

Aristotle the commonly accepted opinion that it is formed of light membranes, and so placed, covering the intestines, as "to preserve the innate heat of the body." Galen accepted and expanded this view. He gives the case of a gladiator who, having lost his omentum through an abdominal wound, recovered from the injury, but thereafter felt cold in his abdomen.<sup>5</sup> So far as I can find from inquiry, this Aristotelean view remains the most commonly accepted at the present day.

With the renaissance of medicine the obscurity of the omentum made it the text for numerous most wild discussions. In his "Exercitatio de Omento," Malpighi collects some of the leading theories. Thus, for example, Fabricius ab Aquapendente (well known in connection with the discovery of the circulation) held that it was the seat of those winds which so torture hypochondriacs. Laurentius, Bauhinus, and others considered that it collected the humors going to the intestine or the excrementitious matters from the spleen, while Cordæus taught that it was a second stomach or food-store from which the stomach received again the food; whence, by him, man was declared to ruminate like unto brute beasts.

Malpighi himself was cautious of attaching any function to the viscus. He was even doubtful whether to accept the vulgar opinion as to its heat-preserving properties. He was especially interested in its relationship to the storage of fat, and has not a little to say concerning the use of fat and its nature as a food. Thus he concludes that fat is important to the economy, is taken up from the intestines and stored in the great omentum and other regions for further use. In short, Malpighi represented the reaction to the wild theorising of his immediate predecessors, and from his time onward it may be said that the theorizing has given place to agnosticism, or, rather, to indifferentism. With rare exception, no one nowadays troubles to think of the viscus.

Possibly this indifferentism is a right attitude. The great omentum varies much in size; and when an organ is very variable and at times almost absent, we are, in general, correct in regarding it as of relatively little use—as a disappearing and *therefore* useless structure. I think, however, that it is not quite so variable as one is apt to regard it; very often, it is true, the coils of the small intestine are wholly exposed, and the first impression is that the omentum is inconsiderable. But it is there, and if the mass of delicate membrane be unravelled it is most often found to be quite extensive.

<sup>5</sup> Galen: De usu partium. Frobenius' edition. T. i, lib. 4, 1567, p. 1244.