing facts because they influenced so strongly medicine as it came to be practised later in Greece. But there is one important difference in the outlook upon medicine in Egypt and in Greece. The Greek physicians were not so concerned as were the Egyptians with the study of mathematics and such like subjects. Theirs was a more plastic activity, an activity that lived in the consciousness of man himself and did not come to him so much from outside. They observed more than did the Egyptians the physiological conditions of the human body, they loved to reproduce the human body in marble and in great perfection of form. They sought by exercises, games and the like to develop the physical body. Also they concerned themselves much with the fluids of the body (as had the Egyptians also to a certain extent) and they related these fluids to the different seasons of the year—phlegm to winter, blood to spring, yellow gall to summer and black gall to autumn. Out of this grew the doctrine of the temperaments which persisted down almost to recent centuries. To keep a proper balance of the four fluids in the body was the aim of the Greek physician.

The Blameless Physician.

The great teacher of medicine in ancient Greece was, of course, Æsculapius. For thousands of years he was spoken of as "the blameless physician," and here we have just an indication of the very high moral standards required of those who studied medicine at that time. Æsculapius was regarded as half god, half man, and in this sense we might place him among those god-men termed "the heroes" of ancient Greece. Many hundreds of temples where medical knowledge was pursued were dedicated to Æsculapius, and in certain traditions he is held to have been the son of Apollo. This last conception would place the origins of Greek medicine back in the island of Delos; according to mythology it was originally a floating island but it was stabilised so that it might provide a resting-place for the goddess Leto when she gave birth to Apollo. From Delos Apollo went to Delphi, and there was established the Delphic Oracle which led on towards the cult of Æsculapius.

The sons of Æsculapius followed the Greek army to cure those wounded in battle, and the names of his daughters, Hygiea and Panacea, also point to connections with the healing art. Æsculapius, and also Hygiea, are very often depicted with a Staff of Mercury to indicate their knowledge of the rhythms of the body and of the interweaving of the various healing forces. The greatest of all the many temples dedicated to Æsculapius was that at Epidaurus. It was built in a beautiful part of the country with vistas of scenery all around it; temples of healing were often placed in such situations so that the harmonies and beauty of nature might play into the consciousness of the sick. It is said that the temple at Epidaurus could seat 20,000 people. It was not, of course, medicine only that was studied here. Music, art, the drama, philosophy, all were pursued in this ancient university, and there were gymnasia, baths and, it is said, about four to five hundred small apartments were comprised in the building; to these we shall refer again presently. Often regarded as the most prominent feature, however, has been the long colonnade, very like a hospital ward except that it was open on all sides, for the Greeks held that healing forces were ever weaving in air and light. At one end of this "abaton" was an altar, and there were many of the tame serpents referred to already. We are told that when

a patient arrived he bathed and then made his sacrifice, very often a cock, to Æsculapius. Then the patient lay down to sleep in the abaton and to obtain in a dream the indication of the procedure to be followed for his cure. But it is held by some that it was the Hierophant or priest who did the dreaming, and here it is important to cast a thought to these many small apartments referred to, certain of which may have been the cells where the priest-physicians went through the experience of "the Temple-sleep."

The status of the Greek physicians was very high and it is told that they shared the tents of the priests and lute players; here it might be useful to refer to the part these lute players had in the art of healing, as it then existed, for they were believed, by their art, to bring into harmonious working certain forces in the body. As pointing to the esteem in which those who studied the art of healing were held, it is interesting to note that, in Homeric verse, one general in the Greek army owes his immortality in literature, not to his own prowess but to the fact that he had for his wife Agammede the Fair-haired, "who knew all drugs so many as the wide earth nourisheth." In other words, she was initiated in the mysteries of the healing art.

The Father of Modern Medicine.

I have mentioned that there were many temples in ancient Greece dedicated to Æsculapius and, next to that at Epidaurus, the most famous was at Cos. Here was born, in 460 B.C., that man whom scholars of all the ages have eulogised—the great Hippocrates. Here no longer is a god-physician. Hippocrates is not spoken of as "the blameless Physician," but as "the Father of Modern Medicine," for it was his world-mission to carry the old teaching of medicine over into the new. He was accused of having "burnt the books of the mysteries" and, in a certain degree, was persecuted therefor. He it was who separated medicine from religion, from philosophy, but not in a sense of the divorcement of one from the other. Each, in a new age, had to become individualised while still one must help the progress of the other. By now the teaching of medicine as it had existed some four or five hundred years before at Epidaurus had become decadent, and Hippocrates himself indicates that this was so. Here, in Hippocrates, we have one of the most brilliant intellects of a brilliant age (remember that he was a contemporary of Plato, Socrates and such men), and this Hippocrates set himself to revolutionise medicine, albeit he claimed descent from Æsculapius himself and came of a long line of physicians who for centuries had practised medicine at Cos after the methods of the Epidaurian school. The age of inspiration, as it might loosely be called, had passed and there remained but a weak, unreliable image of it in the study of medicine as it persisted in those who still held to the old methods of what might be termed clairvoyance, now a decadent clairvoyance. For Greece the age of Persephone, the age of these spirit-enlightened dreams, was gone; the Goddess Natura stood at the portals of the Temple of Healing. And so it was that Hippocrates claimed that the causes of disease could be found in man himself and that the cure of disease must be sought for in nature by careful and patient study and meticulous observation. Yet still he clung to much of the best in the old teachings and, indeed, a great deal of the present-day medicine has its origin in what was preserved from the mysteries. He still accepted the doctrine of the "temperaments" and the four important fluids that influence them.

We have stated that Hippocrates is said to have separated medicine from philosophy, but this must not imply that he minimised the importance of philosophy. Far from this, it was Hippocrates who first originated the saying that "the philosopher physician is near to being a god." No-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)