

Osler (Wm)

Physic and Physicians

AS DEPICTED IN PLATO.

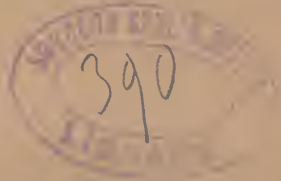
*Read before the Johns Hopkins Hospital Historical Club,
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BY

WILLIAM OSLER, M.D., F.R.C.P. (LOND.),
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY,
BALTIMORE.

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PHYSIC AND PHYSICIANS AS DEPICTED IN PLATO.

OUR Historical Club had under consideration last winter the subject of Greek Medicine. After introductory remarks and a description of the Æsculapian temples and worship by Dr. Welch, we proceeded to a systematic study of the Hippocratic writings, taking up in order, as found in them, medicine, hygiene, surgery, and gynæcology. Among much of interest which we gleaned, not the least important was the knowledge that as an art, medicine had made, even before Hippocrates, great progress, as much almost as was possible without a basis in the sciences of anatomy and physiology. Minds inquisitive, acute, and independent had been studying the problems of nature and of man; and several among the pre-Socratic philosophers had been distinguished physicians, notably, Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Democritus. Unfortunately we know but little of their views, or even the subjects in medicine on which they wrote. In the case of Democritus, however, Diogenes Lærtius has preserved a list of his medical writings, which intensifies the regret at the loss of the works of this great man, the title of one of whose essays, "On Those who are Attacked with Cough after Illness" indicates a critical observation of disease, which Daremberg seems unwilling to allow to the pre-Hippocratic philosopher-physicians.

We gathered also that in the golden age of Greece, medicine had, as to-day, a triple relationship, with science, with gymnastics, and with theology. We can imagine an Athenian father of the middle of the fourth century worried about the enfeebled health of one of his growing lads, asking the advice of Hippocrates about a suspicious cough, or sending him to the palæstra of Taureas for a systematic course in gymnastics; or, as Socrates advised, "when human skill was exhausted" asking the assistance of the divine Apollo, through his son, the "hero-physician," Æsculapius, at his temple in Epidaurus or at Athens itself. Could the Greek live over his parental troubles at the end of the nine-



teenth century he would get a more exact diagnosis and a more rational treatment; he might travel far to find so eminent a "professor" of gymnastics as Miccus for his boy, and in Christian science or faith-healing he would find our bastard substitute for the stately and gracious worship of the Æsculapian temple.¹

From the Hippocratic writings alone we have a very imperfect knowledge of the state of medicine in the most brilliant period of Grecian history; and many details relating to the character and to the life of physicians are gleaned only from secular authors. So much of the daily life of a civilized community relates to problems of health and disease that the great writers of every age of necessity throw an important side-light, not only on the opinions of the people on these questions, but often on the condition of special knowledge in various branches. Thus, as Dr. Billings has just told us, a considerable literature already illustrates the medical knowledge of Shakespeare, from whose doctors, apothecaries, and mad-folk much may be gathered as to the state of the profession in the latter part of the sixteenth century. So also the satire of Molière, malicious though it be, has preserved for us phases of medical life in the seventeenth century, for which we scan in vain the strictly medical writings of that period; and writers of our own times, like George Eliot, have told for future generations in a character such as *Lydgate*, the little every-day details of the struggles and aspirations of the profession of this century, of which we find no account whatever in the files of the *Lancet*.

We are fortunate in having had preserved the writings of the two most famous of the Greek philosophers. The great idealist, Plato, whose "contemplation of all time and all existence" was more searching than his predecessors, fuller than any of his disciples; and the great realist, Aristotle, to whose memory every department of knowledge still pays homage, and who has swayed the master-minds of twenty-two centuries. From the writings of both much may be gathered about Greek physic and physicians; and I propose this evening to give you what I have culled from the "Dialogues of Plato." I shall first speak of his physiological and pathological speculations; then I shall refer to the many interesting allusions to, and analogies drawn

¹ For an account of "Æsculapius at Epidaurus and Athens" see Dyer's "Gods of Greece" (MacMillan, 1891), a chapter which contains also an excellent discussion on the relation of secular to priestly medicine. In Chapter III of Pater's delightful story, "Marius the Epicurean," is a description of one of the Roman Æsculapia, and an account of the method of procedure in the "cure," the ridiculous aspects of which are so graphically described in the "Plutus" of Aristophanes.

from, medicine and physicians; and, lastly, I shall try to estimate from the "Dialogues" the social standing of the Greek doctor, and shall speak on other points which bear upon the general condition of the profession. The quotations are made in every instance from Professor Jowett's translation, either the first edition, 1871, or the third, 1892.²

I.

To our enlightened minds the anatomy and physiology of Plato are crude and imperfect; as much or even more so than those of Hippocrates. He conceived the elements to be made up of bodies in the form of triangles, the different varieties and combinations of which accounted for the existence of the four elementary bodies of Empedocles — fire, earth, water, and air. The differences in the elementary bodies are due to differences in the size and arrangement of the elementary triangles, which, like the atoms of the atomist, are too small to be visible. Marrow had the most perfect of the elementary triangles, and from it bone, flesh, and the other structures of the body were made. "God took such of the primary triangles as were straight and smooth, and were adapted by their perfection to produce fire and water, and air and earth; these, I say, he separated from their kinds, and mingling them in due proportions with one another, made the marrow out of them to be a universal seed of the whole race of mankind; and in this seed he then planted and enclosed the souls, and in the original distribution gave to the marrow as many and various forms as the different kinds of souls were hereafter to receive. That which, like a field, was to receive the divine seed, he made round every way, and called that portion of the marrow brain, intending that, when an animal was perfected, the vessel containing this substance should be the head; but that which was intended to contain the remaining and mortal part of the soul he distributed into figures at once round and elongated, and he called them all by the name 'marrow'; and to these, as to anchors, fastening the bonds of the whole soul, he proceeded to fashion around them the entire framework of our body, constructing for the marrow, first of all, a complete covering of bone."³

The account of the structure of bone and flesh, and of functions of respiration, digestion, and circulation is

² The Dialogues of Plato, translated into English by B. Jowett, M.A., Master of Balliol College, Oxford. At the Clarendon press; first edition, 1871; third edition, 1892.

³ *Timæus*.

unintelligible to our modern notions. Plato knew that the blood was in constant motion ; in speaking of inspiration and expiration, and the network of fire which interpenetrates the body, he says : " For when the respiration is going in and out, and the fire, which is fast bound within, follows it, and ever and anon moving to and fro enters the belly and reaches the meat and drink, it dissolves them, and dividing them into small portions, and guiding them through the passages where it goes, pumps them as from a fountain into the channels of the veins, *and makes the stream of the veins flow through the body as through a conduit.*" A complete circulation was unknown ; but Plato understood fully that the blood was the source of nourishment, — " the liquid itself we call blood, which nourishes the flesh and the whole body, whence all parts are watered and empty spaces filled." In the young, the triangles, or in modern parlance we would say the atoms, are new, and are compared to the keel of a vessel just off the stocks. They are locked firmly together, but form a soft and delicate mass freshly made of marrow and nourished on milk. The process of digestion is described as a struggle between the triangles out of which the meats and drinks are composed, and those of the bodily frame ; and as the former are older and weaker the newer triangles of the body cut them up, and in this way the animal grows great, being nourished by a multitude of similar particles. The triangles are in constant fluctuation and change, and in the " Symposium " Socrates makes Diotima say, " A man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation — hair, flesh, bones, and the whole body are always changing."

The description of senility, euthanasia, and death is worth quoting : " But when the roots of the triangles are loosened by having undergone many conflicts with many things in the course of time, they are no longer able to cut or assimilate the food which enters, but are themselves easily divided by the bodies which come in from without. In this way every animal is overcome and decays, and this affection is called old age. And at last, when the bonds by which the triangles of the marrow are united no longer hold, and are parted by the strain of existence, they in turn loosen the bonds of the soul, and she, obtaining a natural release, flies away with joy. For that which takes place according to nature is pleasant, but that which is contrary to nature is painful. And thus death, if caused by disease

or produced by wounds, is painful and violent; but that sort of death which comes with old age and fulfils the debt of nature is the easiest of deaths, and is accompanied with pleasure rather than with pain."

The mode of origin and the nature of disease, as described in the "Timæus," are in keeping with this primitive and imperfect science. The diseases of the body arise when any one of the four elements is out of place, or when the blood, sinews and flesh are produced in a wrong order. Much influence is attributed to the various kinds of bile. The worst of all diseases, he thinks, are those of the spinal marrow, in which the whole course of the body is reversed. Other diseases are produced by disorders of respiration; as by phlegm "when detained within by reason of the air bubbles." This, if mingled with black bile and dispersed about the courses of the head produces epilepsy, attacks of which during sleep, he says, are not so severe, but when it assails those who are awake it is hard to be got rid of, and "being an affection of a sacred part, is most justly called sacred (*morbus sacer*)." Of other disorders, excess of fire causes a continuous fever; of air, quotidian fever; of water, which is a more sluggish element than either fire or air, tertian fever; of earth, the most sluggish element of the four, is only purged away in a four-fold period, that is in a quartan fever.

The psychology of Plato, in contrast to his anatomy and physiology has a strangely modern savor, and the three-fold division of the mind into reason, spirit and appetite, represents very much the mental types recognized by students of the present day. The rational, immortal principle of the soul "the golden cord of reason" dwells in the brain, "and inasmuch as we are a plant not of earthly but of heavenly growth, raises us from earth to our kindred who are in heaven." The mortal soul consists of two parts; the one with which man "loves and hungers and thirsts, and feels the flutterings of any other desire" is placed between the midriff and the boundary of the navel; the other, passion or spirit, is situated in the breast between the midriff and the neck, "in order that it might be under the rule of reason and might join with it in controlling and restraining the desires when they are no longer willing of their own accord to obey the word of command issuing from the citadel."

No more graphic picture of the struggle between the rational and appetitive parts of the soul has ever been given than in the comparison of man to a charioteer driving a pair of winged horses, one of which is noble and of noble breed; the other ignoble and of

ignoble breed, so that "the driving of them of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to him."

The comparison of the mind of man to a block of wax, "which is of different sizes in different men; harder, moister and having more or less of purity in one than another, and in some of an intermediate quality," is one of the happiest of Plato's conceptions. This wax tablet is a gift of Memory, the mother of the Muses; "and when we wish to remember anything which we have seen, or heard or thought in our own minds, we hold the wax to the perceptions and thoughts, and in that material receive the impression of them as from the seal of a ring; and that we remember and know what is imprinted as long as the image lasts; but when the image is effaced, or cannot be taken, then we forget and do not know."⁴

Another especially fortunate comparison is that of the mind to an aviary which is gradually occupied by different kinds of birds, which correspond to the varieties of knowledge. When we were children the aviary was empty, and as we grow up we go about 'catching' the various kinds of knowledge.

Plato recognized, in the "Timæus" two kinds of mental disease, to wit, madness and ignorance. He has the notion advocated by advanced psychologists to-day, that much of the prevalent vice is due to an ill disposition of the body, and is involuntary; "for no man is voluntarily bad; but the bad become bad by reason of ill disposition of the body and bad education, things which are hateful to every man, and happen to him against his will." A fuller discussion of the theorem that madness and the want of sense are the same is found in the "Alcibiades." (II) The different kinds of want of sense are very graphically described:

Socrates. In like manner men differ in regard to want of sense. Those who are most out of their wits we call "madmen," while we term those who are less far gone "stupid," or "idiotic," or if we prefer gentle language, describe them as "romantic" or "simple-minded," or again as "innocent," or "inexperienced," or "foolish." You may even find other names if you seek for them, but by all of them lack of sense is intended. They only differ as one art appears to us to differ from another, or one disease from another.

There is a shrewd remark in the "Republic" (VI, 491), "that the most gifted minds, when they are ill-educated, become pre-eminently bad. Do not great crimes and the spirit of pure evil spring out of a fullness of nature ruined by education rather than from

⁴ Theætetus.

any inferiority, whereas weak natures are scarcely capable of any very great good or very great evil."

In the "Phædrus" there is recognized a form of madness which is a divine gift and a source of the chiefest blessings granted to man. Of this there are four kinds — prophecy, inspiration, poetry, and love. That indefinable something which makes the poet as contrasted with the rhymster and which is above and beyond all art, is well characterized in the following sentence: "But he who, having no touch of the Muse's madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art — he, I say, and his poetry are admitted. The sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with a madman."⁵ Certain crimes, too, are definitely recognized as manifestations of insanity; in the "Laws" the incurable criminal is thus addressed: "Oh, sir, the impulse which moves you to rob temples is not an ordinary human malady, nor yet the visitation of Heaven, but a madness which is begotten in man from ancient and unexpiated crimes of his race." In the "Laws," too, it is stated that there are many sorts of madness, some arising out of disease, and others originating in an evil and passionate temperament, and are increased by bad education. Respecting the care of the insane it is stated that a madman shall not be at large in the city, but his relations shall keep him at home in any way they can, or if not, certain fines are mentioned.

The greatest aid in the prevention of disease is to preserve the due proportion of mind and body, "for there is no proportion or disproportion more productive of health and disease, and virtue and vice, than that between soul and body." In the double nature of the living being if there is in this compound an impassioned soul more powerful than the body, "that soul, I say, convulses and fills with disorders the whole inner nature of man; and when eager in the pursuit of some sort of learning or study, causes wasting; or again, when teaching or disputing in private or in public and considerations and controversies arise, inflames and dissolves the composite form of man and introduces rheums; and the nature of this phenomenon is not understood by most professors of medicine, who ascribe it to the opposite of the real cause. . . . Body and mind should both be equally exercised to protect against this disproportion, and we should not move the body without the soul or the soul without the body. In

⁵ "Not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of inspiration and genius." — Apology.

this way they will be on their guard against each other, and be healthy and well balanced.”⁶ He urges the mathematician to practise gymnastics, and the gymnast to cultivate music and philosophy.

The modes of treatment advised are simple, and it is evident that Plato had not much faith in medicines. Professor Jowett's commentary is here worth quoting: “Plato is still the enemy of the purgative treatment of physicians, which, except in extreme cases, no man of sense will ever adopt. For, as he adds, with an insight into the truth, ‘every disease is akin to the nature of the living being and is only irritated by stimulants.’ He is of opinion that nature should be left to herself, and is inclined to think that physicians are in vain (c. ‘Laws,’ VI, 761 C, where he says that warm baths would be more beneficial to the limbs of the aged rustic than the prescriptions of a not over-wise doctor). If he seems to be extreme in his condemnation of medicine and to rely too much on diet and exercise, he might appeal to nearly all the best physicians of our own age in support of his opinions who often speak to their patients of the worthlessness of drugs. For we ourselves are sceptical about medicine, and very unwilling to submit to the purgative treatment of physicians. May we not claim for Plato an anticipation of modern ideas as about some questions of astronomy and physics, so also about medicine? As in the ‘Charmides’ (156, 7) he tells us that the body cannot be cured without the soul, so in the ‘Timæus’ he strongly asserts the sympathy of soul and body; any defect of either is the occasion of the greatest discord and disproportion in the other. Here, too, may be a presentiment that in the medicine of the future the interdependence of mind and body will be more fully recognized, and that the influence of the one over the other may be exerted in a manner which is not now thought possible.”

The effect of the purgative method to which Plato was so opposed is probably referred to in the following passage. “When a man goes of his own accord to a doctor's shop and takes medicine, is he not quite aware that soon and for many days afterwards, he will be in a state of body which he would rather die than accept as a permanent condition of his life?”

It is somewhat remarkable that nowhere in the “Dialogues” is any reference made to the method of healing at the Æsculapian temples. The comments upon physic and physicians are made without allusion to these institutions. Hippocrates and other practitioners

⁶ Timæus.

at Athens were probably secular Asclepiads, but as Dyer remarks, "in spite of the severance the doctors kept in touch with the worship of Æsculapius, and the priests in his temples did not scorn such secular knowledge as they could gain from lay practitioners."⁷

II.

So much for the general conception of the structure and functions of the body, in order and disorder, as conceived by Plato. Were nothing more to be gleaned, the thoughts on these questions of one of the greatest minds of what was intellectually the most brilliant period of the race, would be of interest, but scattered throughout his writings are innumerable little *obiter dicta*, which indicate a profound knowledge of that side of human nature which turns uppermost when the machinery is out of gear. There are, in addition, many charming analogies drawn from medicine, and many acute suggestions, some of which have a nineteenth-century flavor. The noble pilot and the wise physician who, as Nestor remarks, "is worth many another man," furnish some of the most striking illustrations of the "Dialogues."

One of the most admirable definitions of the Art of Medicine I selected as a rubric with which to grace my text-book, "And I said of medicine, that this is an Art which considers the constitution of the patient, and has principles of action and reasons in each case." Or, again, the comprehensive view taken in the statement, "There is one science of medicine which is concerned with the inspection of health equally in all times, present, past and future."

Plato gives a delicious account of the origin of the modern medicine, as contrasted with the art of the guild of Asclepius.⁸

Well, I said, and to require the help of medicine, not when a wound has to be cured, or on occasion of an epidemic, but just because by indolence and a habit of life such as we have been describing, men fill themselves with waters and winds, as if their bodies were a marsh, compelling the ingenious sons of Asclepius to find more names for disease, such as flatulence and catarrh; is not this, too, a disgrace?

Yes, he said, they do certainly give very strange and new-fangled names to diseases.

Yes, I said, and I do not believe there were any such diseases in the days of Asclepius; and this I infer, from the circumstance that the hero Eurypylus, after he has been wounded in Homer, drinks a posset of Pramnian wine well

⁷ The Gods of Greece.

⁸ Republic, iii.

besprinkled with barley-meal and grated cheese, which are certainly inflammatory, and yet the sons of Asclepius who were at the Trojan war do not blame the damsel who gives him the drink, or rebuke Patroclus, who is treating his case.

Well, he said, that was surely an extraordinary drink to be given to a person in his condition.

Not so extraordinary, I replied, if you bear in mind that in former days, as is commonly said, before the time of Herodicus, the guild of Asclepius did not practise our present system of medicine, which may be said to educate diseases. But Herodicus, being a trainer, and himself of a sickly constitution, by a combination of training and doctoring found out a way of torturing first and chiefly himself, and secondly the rest of the world.

How was that? he said.

By the invention of lingering death; for he had a mortal disease which he perpetually tended, and as recovery was out of the question, he passed his entire life as a valetudinarian; he could do nothing but attend upon himself, and he was in constant torment whenever he departed in anything from his usual regimen, and so dying hard, by the help of science he struggled on to old age.

A rare reward of his skill!

He goes on to say that Asclepius did not instruct his descendants in valetudinarian arts because he knew that in well-ordered states individuals with occupations had no time to be ill. If a carpenter falls sick, he asks the doctor for a "rough and ready cure—an emetic, or a purge, or a cauterly, or the knife—these are his remedies." Should any one prescribe for him a course of dietetics and tell him to swathe and swaddle his head, and all that sort of thing, he says, "he sees no good in a life spent in nursing his disease to the neglect of his customary employment; and therefore bidding good-bye to this sort of physician, he resumes his ordinary habits, and either gets well and lives and does his business, or, if his constitution fails, he dies and has no more trouble."

He is more in earnest in another place ("Gorgias") in an account of the relations of the arts of medicine and gymnastics: "The soul and the body being two, have two arts corresponding to them; there is the art of politics attending on the soul; and another art attending on the body, of which I know no specific name, but which may be described as having two divisions, one of which is gymnastic, and the other medicine. And in politics there is a legislative part, which answers to gymnastic, as justice does to medicine; and they run into one another, justice having to do with the same subject as legislation, and medicine with the same subject as gymnastic, yet there is a difference between them. . . . Cookery simulates the disguise of

medicine, and pretends to know what food is the best for the body; and if the physician and the cook had to enter into a competition in which children were the judges, or men who had no more sense than children, as to which of them best understands the goodness or badness of food, the physician would be starved to death."

And later in the same dialogue Socrates claims to be the only true politician of his time who speaks, not with any view of pleasing, but for the good of the State, and is unwilling to practise the graces of rhetoric — and so would make a bad figure in a court of justice. He says: "I shall be tried just as a physician would be tried in a court of little boys at the indictment of the cook. What would he reply in such a case, if some one were to accuse him, saying, 'O my boys, many evil things has this man done to you; he is the death of you, especially of the younger ones among you, cutting and burning and starving and suffocating you, until you know not what to do; he gives you the bitterest potions, and compels you to hunger and fast? How unlike the variety of meats and sweets which I procured for you.' What do you suppose that the physician would reply when he found himself in this predicament? For if he told the truth he could only say: 'All this, my boys, I did with a view to health,' and then would there not just be a clamour among such judges? How they would cry out!"

The principle of continuity, of uniformity, so striking in ancient physics was transferred to the body which, like the world, was conceived of as a whole. Several striking passages illustrative of this are to be found. Thus to the question of Socrates, "Do you think that you can know the nature of the soul intelligently without knowing the nature of the whole?" Phædrus replies, "Hippocrates, the Asclepiad, says that this is the only method of procedure by which the nature even of the body can be understood." The importance of treating the whole and not the part is insisted upon. In the case of a patient who comes to them with bad eyes the saying is "that they cannot cure his eyes by themselves, but that if his eyes are to be cured his head must be treated": and then again they say "that to think of curing the head alone and not the rest of the body also is the height of folly."

Charmides had been complaining of a headache, and Critias had asked Socrates to make believe that he could cure him of it. He said that he had a charm, which he had learnt, when serving with the army, of one of the physicians of the Thracian king, Zamolxis.

This physician had told Socrates that the cure of the part should not be attempted without treatment of the whole, and also that no attempt should be made to cure the body without the soul, "and, therefore, if the head and body are to be well you must begin by curing the soul; that is the first thing. . . . And he who taught me the cure and the charm added a special direction, 'Let no one,' he said, 'persuade you to cure his head until he has first given you his soul to be cured. For this,' he said, 'is the great error of our day in the treatment of the human body, that physicians separate the soul from the body.'" The charms to which he referred were fair words by which temperance was implanted in the soul.

Though a contemporary, Hippocrates is only once again referred to in the "Dialogues" — where the young Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, who has come to Protagoras, "that almighty wise man," as Socrates terms him in another place, to learn the science and knowledge of human life, is asked by Socrates, "If you were going to Hippocrates, the Coan, the Asclepiad, and were about to give him your money, and some one said to you, 'As being what, do you give money to your namesake, Hippocrates, O Hippocrates, what would you answer?'" "I should say," he replied, "that I give money to him as a physician." "And what will he make of you?" "A physician," he said — a paragraph which would indicate that Hippocrates was in the habit of taking pupils and teaching them the art of medicine; and in the "Euthydemus," with reference to the education of physicians, Socrates says, "that he would send such to those who profess the art, and to those who demand payment for teaching the art, and profess to teach it to any one who will come and learn."

We get a glimpse of the method of diagnosis, derived doubtless from personal observation, possibly of the great Hippocrates himself, whose critical knowledge of pulmonary complaints we daily recognize in the use of his name in association with the clubbed fingers of phthisis, and with the succussion splash of pneumothorax. "Suppose some one, who is inquiring into the health or some other bodily quality of another: he looks at his face and at the tips of his fingers, and then he says, 'Uncover your chest and back to me that I may have a better view.'" And then Socrates says to Protagoras, "Uncover your mind to me; reveal your opinion, etc."

One of the most celebrated medical passages is that in which Socrates professes the art of a midwife prac-

tising on the souls of men when they are in labor, and diagnosing their condition, whether pregnant with the truth or with some "darling folly." The entire section, though long, must be quoted. Socrates is in one of his "little difficulties" and wishes to know of the young Theætetus, who has been presented to him as a paragon of learning, and whose progress in the path of knowledge has been sure and smooth "flowing on silently like a river of oil" — what is knowledge? Theætetus is soon entangled and cannot shake off a feeling of anxiety.

Theæt. I can assure you, Socrates, that I have tried very often, when I heard the questions which came from you; but I can neither persuade myself that I have any answer to give, nor hear of any one who answers as you would have me answer; and I cannot get rid of the desire to answer.

Soc. These are the pangs of labor, my dear Theætetus; you have something within you which you are bringing to the birth.

Theæt. I do not know, Socrates; I only say what I feel.

Soc. And did you never hear, Simpleton, that I am the son of a midwife, brave and burly, whose name was Phænarete?

Theæt. Yes, I have heard that.

Soc. And that I myself practise midwifery?

Theæt. No, I never heard that.

Soc. Let me tell you that I do, though, my friend; but you must not reveal the secret, as the world in general have not found me out; and therefore they only say of me, that I am an exceedingly strange being, who drive men to their wits' end; did you ever hear that?

Theæt. Yes.

Soc. Shall I tell you the reason?

Theæt. By all means.

Soc. I must make you understand the situation of the midwives, and then you will see my meaning better. No woman, as you are probably aware, who is still able to conceive and bear, attends other women, but only those who are past bearing.

Theæt. Yes, I know.

Soc. The reason of this is said to be that Artemis — the goddess of childbirth — is a virgin, and she honors those who are like herself; but she could not allow the barren to be midwives, because human nature cannot know the mystery of an art without experience; and therefore she assigned this office to those who by reason of age are past bearing, honoring them from their likeness to herself.

Theæt. That is natural.

Soc. And a natural, or rather necessary inference is, that the midwives know better than others who is pregnant and who is not?

Theæt. Very true.

Soc. And by the use of potions and incantations they

are able to arouse the pangs and to soothe them at will; they can make those bear who have a difficulty in bearing, and if they choose, they can smother the babe in the womb.

Theat. They can.

Soc. Did you ever remark that they are also most cunning matchmakers, and have an entire knowledge of what unions are likely to produce a brave brood?

Theat. I never heard of this.

Soc. Then let me tell you that this is their greatest pride, more than cutting the umbilical cord. And if you reflect, you will see that the same art which cultivates and gathers in the fruits of the earth, will be most likely to know in what soils the several plants or seeds should be deposited.

Theat. Yes, the same art.

Soc. And do you suppose that this is otherwise in the case of women.

Theat. No, that is not likely.

Soc. No, indeed; but the midwives, who are respectable women and have a character to lose, avoid this department of practice, because they are afraid of being called procuresses, which is a name given to those who join together man and woman in an unlawful and unscientific way; and yet the true midwife is also the true and only matchmaker.

Theat. That I understand.

Soc. Such are the midwives, whose work is a very important one, but not so important as mine; for women do not bring into the world at one time real children, and at another time idols which are with difficulty distinguished from them; if they did, then the discernment of the true and false birth would be the crowning achievement of the art of midwifery — you should think of that?

Theat. Yes, I certainly should.

Soc. Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs; but the difference lies in this — that I attend men and not women, and I practise on their souls when they are in labor, and not on their bodies; and the triumph of my art is in examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man is bringing to the birth, is a false idol or a noble and true creation. And like the midwives, I am barren, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to answer them myself, is very just; the reason is, that the god compels me to be a midwife, but forbids me to bring forth. And therefore I am not myself wise, nor have I anything which is the invention or offspring of my own soul, but the way is this: — Some of those who converse with me, at first appear to be absolutely dull, yet afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens, if the god is gracious to them, they all of them make astonishing progress; and this not only in their own opinion but in that of others. There is clear proof that they had never learned anything of me, but they have acquired and discovered many noble things of themselves, although the god and I help to deliver them. And the proof is, that many of them in their ignorance, attributing all to themselves and despising me, either of their own accord or at the instigation of others, have gone

away sooner than they ought; and the result has been that they have produced abortions by reason of their evil communications, or have lost the children of which I delivered them by an ill bringing up, deeming lies and shadows of more value than truth; and they have at last ended by seeing themselves, as others see them, to be great fools. Aristides, the son of Lysimachus, is one of this sort, and there are many others. The truants often return to me, and beg that I would converse with them again — they are ready to go down on their knees — and then, if my familiar allows, which is not always the case, I receive them and they begin to grow again. Dire are the pangs which my art is able to arouse and to allay in those who have intercourse with me, just like the pangs of women in childbirth; night and day they are full of perplexity and travail which is even worse than that of women. So much for them. And there are others, Theætetus, who come to me apparently having nothing in them; and as I know that they have no need of my art, I coax them into another union, and by the grace of God I can gradually tell who is likely to do them good. Many of them I have given away to Prodicus, and some to other inspired sages. I tell you this long story, friend Theætetus, because I suspect, as indeed you seem to think yourself, that you are in labor — great with some conception. Come then to me, who am a midwife and the son of a midwife, and try to answer the question which I will ask you. And if I abstract and expose your first-born, because I discover upon inspection that the conception which you have formed is a vain shadow, do not quarrel with me on that account, as the manner of women is when their first children are taken from them. For I have actually known some who were ready to bite me when I deprived them of a darling folly; they did not perceive that I acted from good will, not knowing that no god is the enemy of man (that was not within the range of their ideas) neither was I their enemy in all this, but religion will never allow me to admit falsehood, or to stifle the truth. Once more, then, Theætetus, I repeat my old question, “What is knowledge?” and do not say that you cannot tell; but quit yourself like a man, and by the help of God you will be able to tell.⁹

Socrates proceeds to determine whether the intellectual babe brought forth by Theætetus is a wind-egg or a real and genuine birth. “This then is the child, however he may turn out, which you have brought into the world, and now that he is born we must run around the hearth with him and see whether he is worth rearing or only a wind-egg and a sham. Is he to be reared in any case? or will you bear to see him rejected and not get into a passion if I take away your first-born?” The conclusion is “that you have brought forth wind, and that the offsprings of your brain are not worth bringing up.” And the dialogue

⁹ Theætetus.

ends as it began with a reference to the midwife: "The office of a midwife I, like my mother, have received from God: she delivered women, and I deliver men; but they must be young, noble, and fair."

III.

From the writings of Plato we may gather many details about the status of physicians in his time. It is very evident that the profession was far advanced and had been progressively developing for a long period before Hippocrates, whom we erroneously, yet with a certain propriety, call the *Father of Medicine*. The little by-play between Socrates and Euthydemus suggests an advanced condition of medical literature: "Of course, you who have so many books are going in for being a doctor," says Socrates, and then he adds, "there are so many books on medicine, you know." As Dyer remarks, whatever the quality of these books may have been, their number must have been great to give point to this chaff.

It may be clearly gathered from the writings of Plato that two sorts of physicians (apart altogether from quacks and the Æsculapian guild) existed in Athens, the private practitioner, and the State-physician. The latter, though the smaller numerically, representing apparently the most distinguished class. From a reference in one of the dialogues ("Gorgias") they evidently were elected by public assembly,—“when the assembly meets to elect a physician.” The office was apparently yearly, for in the "Statesman" is the remark, "when the year of office has expired, the admiral or physician has to come before a court of review" to answer any charges that may be made against him. In the same dialogue occurs the remark, "and if anyone who is in a private station has the art to advise one of the public physicians, must he not be called a physician?" Apparently a physician must have been in practice for some time and attained great eminence before he was deemed worthy of the post of State-physician. "If you and I were physicians, and were advising one another that we were competent to practise as state-physicians, should I not ask you, and would you not ask me, Well, but how about Socrates himself, has he good health? And was any one else ever known to be cured by him whether slave or freeman?"¹⁰

A reference to the two sorts of doctors is also found in the "Republic": "Now you know that when pa-

¹⁰ Gorgias.

tients do not require medicine, but have only to be put under a regimen, the inferior sort of practitioner is deemed to be good enough; but when medicine has to be given, then the doctor should be more of a man."

The office of State-physician was in existence fully two generations before this time, for Democedes held this post at Athens in the second half of the sixth century at a salary of £406, and, very much as a modern professor might be, he was seduced away by the offer of a great increase in salary by Polycrates, the tyrant of Samos. It is evident, too, from the "Laws;" that the doctors had assistants, often among the slaves.

For of doctors, as I may remind you, some have a gentler, others a ruder method of cure; and as children ask the doctor to be gentle with them so we will ask the legislator to cure our disorders with the gentlest remedies. What I mean to say is, that besides doctors there are doctors' servants, who are also styled doctors.

Cle. Very true.

Ath. And whether they are slaves or freemen makes no difference; they acquire their knowledge of medicine by obeying and observing their masters; empirically and not according to the natural way of learning, as the manner of freemen is, who have learned scientifically themselves the art which they impart scientifically to their pupils. You are aware that there are these two classes of doctors?

Cle. To be sure.

Ath. And did you ever observe that there are two classes of patients in states, slaves and freemen; and the slave doctors run about and cure the slaves, or wait for them in the dispensaries — practitioners of this sort never talk to their patients individually, or let them talk about their own individual complaints? The slave-doctor prescribes what mere experience suggests, as if he had exact knowledge; and when he has given his orders, like a tyrant, he rushes off with equal assurance to some other servant who is ill; and so he relieves the master of the house of the care of his invalid slaves. But the other doctor, who is a freeman, attends and practises upon freemen; and he carries his enquiries far back, and goes into the nature of the disorder; he enters into discourse with the patient and with his friends, and is at once getting information from the sick man, and also instructing him as far as he is able, and he will not prescribe for him until he has first convinced him; at last, when he has brought the patient more and more under his persuasive influences and set him on the road to health, he attempts to effect a cure. Now which is the better way of proceeding in a physician and in a trainer? Is he the better who accomplishes his ends in a double way, or he who works in one way, and that the ruder and inferior?

This idea of first convincing a patient by argument is also mentioned in the "Gorgias," and would appear indeed to have furnished occupation for some of the

numerous sophists of that period. Gorgias lauding the virtues of rhetoric and claiming that she holds under her sway all the inferior art, says: "Let me offer you a striking example of this. On several occasions I have been with my brother Herodicus, or some other physician, to see one of his patients, who would not allow the physician to give him medicine or apply the knife or hot iron to him; and I have persuaded him to do for me what he would not do for the physician just by the use of rhetoric. And I say that if a rhetorician and a physician were to go to any city and had there to argue in the Ecclesia or any other assembly as to which of them should be elected state-physician, the physician would have no chance; but he who could speak would be chosen if he wish." In another place ("Laws") Plato satirizes this custom: "For of this you may be very sure, that if one of those empirical physicians, who practise medicine without science, were to come upon the gentleman physician talking to his gentle patient, and using the language almost of philosophy — beginning at the beginning of the disease, and discoursing about the whole nature of the body, he would burst into a hearty laugh — he would say what most of those who are called doctors always have at their tongue's end: foolish fellow, he would say, you are not healing the sick man, but you are educating him; and he does not want to be made a doctor, but to get well."

Of the personal qualifications of the physician not much is said; but in the "Republic" (III, 408) there is an original, and to us not very agreeable, idea: "Now the most skilful physicians are those who, from their youth upwards, have combined with a knowledge of their art, the greatest experience of disease; they had better not be in robust health, and should have had all manner of diseases in their own person. For the body, as I conceive, is not the instrument with which they cure the body; in that case we could not allow them to be or to have been sickly; but they cure the body with the mind, and the mind which has become and is sick can cure nothing."

Some idea of the estimate which Plato put on the physician may be gathered from the mystical account in the "Phædrus" of the nature of the soul and of life in the upper world. We are but animated failures — the residua of the souls above which have attained a vision of truth, but have fallen "hence beneath the double load of forgetfulness and vice." There are nine grades of human existence into which these souls may pass, from that of a philosopher or artist to that

of a tyrant. The physician or lover of gymnastic toils comes in the fourth class.

But if Plato assigns the physician a place in the middle tier in his mystery, he welcomes him socially into the most select and aristocratic circle of Athens. In that most festive of all festal occasions, at the house of Agathon, described in the "Symposium," Eryximachus, a physician and the son of one, is a chief speaker, and in his praise of love says, "from medicine I will begin that I may do honor to my art." We find him, too, on the side of temperance and sobriety: "The weak heads like myself, Aristodemus, Phædrus, and others who never can drink, are fortunate in finding that the stronger ones are not in a drinking mood. (I do not include Socrates, who is able either to drink or to abstain, and will not mind, whichever we do.) Well, as none of the company seem disposed to drink much, I may be forgiven for saying, as a physician, that drinking deep is a bad practice, which I never follow, if I can help, and certainly do not recommend to another, least of all to any one who still feels the effect of yesterday's carouse." The prescriptions for hiccough given by Eryximachus give verisimilitude to the dialogue. When the turn of Aristophanes came he had eaten too much and had the hiccough, and he said to Eryximachus, "You ought either to stop my hiccough or speak in my turn." Eryximachus recommended him to hold his breath, or if that failed to gargle with a little water, and if the hiccough still continued, to tickle his nose with something and sneeze, adding, "if you sneeze once or twice even the most violent hiccough is sure to go."

Upon the medical symptoms narrated in that memorable scene, unparalleled in literature, after Socrates had drunk the poison in prison, it is unnecessary to dwell; but I may refer to one aspect as indicating the reverence felt for the representative of the great Healer. Denied his wish (by the warning of the jailor, who says that there is only sufficient poison) to offer a libation to a god, Socrates's dying words were, "Crito, we owe a cock to Æsculapius." "The meaning of this solemnly smiling farewell of Socrates would seem to be," according to Dyer, "that to Æsculapius, a god who always is prescribing potions and whose power is manifest in their effects, was due that most welcome and sovereign remedy which cured all the pains and ended all the woes of Socrates — the hemlock, which cured him of life which is death, and gave him the glorious realities of hereafter. For this great boon of awakening into real life Socrates owed Æscu-

lapius a thank offering. This offering of a cock to Æsculapius was plainly intended for him as the awakener of the dead to life everlasting."

And permit me to conclude this already too long account with the eulogium of Professor Jowett — words worthy of the master, worthy of his great interpreter to this generation :

"More than two thousand two hundred years have passed away since he returned to the place of Apollo and the Muses. Yet the echo of his words continues to be heard among men, because of all philosophers he has the most melodious voice. He is the inspired prophet or teacher who can never die, the only one in whom the outward form adequately represents the fair soul within ; in whom the thoughts of all who went before him are reflected and of all who come after him are partly anticipated. Other teachers of philosophy are dried up and withered, — after a few centuries they have become dust ; but he is fresh and blooming, and is always begetting new ideas in the minds of men. They are one-sided and abstract ; but he has many sides of wisdom. Nor is he always consistent with himself, because he is always moving onward, and knows that there are many more things in philosophy than can be expressed in words, and that truth is greater than consistency. He who approaches him in the most reverent spirit shall reap most of the fruits of his wisdom ; he who reads him by the light of ancient commentators will have the least understanding of him.

"We may see him with the eye of the mind in the groves of the Academy, or on the banks of the Ilissus, or in the streets of Athens, alone or walking with Socrates, full of these thoughts which have since become the common possession of mankind. Or we may compare him to a statue hid away in some temple of Zeus or Apollo, no longer existing on earth, a statue which has a look as of the God himself. Or we may once more imagine him following in another state of being the great company of heaven which he beheld of old in a vision ('Phædrus,' 248). So, 'partly trifling but with a degree of seriousness' ('Symposium' 197, E), we linger around the memory of a world which has passed away ('Phædrus,' 250, C)."

