

Medicine has been termed "The Healing Art"—an art, because in the absence of stable guiding principles its successful practice depended on experience and on a sort of intuitive aptitude on the part of the practitioner. Nevertheless, it has always been the aim, at least of the master-minds of our profession, to convert this art into a science, to exchange the tallow dip of empiricism for the glorious and beneficent sun of reason. With what measure of success this has already been accomplished we are all familiar.

A learned interpreter of the doctrine of Cuvier has said, "The first question in science is always a question of method." The method of to-day, not only in medicine but in all natural and applied sciences, is the method of observation and experimentation. John Hunter touched the keynote of this when he said, "Do not think. Try it." The modern scientific spirit, then, is essentially the spirit of enquiry. Do I say modern? It is really old. For we owe this conception to the Greeks. Systems of philosophy have come and gone, many of them the offspring of the brightest intellects. If they exist at all to-day it is mainly as curious relics, illustrating merely stages in the development of human thought, but devoid of vital force. The one thing that has been permanent is the spirit of enquiry. This is the golden thread connecting the present with the past. If this be the case, and it is true of medicine as of the other natural sciences, we are the more readily enabled to translate ourselves into the intellectual atmosphere of the past. By a study of the method of medical learning, therefore, our sympathies and our interest will be best aroused and we will the better appreciate our heritage from the ages.

To return, now, to the question, "How are we to bound our enquiry?"

To trace the influence of Greek thought on the science of medicine would be to write a history of medicine. To do this would be obviously impossible within the compass of a half-hour paper. On the other hand, to restrict our enquiry to the medicine of Greece itself would lead to but a partial, and indeed erroneous, conception of the subject. Greek medicine was none the less Greek because it overstepped its geographical boundaries and was transported to Asia, Egypt, or Rome. It has seemed to me, therefore, the most useful plan to deal with the evolution of medical knowledge as it is exemplified in the work of men of Greek race, of Greek education, and of Greek ideals, wherever they may have been found. From the origin of medicine to the time of its greatest perfection as a product of Greek genius is approximately a span of a thousand years. We begin with the dawn of history, for practical purposes the Trojan war; we end with the birth of Galen.