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## [Greek medecine in its relation to religion and magic - suite]

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### Présentation de la fiche

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ceed farther than the physicians before him and to write methodically about the treatment of chronic diseases. Erasistratos, admitting that nature does many things in vain, and Asclepiades, stating that nature cannot heal at all, are the only physicians whose treatment of some of the chronic diseases is especially mentioned.<sup>80</sup> This development is reflected by the change in the attitude of the doctor. For in the Hippocratic book it is said: "I should most commend a physician who in acute diseases, which kill the great majority of patients, shows some superiority."<sup>81</sup> In the books of the Methodists it is the chronic diseases "which bring those who have experience in medicine great and eternal fame."<sup>82</sup> In this case the merely natural and mechanistic understanding of nature brought about a progress in medicine; but this is an exception; in general, like in the explanation of phenomena, the Dogmatists are more progressive than the Methodists.

These considerations are of course important not only for surgery and dietetics, but also for pharmacology. In the treatment by drugs, too, the question arises how far the physician is able to help or must rely on the nature of the patient. On the other hand, there is a specific problem of pharmacology in connection with the efficacy of plants. Certainly herbs are prescribed as a means of natural therapy. If one remembers the ambiguity of the term "nature" in ancient medicine, one immediately realizes that in the administration of remedies also various attitudes must be differentiated from one another. All those men to whom nature is devoid of God also see in plants nothing but natural powers. But it is not only the superstitious layman, Pliny, who recognizes the grandeur and power of God, especially in the vegetable kingdom.<sup>83</sup> The great anatomist and physiologist Herophilus is said to

<sup>80</sup> Caelius Aurelianus, *De morbis acutis et chronicis*, ed. I. C. Amman, 1709, pp. 267–68: scribentium igitur medicinam nullus ante Themisonem tardarum passionum curationes principaliter ordinavit . . . Alii disperse atque de aliis passionibus scribentes . . . ut Erasistratus et Asclepiades. Themison autem tardarum passionum tres libros scripsit. As regards the attitude of Erasistratus and Asclepiades toward nature cf. Neuburger, l. c., p. 11 sq., who is not aware of the connection between these divergent theories and the discovery of the treatment of chronic diseases.

<sup>81</sup> Jones, l. c., II, p. 67: *μάλιστα δ' ἂν ἐπαινέσαιμι ἱητρὸν, ὅστις ἐν τοῖσιν ὀξείαι νοσήμασι, ἃ τοὺς πλείστους τῶν ἀνθρώπων κτείνει ἐν τούτοις διαφέρων τι τῶν ἄλλων εἰς τὸ βέλτιον*. Cf. also the beginning of the *Prognostic* of Hippocrates.

<sup>82</sup> Caelius Aurelianus, l. c., *peritis medicinae claram eternamque gloriam quaerunt*. Cf. Aretaeus, ed. C. Hude, CMG, II, 1923, pp. 36, 4 sq.; p. 144, 3 sq.

<sup>83</sup> Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, XIX, finis.

have called the plants "the hands of the gods."<sup>84</sup> This statement is not mere rhetoric. If nature is divine, the plants are divine too. Almost all physicians seem to agree with this. Some compose special remedies which are called sacred.<sup>85</sup> But Galen states in a more comprehensive sense: "One is right in saying that the plants act like the hands of the gods, since it is efficacious for the man who uses them to be trained in logical method and to have by nature a good understanding besides."<sup>86</sup> This interpretation, which accepts the divinity of the plants because of the divinity of the intellect in the human being who applies them, is just as characteristic for the Greek attitude as the more verbal explanation of Herophilus' statement.

Undoubtedly rationalistic supernaturalism revives the old conception according to which the power of plants contains something miraculous. But this does not mean the introduction of any magical belief. On the contrary, it hinders the acceptance of those ideas.<sup>87</sup> Galen expressly states that the Herophilean Andreas recorded magical rites to be used in connection with plants and that he was the first to discuss sorcery and such nonsense in medical books. Hippocrates, Euryphon, Dieuches, Diocles, Pleistonius, Praxagoras, Herophilus, did not care for magical remedies. All the great pharmacologists, Crateuas, Heraclides of Tarent, Dioscurides, rejected those things. Andreas and Pamphylus and the men who followed them constituted a small minority; they were scholars

<sup>84</sup> Scribonius Largus, *Compositiones*, ed. G. Helmreich, 1887, p. 1, 1–3: Herophilus fertur dixisse medicamenta divinas manus esse. Cf. Galen, *Opera* ed. Kühn, XII, p. 966; Plutarch, *Quaest. Symp.* IV, 1, 3, 663c., the same is told about Erasistratos. Cf. also Nicander, *Theriaca*, v. 7.

<sup>85</sup> In Galen's works those named as inventors of divine remedies are: Antipatros, XIII, p. 136; Andromachos, XIII, p. 126; Archigenes in Aetius, III, 114 (CMG, VIII, 1, 1935, p. 305, 11 sq.); in regard to Rufus cf. J. Ilberg, *Rufus v. Ephesus*, Abh. d. Sächs. Akademie, XLI, 1930, p. 20.

<sup>86</sup> Galen, *Opera*, ed. Kühn, XII, p. 966: *ἐὰν τε πάλιν ὁὖν περ θεῶν χεῖρας εἶναι τὰ φάρμακα καὶ τοῦτο ὁρθῶς ἔρεῖς. ἀντί γὰρ μέγιστα τὸν χρώμενον αὐτοῖς ἔχοντα γεγυμνασμένον ἐν λογικῇ μεθόδῳ μετὰ τοῦ καὶ συνετὸν εἶναι φύσει*.

<sup>87</sup> The mysterious effect of plants, still intimated at least in the Homeric Epic, was soon forgotten. The term *φάρμακον*, since the seventh century B.C., had no longer any magical meaning (cf. W. Artelt, *Studien z. Gesch. d. Begriffe Heilmittel u. Gift*, *Stud. z. Gesch. d. Medizin*, herg. v. Karl Sudhoff, 23, 1937, pp. 46 sq.). When in the beginning of the Hellenistic era more plants, especially those of the Orient, became known to the Greek physician, a new and strong influx of magic took place. For in the Orient magical rites were combined with the plucking of plants as well as with their preparation and use; and Egypt is, already in the Homeric poem, famous for its remedies (Artelt, l. c., p. 44).

