

by Hippocrates. But within the last few weeks, Spaet, in his study of a remarkable manuscript (*Anonymus Londinensis*, one of the rich horde recently unearthed in Egypt by the British Museum authorities), points out that Hippocrates clearly indulged in theoretical speculation, and that the commentators have been wrong in taking from him all the so-called philosophical writings. Hence it is not impossible that the treatise is by the physician of Cos. Whoever be the author, it is curious that he should have spoken of this flux into the omentum almost with the same breath with his discussion upon dropsy. Indeed, he appears to imply that this flux is dropsical. The wise old Malpighi, commenting upon this passage, carries the connection to its natural conclusion and makes the definite suggestion that from the omentum the flux may pass into the abdominal cavity and be a cause of dropsy. It is remarkable that, so far as I can read, no authority since has taken up the relationship between this vascularity (and delicacy) of the great omentum and the development of ascites. There is only the suggestion of a German country practitioner, one Landgraf,³ who in 1870 called attention to this possible function. He gave the notes of a case of ascites associated with cardiac disease and of many months' duration, which had proved absolutely intractable to fourteen tapplings. Being called one day to the case, he found the abdominal distension so great and the respiratory difficulty so alarming that death appeared imminent unless the fluid were removed. He had no trochar with him and was compelled to perform paracentesis by means of a lancet and a piece of tubing. As a result there developed at the incision a hernia of the great omentum of the size of a walnut. The protruding tissue true to Hippocrates' aphorism, sloughed off, and there was no further untoward result; but within a few days the ascites came to an end, and, after one further tapping, never recurred. Landgraf makes the obvious, though it may not be absolutely logical, suggestion that the great omentum is largely responsible for the exudation of ascitic fluid. At the last moment I find that a *confrère* here in Toronto, Dr. J. F. W. Ross, has arrived at a similar conclusion, and that in his very full article upon the omentum⁴ he quotes Lawson Tait as holding like opinions.

But if Hippocrates may have come near to indicating one important function of the viscus, that, namely, of regulating to a greater or less extent the amount of fluid passing into (and out of) the peritoneal cavity, those who followed him held other views. We owe to

³ *Deutsches Archiv für Klinisches Medicin.*

⁴ *American Journal of Obstetrics*, xxviii., 1-23, No. 6.