

Asklepios appears to have been the first to devote himself to the study and practice of medicine as a distinct object of pursuit. Before his time a knowledge of medicine was regarded merely as a part of the education, though an indispensable one, of all persons of rank and condition. So far as we can gather, he was a native of Epidaurus, exposed on account of his illegitimate birth, who was found by a shepherd, and placed under the care of Chiron. He was highly successful as a practitioner, for we read that Zeus blasted him with his thunderbolts at the instance of Pluto, who viewed with alarm the diminishing number of arrivals in the nether regions. Wherefore, some wit has said, "The modern children of Æsculapius abstain from performing prodigies." So great was his reputation that he was asked by the twin brothers, Castor and Pollux, to accompany the Argonautic expedition as surgeon. After his death he attained to divine honours. It is worthy of note that in the *Iliad* Asklepios appears, not as a god, but as a king of Thessaly. This is in keeping with what we know of the origin of ancient myths. We need not scout these as altogether unworthy of credence, as the mere creations of a lively imagination. Carlyle has pointed out that in many cases there was a substratum of fact. An individual becomes renowned in his day for some brilliant achievement or striking peculiarity. He stands out preeminent above all others. As time goes on, his life-story becomes invested with the glamour that always enshrouds the past. His deeds are magnified and his character is exalted. The man becomes a hero, and the hero, a god. His history finally reads like a romance, tricked out with all the beautiful imaginings of poetic fancy. So with Asklepios.

At his death his mantle was divided between his two sons, Machaon and Podalirius. They appear in Homer as professional healers, and are treated with great respect. Machaon's task was to heal injuries, while Podalirius had received from his father the gift of "recognizing what was not visible to the eye, and tending what could not be healed." Here we see, even in this ancient story, an indication of the distinction between physician and surgeon. In the Homeric poems, too, it is worthy of mention, that there is no evidence of the subordination of medicine to religion, as was the case in India and Egypt, nor are the priests invested with healing functions. From incidental references in the pages of Homer and the earlier Greek writers we would infer that the practice of these personages and others of the time was principally surgical, and confined almost entirely to the treatment of wounds. Internal diseases, so-called, were usually looked upon as due to the infliction of the gods, and were to be relieved only by means of charms and incantations. In fact, the arts of magic were invoked to a large extent in surgical prac-