

PREFACE

The necessity of allotting the various subjects of the medical curriculum to different periods, so that the more strictly scientific subjects are completed in the earlier years, has the great disadvantage that the student, being no longer in touch with laboratory work, fails to employ the scientific knowledge with full advantage in the solution of his clinical problems. He is apt to regard the first two or three years in the laboratory departments as inconsequential in comparison with the supposedly more practical instruction offered during the subsequent clinical years. He is taught by his laboratory instructors to observe accurately, and to correlate the observed facts, so that he may be enabled to draw conclusions as to the manner of working of the various functions of the animal body in health, and before proceeding to his clinical studies, he is required to show a proficiency in scientific knowledge, because it is recognized that this must serve as the basis upon which his knowledge of disease is to be built. When the clinic is reached, however, the methods of the scientist are not infrequently cast aside and an understanding of disease is sought for largely by the empirical method; namely, by the endeavor to see and examine innumerable patients, to diagnose the case according to the grouping of the signs and symptoms, and to treat it by the prescribed methods of experience. So much has to be learned and so much has to be seen during the clinical years, that the student gives little thought to the nature of the functional disturbance which is responsible for the symptoms; he fails to realize that after all, there is no essential difference between the condition brought about in his patient by some pathologic lesion, and that which may be produced in the laboratory by experimental procedures, by drugs or by toxins. It must of course be recognized that just as the science of medicine originated by the grouping of symptoms into more or less characteristic diseases for which the most favorable method of treatment had to be discovered by experience, so must a certain part of the medical training be more or less empirical but it should at the same time be realized that such a method is only a means to an end, and that the real understanding of disease can be acquired only when every abnormal condition is interpreted as a primary or secondary consequence of some perverted bodily function, and when the training in observation and the inductive method is carried from the laboratory into the clinic.