

The origin of Medicine, like that of other branches of knowledge, is wrapped in obscurity. The most ancient literary monuments that have come down to us are the Books of Moses and the Homeric poems. In the former, medical subjects are touched upon in some detail and a good many useful rules of hygiene are inculcated. The suggestions for treatment, however, are of a thaumaturgic and mystical, rather than a rational, character, in keeping with what we know were the habits of thought of all primitive peoples. In Homer, we have indications that at the time of the Trojan war (about 882 B.C.) there was a very considerable knowledge of things medical, in fact, there was something approaching a definite system. Now, it is well-known that in the evolution of social and political economy things are always older than they appear to be, and, no doubt, this is the case with medicine also. Medical knowledge has always flourished in direct proportion to the degree of enlightenment of the community, and it may reasonably be inferred that it would progress equally with the arts, sciences, and other polite accomplishments of budding civilization. It is not improbable, indeed, that medicine would antedate all these, for accident and disease have been the unfortunate heritage of all races from time immemorial, and rude attempts at healing would, no doubt, be practiced in all but the most barbarous ages of mankind. The earliest therapeutics would naturally be based upon observation. A dog licking a sore would suggest the utility of washing a wound and protecting it from the air with a bland coating, such as would be afforded by the mucus of the saliva. The relief afforded by the evacuation of the stomach and bowels in certain derangements of the alimentary system would suggest the employment of artificial means to attain the same result. Observation of the effects of various plants upon the lower animals would point out the remedy here. Then, it would be found that the pain of wounds could be alleviated by rest, by the exclusion of the air and foreign substances, and by the application of heat and cold. Darts and arrows would be removed and bleeding stopped by pressure or the application of plugs and styptic agents. Broken bones would be replaced and kept in position. The observation of the course of disease and the attempts of Nature to return to a normal equilibrium would suggest other lines of treatment. The effects of certain forms of diet and the influence of external agents on the body would also early be noted. In this way a certain rough system of medical practice would arise, and, as experience grew, the skill and resources of the physician would be correspondingly increased. Yet, no doubt, the measures adopted must often have proved ineffective and even at times misdirected.

When and how medical knowledge came into being in Greece must