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Présentation de la fiche

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more. The consequence that the patient then should try to find help with the god is self-evident and removes the responsibility of the physician, as it relieves his conscience. This, at least, is true in so far as the physician has no ground for objecting to the healing by the god, since he acknowledges divine cures as real and helpful. It is not by chance, then, that the Methodists were the first to treat chronic diseases regularly; they were the only physicians who objected to the possibility of divine interference. But in general, religious medicine is, throughout antiquity, a subsidiary of human healing by surgery, diet, drugs, and music.

To sum up the results of my inquiry: Greek medicine in its aetiology as well as in its treatment of diseases is rational and empirical. About this fact there can be no doubt. But this is Greek rationalism and empiricism: it is influenced by religious ideas. God and His action are powers reckoned with by the physicians in their theory and in their practice. Every form of magic, however, is rejected as useless and wrong. If it is explained at all, it is on account of a religious belief that the physicians renounce magical superstition. Certainly, in many cases the Skeptic in his resignation also refrains from magical ideas. But this resignation, then, is not restricted to the renunciation of magic alone. It means also the disapproval of every aetiology and is therefore destructive of medical science. Moreover, the majority of physicians belong to the Dogmatic school. The Dogmatists and the unknown practitioners are religious and hostile to magic, which is held to be superstition. From the beginning until the end of antiquity there is no change in the attitude of the physicians in this respect. The relation of medicine to religion and magic therefore cannot be used for distinguishing different epochs of medical history. Greek medical art is a science; it is the beginning of modern science and yet different from it in its foundation.

Various testimonies report that Alexandrian physicians dissected and vivisected humans. For earlier times, such dissection or vivisection is not attested. Later, in the first century of Roman supremacy, dissections are still taken for granted by ancient writers; already in the Empire one hears that they are impossible to perform, and vivisection probably is no longer performed at all. Thus tradition has it that the dissection of human bodies began in Alexandria at the same time as vivisection, and that it ended in the first century A.D.

Modern scholars hardly accepted the accounts that have been preserved as they stand. Those who did accept without question the tradition contained in the few testimonies did so because in themselves these testimonies appeared to be reliable and above suspicion, and because they did not contradict one another. But it can easily be objected that the survival of these statements is merely accidental, that reports of dissections performed in pre-Alexandrian times may have been lost. Above all, many physicians considered it impossible that the Hippocratic physicians had not yet practiced anatomy. The knowledge of the body to be found in the Hippocratic writings, they contended, was only obtainable through dissection. It is true, this conclusion did not remain uncontested. Other physicians declared that all the Hippocratics knew about the human body could also be known without dissection.¹ No universally acceptable conclusion was reached. Nevertheless, the performance of dissections was attributed even to much earlier times: already the Homeric physicians were said to have dissected, and the basis for this hypothesis was once more the conviction that the knowledge of the body that the Homeric poems evince was not attainable

* "Die Geschichte der Sektion in der Antike," *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin*, Band 3, Heft 2, Berlin: Julius Springer, 1932, pp. 50-106 (pp. 100-56 of the volume).

¹ The various opinions are most thoroughly represented in "Die Geschichte der Anatomie," by R. von Töply, in *Handbuch der Geschichte der Medizin*, edited by Neuburger and Pagel, 11, Jena, 1903, p. 175.

