

ÆSCULAPIUS.

"Homines ad Deos nullâ re propriis accedunt, quam salutem
hominibus dando." CICERO.

THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE has been advantageously divided into four periods; the first of which embraces not less than 3000 years, extending from the time of the deluge to that of the Arabian physicians.

The medical art, including both Physic and Surgery, a distinction of later times, is generally admitted to have taken its rise among the Egyptians, but to have been brought to considerable perfection by the cultivation of the Greeks. All the facts connected with the earliest period of the history of medicine must be regarded with great doubt, being involved in the mystery of fabulous narration. The existence, however, of certain practices employed as remedial agents, have been handed down to us, and the records of them are to be considered as entitled to some degree of credit.

Medicine was divided into various kinds; and these divisions had their respective followers — DIETETICAL, PHARMACEUTICAL, and CHIRURGICAL. The professors were divided into sects: EMPIRICS, DOGMATISTS, METHODISTS. Many of the works of those whose names are preserved to us have perished by the hand of time.

In the FIRST period, omitting all that may be regarded as belonging to the fabulous age, are the celebrated names of Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Callisthenes, Epicurus, Erasistratus, Herophilus, Themison, Thessalus, Leonidas, Plutarch, Celsus, Aretæus, Coelius Aurelianus, Galen, Oribasius, Ætius, Alexander de Tralles, Paulus de Ægina, and Actuarius.

The SECOND period embraces the Arabian physicians, who must be looked upon chiefly as servile copyists of Galen and Aristotle. Many remedies were, however, added by these physicians, and some diseases, as, for example, the small-pox and the measles, have been, for the first time, well described; so accurate, indeed, have been the descriptions of these maladies, that little, if any thing, has been since added to their history. Among the Arabian physicians, the most renowned are Mesué, Rhazes,

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Avicenna, Averröes, Haly-Abbas, Albucasis; and in this period, in Europe, Arnoldus de Villa Nova, Roger Bacon, and Basil Valentine, celebrated for his alchemical knowledge. This will be sufficient to show how much in its infancy medicine was, as a science, at this period. The foundation of the schools of Salerno and Montpellier seemed to diffuse knowledge; but the art of healing was truly given up to the empirics and to the monks. The second period did therefore but little for the advancement of medicine.

The THIRD period delivered medicine from the hands of the Arabs to those of the Europeans. Europe, however, was but slowly emerging from the ignorance which a state of barbarism had produced, and was, about the middle of the 15th century, recovering from the effects of the bloody wars in Italy, and the boundless luxury of the Roman empire. Efforts were now made to bring to light the productions of former times; princes gave encouragement to the learned to translate the MSS. of former ages; and these translations, disseminated by the invention of printing, promoted the civilization of Europe, and extended the knowledge of the medical art. Many eminent men belong to this period, as Celsus, Mercurialis, and Martianus, among the Italians; and Fernelius, Ballon, Duret, Houlier, and Jacot, among the French. Paracelsus must be mentioned as belonging to this era, although his speculations scarcely entitle him to be named as a benefactor to, or promoter of, medical science.

It is in the FOURTH period that we find the respected names of Harvey, Sydenham, Sanctorius, Gorter, Baglivi, Morton, Hoffman, Riverius, Etmuller, Stahl, Boerhaave, Mead, Freind, and others, who are familiar to us at this day, and whose observations are entitled to the most serious attention and regard.

The zeal now manifested in anatomical researches, the physiological views based upon them, and the consequent improvement of medical practice, the natural result of so correct and judicious a system, deserves the most fixed contemplation of the practitioner. The labours of Morgagni, Desault, Sabatier, Chaussier, Vicq d'Azyr, Sauvages, Cullen, Astruc, Stoll, Fothergill, the Hunters, Jenner, &c., have contributed much to the advancement of professional knowledge; and the skill of the chemist, by the researches of Lavoisier, Fourcroy, Davy, and others, have assisted in promoting the march of science. In later times, that is, during the present century, every branch of science has rapidly advanced; and the manner in which anatomical and physiological pursuits are now conducted, the zeal with which the several tissues of which the body is composed, are developed, and the general views entertained of the whole system of nature, promise greatly for the future perfection of the science of medicine. What

ÆSCULAPIUS.

can be more interesting to, or more worthy the observation of the philosopher, than to contemplate the progress of the human mind, as exhibited in the advancement of a science, the object of which is the relief of the sick, and the preservation of our fellow-creatures. Every man was, probably, at the commencement of the world, a physician; every one would study that which was calculated to assuage pain, or guard against disorder. In this sense, a French writer has marked the first, or earliest period, of medical science, as *POPULAR*; that it was *EMPIRICAL* there can be no doubt; it must necessarily have been founded on experience and imitation: it would descend from generation to generation, as we find it to have done in savage nations, from the accounts which have been handed down to us by various travellers. But their remedial agents extend little beyond those which are derived from the vegetable kingdom of nature, and are necessarily limited in their operation.

Among the Babylonians and the Egyptians, according to Herodotus and other authorities, the sick were exposed to the passers-by, who were expected not only to discover the ills of the afflicted, but to prescribe the remedies that might be necessary for their cure. These means for the relief of disease, we learn, were afterwards collected together, and inscribed either in the sacred books of the priests, or, as Iamblichus reports, upon columns, and preserved in the temples. Of the antiquity of medicine there cannot exist a doubt; but its earliest history is so enveloped in fable, that it is impossible to unravel it. Menes is the most ancient king of Egypt of whom we possess any records. His son Athotis is mentioned by Manetho as the author of several books on anatomy; which would of itself demonstrate some progress in the science, and a removal from that empirical character with which it must necessarily have commenced. Next to this illustrious professor of the medical art, must be mentioned Hermes Trismegistus, who has been confounded with the Thoth of the Egyptians—the Egyptian Mercury—who is reported to have been the inventor of all the arts and sciences. The priests of Egypt were the possessors of all the knowledge and learning of the Egyptians: this knowledge is said to have been contained in the Hermetic books, forty-two in number, (according to Clement of Alexandria), of which the last six related to medicine.

The Egyptians divided the human body into thirty-six parts, each of which they believed to be under the particular government of one of the decans, or aerial demons, who presided over the triple divisions of the twelve signs; and Origen says, that when any part of the body was diseased, a cure was effected by invoking the demon to whose province it belonged. A kind of theological anatomy has thus been made out by the

ÆSCULAPIUS.

late Mr. Champollion,* from the great funereal ritual, or book of the Manifestations. This is expressed, on various mummy-cases, in hieroglyphical characters; and may we not in this trace the first attempt to assign the different parts of the body to the several planets, which has been continued down to the present day in the renowned and popular astrological almanack of Francis Moore, physician?

The Egyptian Horus, son of Osiris and Isis, has been looked upon as the Grecian Apollo,† and usually regarded as the god of physic; and from Apollo, Æsculapius springs. Bacon says, "The variable composition of man's body hath made it as an instrument easy to distemper; and therefore the poets did well to conjoin music and medicine in Apollo: because the office of medicine is but to tune this curious harp of man's body, and to reduce it to harmony."

The Egyptian must not be confounded with the Grecian Æsculapius. The history attaching to the former is exceedingly obscure. Mr. Salt first discovered Æsculapius as a deity in the island of Philæ, where there was a small sanctuary, having a Greek inscription dedicating the temple to him. Mr. Wilkinson informs us‡ that he was worshipped at Memphis, and on a certain mountain on the Libyan side of the Nile, near the City of Crocodiles, where he was reported to have been buried, if he were the first Æsculapius, the reputed inventor of medicine. But it must be recollected that the Egyptians admitted two deities of this name. Macrobius makes Æsculapius the beneficent force of the sun, which pervaded the souls and bodies of man; but Mr. Wilkinson thinks it more probable that he was the healing power of the Creator, which averted misfortunes and illness from mankind.

HERMES is looked upon, in the Egyptian mythology, as the god of letters. He is the same as Taut or Thoth, Mercury or the Moon. He has been confounded with Hermes Trismegistus;§ but *Trismegistus* does not in any way apply to letters, but simply means, "thrice great." There is great difficulty in making out this Egyptian deity, from the variety of appellations he bears, in accordance with the different characters ascribed to him. It would occupy too much space, and at the same time, be inconsistent with the design of the sketches in this work, to enter upon an enumeration of them in this place; but that mentioned by Horapollon must be noticed,

* See Pettigrew's History of Egyptian Mummies.

† Millin says, (Mem. Med. Soc. d'Emulation, t. 5. p. 344.) Apollo is first mentioned as the god of medicine, in the Orphic Hymns. (xxxiii. l. Argon. 173.)

‡ Materia Hieroglyphica.

§ Tourtelle Hist. Phil. de la Médecine.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

for this author describes Thoth, or Hermes, as holding a palm-branch, emblematic of a year and a month; and to this is attached the symbol of life and man in embryo, under the form of a frog.

The mythological veil under which all traces of the history of Egyptian medicine are to be found, serves only to demonstrate that the whole is to be regarded as allegorical, as far as relates to the personages mentioned. No human being was ever admitted into the order of the Egyptian gods, and no Egyptian god could ever have lived upon earth. The whole matter, then, reduces itself to fabulous history. Medicine, however, took its rise in the East, passed into Egypt, thence into Greece, and so was disseminated throughout the civilized world. The profession of medicine in Egypt was confined to the priests, and it descended hereditarily with them. If the account of the Hermetic books is to be relied on, there were treatises on different parts of the body, the structure and diseases of the eye, and the operations necessary for their cure. Every Egyptian was required to follow the profession of his father; and Herodotus tells us,* that the science of medicine was distributed into different parts; every physician was for one disease—not more: so that every place was full of physicians; for some were doctors for the eyes, others for the head; some for the teeth, others for the belly; and some, for occult disorders. Their number must necessarily have been very great. Herodotus says, *παντα δε ιητρων επιπλεα*. The Æsculapius of Greece must date at least 1000 years posterior to the Egyptian. The celebrated mythologist, Jacob Bryant, makes him to be the same as Jupiter and Apollo—the same as Osiris, Hermes, Thoth, and Apis the physician. Many temples were dedicated to him in Asia Minor: he had several temples at Pergamus;† and Aristides reports that he was worshipped under the title of *Ζευς Ασκληπιος*, or Jupiter Æsculapius. At Memphis, the ancient Misr, the capital of Egypt, a live serpent, as the Æsculapian emblem, was kept, and treated with religious reverence. Serpent worship, however, was very general, not confined to one part of the globe, and it may be traced in almost every religion, through ancient Asia, Europe, Africa, and America.‡ The serpent has been employed as the symbol both of Good and Evil: the Egyptians used it as typical of the good demon (Agathodæmon). Thoth is not the only Egyptian deity symbolized by the serpent; Kneph, and Isis, and many others, were also distinguished by it. How the serpent applied to Hygæia, is to be considered as the symbol of

* Euterpe.

† Lucian.

‡ See the Rev. J. B. Deane's excellent work on the *Worship of the Serpent*, 8vo. 2d edit. Lond. 1833.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

health, is not easy of explanation. Pliny states the reason of its consecration to be from the use formerly made of the flesh of these animals in medicine. But the more probable conjecture is, I think, that which refers it to the renovation of life and vigour, typified by the periodical change of its skin. In the Grecian mythology, as in the Egyptian, the symbol of the serpent is sacred to nearly all the gods and goddesses, to Saturn, Jupiter, Apollo, Bacchus, Mars, Æsculapius, Rhea, Juno, Minerva, Diana, Ceres, and Proserpine.

The Egyptian origin of Æsculapius, and the connexion between the serpent and the god of medicine, are questions of little interest at the present day; but that the hereditary claims of the wise reptile should be still maintained among a people professing the Mohammedan religion, so hostile as it has always been to the least semblance of idolatry, is a remarkable and curious fact, and one which the traveller is surprised to find in the Valley of the Nile, though ever the cradle of superstition, and of so many fables of paganism. The juggling performances of the Háwees, or snake-players, may be traced to the feats of the Psylli; but the object of these, like similar contrivances in India, or the sleight-of-hand of European conjurers, is little more than to obtain money; and whatever notions may be connected with the disgusting ceremony of tearing live snakes with the teeth, during the *Wooled*, or birth-day festival of the Prophet, this is not directly attributable to any superstitious respect for the reptile, nor in any way referable to the emblem of the son of Apollo.

At the tomb of Shekh Hereédee, in Upper Egypt, the case is otherwise; and the cures believed to be performed there are attributed to the influence or direct agency of a sacred serpent. The name of the saint has extended from his tomb to the whole mountain on which it stands; and between E'Siout and E'Khmin, and nearly opposite Tahta, the projecting corner of the Mokuttum chain, is known by the appellation of Gebele 'Shekh Hereédee. Ascending near the centre of these precipitous cliffs, a celebrated Egyptian traveller informs me, you arrive at a tomb concealed from the view of those below by a projecting eminence, where the saint is said to be buried, and whither the sick are invited, by the well-known reputation of that holy personage and his miraculous powers, to repair, to obtain alleviation of their sufferings. To gain permission to consult him, or rather to invoke his aid, is readily granted by the guardian of the sepulchre, who is, at the same time, supposed to be entrusted with the power and privilege of interpreting his patron's wishes; and the pious devotee anxiously expects the manifestation, or the promises of the saint. An awful silence is preserved; he takes the shoes off his feet, and nothing is heard save the

ÆSCULAPIUS.

repetition of the *Fat-hah* (or evening prayer of the Koran), which the supplicant recites at the door of the tomb. At length, the guardian, having a knobbed staff fancifully decorated with tattered shreds of coloured cloth, approaches from the interior of the sepulchre, and unites with him in repeating the *Fat-hah*. The Shekh is supposed to be propitious—the snake, his emblem, under whose form he is believed to appear, glides from a dark recess—and thus, by his manifestation, having promised the wished-for boon, the credulous man humbles himself before it, and withdraws with the full persuasion of his own incipient cure, or of the recovery of the afflicted friend who had sent him to offer his adoration and presents to the all-potent saint.

The Grecian Æsculapius is generally esteemed as the son of Apollo and the nymph Coronis:—

Υιὸν Ἀπολλωνὸς ὃν ἐγένετο διὰ Κορωνίς.

HOMER.

Pausanias says, no woman of mortal race was his mother: *θητην γυναῖκα καὶ ἀνθρώπου μητέρα*.* Coronis was worshipped at Sicyon, where, also, was a temple dedicated to Apollo, in which two live serpents were maintained. The serpent is to be regarded as the ordinary emblem of Æsculapius; but he is frequently depicted with a cock, as typical of vigilance; with an eagle, as denoting judgment and length of life. With the eagle, the head of a ram is also found, the former being placed on the right, and the latter on his left hand. The ram's head is conceived to have reference to the divinations of the deity. The serpent usually entwined around a club, to represent the exercise of prudence and discretion, as necessary to the sustaining of life. But to return to the Egyptians.

The Egyptians have been held forth for their knowledge of Anatomy, Botany, and Chemistry. With respect to the former, it has been inferred, rather than shewn, to have existed from the practice of embalming. The operations, however, embraced in this process, are scarcely entitled to the appellation of dissection; they consisted of little more than an evisceration of the contents of the head, chest, and belly, and a knowledge of the distinctive characters of most of the organs contained in these cavities, would be acquired without the aid of much anatomical research. The *Botanical* knowledge of the Egyptians is entitled to greater distinction. They were well acquainted with the use of various medicinal plants. Pliny, Dioscorides, and Theophrastus, mention several as worthy of notice, and demonstrative of the learning and civilization of the Egyptians.

* L. vii. p. 533.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Their knowledge of *Chemistry* is worthy of consideration. It is evidenced in the embalmments; and it has been endeavoured to be shewn that the word, Chemistry, is derived from a hieroglyphical name by which Egypt has been distinguished: *Khemi*, the tail of the crocodile. *Chame* literally means "the black colour."

Bleeding in the veins, and also in some of the arteries, the application of the actual cautery, the administration of enemata, the operation of paracentesis of the abdomen for a dropsy—these are given upon the authority of Prosper Alpinus, a writer of good credit, but probably refer to the more modern practices of the Egyptians.

The engraving which accompanies this sketch is taken from the celebrated statue in the Louvre, where the god Æsculapius is seen attended by Telesphorus, the god of recovery.

