

A. CORN. CELSUS
OF
M E D I C I N E.

BOOK I.

P R E F A C E.

As agriculture promises food to the healthy, so medicine promises health to the sick. There is no place in the world, where this art is not found: for even the most barbarous nations are acquainted with herbs, and other easy remedies for wounds and diseases. However, it has been more improved by the Greeks than any other people; though not from the infancy of that nation, but only a few ages before our own times; as appears by their celebrating Æsculapius as its most ancient author; who, because he cultivated this science with somewhat more accuracy, which, before him, was rude and of low esteem, was received into the number of their gods*. After him, his two sons,

* Though Æsculapius lived so near to the time of the Trojan war, yet the Greeks knew very little about him. The superstition of those times gave him a place among the gods: and as he was adored under the character of the genius of physic, it came at last to be doubted whether he was ever a mortal. This blind devotion, however, produced one happy consequence: his priests were obliged, for their own interest, to make themselves masters of all the physic that was known in that country, that they might be qualified to give advice to the people who applied to them. Their prescriptions past for the suggestions of the god; the cures for miraculous. But both diseases and remedies were carefully recorded. Strabo tells us, that from these registers in the temple of Æsculapius at Cos, Hippocrates formed this plan for a proper diet—*Strabon. Geograph. lib. 14. p. 657. Edit. Casaub.*

Podalirius and Machaon (*Homer's Iliad*, Bk. ii., l. 731), following Agamemnon to the Trojan war, were not a little useful to their fellow soldiers. But even these, according to Homer's account, did not undertake the plague, nor the other various kinds of diseases, but only cured wounds by incisions and medicines: from which it appears, that they entirely confined themselves to the chirurgical part of medicine, and that this was the most ancient branch. From the same author we may also learn, that diseases were then believed to arise from the anger of the immortal gods*, and that relief used to be sought from them. It is also probable, that though there were very few remedies for distempers known, men, nevertheless, generally enjoyed good health from the sobriety of their lives, yet untainted by sloth and luxury. For these two vices, first in Greece, and then among us, rendered men liable to many diseases. And hence that variety of remedies now used, which was neither necessary in ancient times, nor is yet in other nations, scarcely protracts the lives of a few of us to the verge of old age. For the same reason, after those, whom I have mentioned, no men of eminence practised medicine, till learning began to be pursued with greater application; which, as it is of all things most necessary to the mind, so it is no less hurtful to the body. And at first the science of healing was accounted a branch of philosophy; so that the cure of diseases, and the study of nature, owed their rise to the same persons: and for this very good reason, because they, who had impaired their bodies by anxious thought, and nightly watchings, stood most in need of its assistance. And thus we find, that many amongst the philosophers were skilled in this science; of whom the most celebrated were Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Democritus; Hippocrates of Cos, who, according to some authors, was the disciple of the last mentioned of these, and is so justly admired both for his knowledge in this profession, and for his eloquence, was the first worthy of notice, who separated medicine from the study of philosophy. After him, Diocles the Carystian, then Praxagoras, and Chrysippus; after

* That this was really the opinion of the ancients, may be seen by many passages in Homer's poems, where he mentions Jupiter punishing wicked nations by diseases, as well as famine, wars, and other calamities.

these, Herophilus and Erasistratus, applied themselves to this art, and differed widely from each other in their methods of cure.

During this period, physic was divided into three parts: the first cured by diet, the second by medicines, the third by manual operations; the first, the Greeks termed Diætic (*διαιτητικὴ*), the second, pharmaceutic (*φαρμάκευτικὴ*), and the third, Chirurgical (*χειρουργικὴ*). The most illustrious professors of that branch, which treats diseases by diet, endeavouring to extend their views farther, took in the assistance of natural philosophy; being persuaded, that, without it, medicine would be a weak and imperfect science. After these came Serapion, who first of all maintained, that the rational method of study was foreign to the art of medicine, and confined it to practice and experience. In his steps followed Apollonius and Glaucias, and, some time after, Heraclides of Tarentum, and others of no small note; who, from the doctrine they asserted, styled themselves empirics (*εμπειρικὸι*). And thus the dietetic branch was also divided into two parts, one set of physicians pursuing theory, the other following experience alone. However, after those we have enumerated above, no one attempted any thing new till Asclepiades, who greatly changed the art of medicine. And Themison, one of his successors, has also lately, in his old age, departed from him in some things. And these are the men, to whom we are chiefly indebted for the improvements made in this salutary profession.

As that branch of medicine, which respects the cure of diseases, is the noblest, as well as the most difficult of the three, we shall first treat of that part. And because in this the chief dispute is, that some allege an acquaintance with experiments to be only requisite, while others affirm experience alone to be insufficient, without a thorough knowledge of the constitution of bodies, and what naturally happens to them; it will be proper to recite the principal arguments on both sides, that we may the more easily deliver our own opinion upon the question.

Those, then, who declare for a theory in medicine, look upon the following things as necessary: the knowledge of the occult and constituent causes of distemper; next, of the evident ones;

then of the natural actions; and, lastly, of the internal parts. They call these causes occult, in which we inquire of what principles our bodies are composed, what constitutes health, and what sickness. For they hold it impossible that any one should know how to cure diseases, if he be ignorant of the causes whence they proceed; and that it is not to be doubted, but one method of cure is required, if the redundancy or deficiency in any of the four principles* be the cause of diseases, as some philosophers have affirmed; another, if the fault lie wholly in the humours, as Herophilus thought; another, if in the inspired air, as Hippocrates believed; another, if the blood be transfused into those vessels,† which are designed only for air, and occasion an inflammation, which the Greeks call phlegmone (φλεγμονή), and that inflammation causes such a commotion as we observe in a fever, which was the opinion of Erasistratus; another, if the corpuscles passing through the invisible pores should stop, and obstruct the passage, as Asclepiades maintained: that he will proceed in the proper method of curing a disease, who is not deceived in its original cause. Nor do they deny experience to be necessary, but affirm, it cannot be obtained without some theory; for that the more ancient practitioners did not prescribe any thing at hazard for the sick, but considered what was most suitable, and examined that by experience, to which they had before been led by some conjecture. That it is of no moment in *this argument*, whether most remedies were discovered by experiment, provided they were first applied with some rational view: and that this holds in many cases; but new kinds of distempers often occur, in which practice has hitherto given no

* Some of the ancient philosophers maintained, that the human body, as well as the whole material system, was composed of four principles or elements, *viz.* fire, air, earth, and water.

† In the original *vena*; which is used by Celsus, as a general term for arteries and veins. In this place it is evident he means arteries; for mentioning the same opinion again, page 16, he says, *At si sanguis in arterias transfusus*; and he often speaks of the motion of the veins, where, it is plain, he intends the pulsation of the arteries. *Arteria* he uses to signify the wind-pipe, and likewise the sanguiferous arteries, as in chap. i. of book iv. *Circa guttur venæ grandes, quæ sphagitides nominantur; item arteriæ, quas carotidas vocant.*

light; so that it is necessary to observe whence they arose; without which, no mortal can find out why he should make use of one thing, rather than another. And for these reasons, they investigate the occult causes. They term those causes evident, in which they inquire, whether the beginning of the distemper was occasioned by heat or cold, fasting or surfeit, and the like. For they say, he will be able to oppose the first appearances, who is not ignorant of their rise. Those actions of the body which they call natural, are inspiration and expiration, the reception and concoction of our meat and drink, as also the distribution* of the same into the several parts of the body. They also inquire how it happens, that our arteries rise and fall; from what causes proceed sleeping and watching; without the knowledge of which, they conceive it impossible for any person either to oppose the beginnings of diseases, that depend on these particulars, or cure them when formed. As of all these things they look upon concoction to be of the greatest importance, they insist chiefly upon it; and some of them following the opinion of Erasistratus, affirm that the food is concocted in the stomach by attrition; others, after Plistonicus, the disciple of Praxagoras, by putrefaction; others, upon the credit of Hippocrates, believe concoction is effected by heat. After them follow the disciples of Asclepiades, who hold all these hypotheses to be vain and idle for that there is no concoction at all, but the matter, crude as it is received, is distributed through the whole body. And in these things they are by no means agreed: however, it is not disputed that, according to the different hypotheses, a different regimen of diet is to be observed by sick people. For

* The word in the original is *digero*, which, by the modern physicians, is generally applied to the digestion in the aliment of the stomach. But that is what Celsus never intends by it. *Digero* he uses in three different senses; 1st, for the distribution of the aliment from the stomach (after its concoction) to all the other parts of the body, which appears to be his meaning here; 2dly, for any evacuations made by the pores of the skin, as *sudore digerit* in the end of the ninth chapter of this book; 3dly, for discussing any collection of humour, so as to prevent its coming to suppuration; *vel avertenda concurrrens eo materia, vel digerenda, vel ad maturitatem perducenda est; si priora contigerunt, nihil præterea necessarium est.* Lib. vii. c. ii. ad fin. p. 408. Unless we restrain the meaning of this last passage to discussing by the skin, which would bring it under the second sense.

if it be performed by attrition, such food is to be chosen, as will most easily be broken to pieces; if by putrefaction, such as most quickly undergoes that change; if heat be the cause of concoction, then such as most effectually cherishes heat. But if there be no concoction at all, then none of these kinds of aliment are to be chosen, but such are to be taken, as are least liable to change from the state in which they are received. And, by the same way of reasoning, when there is a difficulty of breathing, when sleep or watchings oppress, they are of opinion, that the man, who has first learned in what manner these happen, will be capable of curing them. Besides, as pains, and various other disorders, attack the internal parts, they believe no person can apply proper remedies to those parts, of which he is ignorant; and, therefore, that it is necessary to dissect dead bodies, and examine their viscera and intestines; and that Herophilus and Erasistratus had taken far the best method *for attaining that knowledge*, who procured criminals out of prison, by royal permission, and dissecting them alive, contemplated, while they were even breathing, the parts which nature had before concealed; considering their position, colour, figure, size, order, hardness, softness, smoothness, and asperity*; also the process and depression of each, or what is inserted into, or received by another part; for, *say they*, when there happens any inward pain, a person cannot discover the seat of that pain, if he have not learned where every viscus or intestine is situated; nor can

* Ten of the most ancient editions mentioned by Morgagni (Ep. iii. p. 53.), read *contactum*; but as that seems to convey no convenient sense, others prefer *contractum*, which is found in one of the manuscripts, and suppose it to mean asperity, a sense, which it is not found to bear elsewhere; and therefore Constantine boldly enough substitutes *confractum*, which he thinks agreeable to this interpretation. The same reason may, perhaps, have led him to that alteration, as induced the others to explain *contractum* by asperity, that it might stand in opposition to smoothness. For my own part, though *confractus* is not found in any other classic, yet I have given this translation, because I can find no other sense of the place, as it now stands. If I durst offer my own conjecture, I would rather choose to read *anfractum*, which, I think, is applicable to the windings of some of the internal parts.

[I must here differ from the learned Dr. Greive, and follow the reading of the majority of the early editions, *contactum*, which signifies the *relative position* of the various parts.]—G.F.

the part, which suffers, be cured by one, who does not know what part it is; and that when the viscera happen to be exposed by a wound, if one is ignorant of the natural colour of each part, he cannot know what is sound and what corrupted; and for that reason is not qualified to cure the corrupted parts; besides, they maintain, that external remedies are applied with much more judgment, when we are acquainted with the situation, figure, and size of the internal parts; and that the same reasoning holds in all the other instances above mentioned. And that it is by no means cruel, as most people represent it, by the tortures of a few guilty, to search after remedies for the whole innocent race of mankind in all ages.

On the other hand, those who from experience style themselves empirics, admit indeed the evident causes as necessary; but affirm the inquiry after the occult causes and natural actions to be fruitless, because nature is incomprehensible. And that these things cannot be comprehended, appears from the controversies among those, who have treated concerning them, there being no agreement found here, either amongst the philosophers or the physicians themselves; for why should one believe Hippocrates rather than Herophilus? or, why him more than Asclepiades? that if a man inclines to determine his judgment by reasons assigned, the reasons of each of them seem not improbable; if by cures, all of them have restored the diseased to health; and therefore we should not deny credit either to the arguments or authority of any of them. That even the philosophers must be allowed to be the greatest physicians, if reasoning could make them so; whereas it appears, that they have abundance of words, and very little skill in the art of healing. *They say also* that the methods of practice differ according to the nature of places; thus one method is necessary at Rome, another in Egypt, and another in Gaul. That if the causes of distempers were the same in all places, the same remedies ought also to be used every where. That often, too, the causes are evident; as for instance in a lippitude,* or a wound, and nevertheless the method of cure does not appear

* *Lippitudo* is used by Celsus, and the more ancient Latins, in the same sense as the Greek term *Ophthalmia*.

END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:
Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature
which can be purchased on our Website :
www.Brainfly.net

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :
Brainfly Inc.
5100 Garfield Ave. #46
Sacramento CA 95841-3839

TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website (www.Brainfly.net) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

webcomments@brainfly.net