

surgery, and until the last few months practically none upon its physiology, represents all that has been written during the century. Evidently, according to the *Index Medicus*, during the last ten years, when medical scribbling has been at its height, not two papers per annum have been published of which the main subject has been some one or other condition of this viscus. And yet this is the ominous organ of the augurs, every aspect of which, studied by them, was found full of fate. The older priestly comparative anatomist is long past and gone, and now no modern comparative anatomist so poor as to do the omentum reverence.

Thus, if following the time-honored custom one wishes to lead gently up to his subject—to introduce it in a respectful manner—by referring to the observations and conclusions of those who have gone before, he finds himself confronted by the fact that here, in connection with the great omentum, there is little to be said unless he travels back through the centuries. There is no voluminous literature, no array of modern continental authorities, whose names, in length and difficulty of pronunciation, are in inverse proportion to the facts and theories they bring forward. There are, it is true, isolated observations upon the omentum, of recent date—observations of great value by Ranvier, Durham, and others; but for any attempt at broad generalization upon the functions of the same we have to wander back to the seventeenth century, and beyond that to the fathers of medicine. And strangely enough, passing back to the limits of medical history, we find that old Hippocrates noted that which, as I shall have later occasion to point out, was perhaps more nearly correct than any of the observations for long centuries following. In addition to his aphorism that if the omentum protrude it necessarily mortifies and drops off, he makes a longer reference in his book "*pezi topon.*" Writing concerning exudations, he turns to one side to refer to the spleen. "In fever," says he, "the spleen becomes enlarged, increasing in size as the body becomes emaciated. Indeed, everything which causes the spleen to become enlarged consumes the body. When the body becomes emaciated, if the spleen be swollen and the great omentum attenuated at the same time as the body, then the fat which was in the omentum is dissolved, and when the organ is free from fat, the growing spleen furnishes a flux, and the omentum, which is close by, which has vessels, and those vessels empty, receives that flux."<sup>2</sup>

It is true that Littré and Adams and the modern commentators regard the work in which this passage occurs as almost certainly not

<sup>2</sup> Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate, Littré's edition, Paris, 1819, p. 314.