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## BEGINNINGS OF MEDICINE.

Dr. W. Osler, Regius Professor of Medicine, delivered the first of two lectures on "The Beginnings of Modern Medicine," to a large gathering of University Extension students at Oxford yesterday.

In opening his address, Dr. Osler quoted the words of Sir Henry Maine that "to one small people it was given to create the principle of progress; that people was the Greek. Except the blind forces of Nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin." Those words were as true of medicine as of philosophy and science. To the work of the Hippocratic physicians of ancient Greece they owed, first, the emancipation of medicine from the shackles of priestcraft and caste; secondly, the conception of medicine as an art, based on accurate observation, and as a science—an integral part of the science of man and of Nature; thirdly, the high moral ideals expressed in that most "memorable of human documents," the Hippocratic oath; and, fourthly, the conception and realisation of medicine as the profession of a cultivated gentleman. Dr. Osler pointed out that, in spite of the great change effected by the Renaissance, men still clung to the old Hippocratical views of the four humours and the three spirits—natural, animal, and vital—and the conception of the working of the bodily machine had undergone little or no change. The end of the sixteenth century still saw the dominance of the views of the great Pergamite, and in spite of all the good work which had been done in anatomy, what seemed to us to-day so simple, the circulation of the blood, was as little understood as in the days of Galen. There were, it was then thought, two closed systems, the natural containing the venous blood, which had its origin in the liver, from which, as from a fountain, the blood continuously ebbed and flowed for the nourishment of the body; the other the vital, containing another blood and the vital spirits, which ebbed and flowed from the heart, distributing life and heat to all parts. Like a bellows, the lungs fanned and cooled this vital blood. Here and there were found glimmering conceptions of a communication between these systems. Servetus showed the circulation of the blood through the lungs, but all teachers believed that the only communication which existed was by means of small pores in the wall separating the two sides of the heart.

Observation, merely looking at and thinking of things, had done all that was possible, and further progress had to await the introduction of a new element, namely, experiment. It was true that Galen had made many experiments, with one of the most memorable of which he had shown that the arteries of the body contained blood, not air. But the day had come when men were no longer to rest content with accurate description and with finely-spun theories and dreams, and it was reserved for the immortal Harvey, whose name was connected with Oxford, as for a time Warden of Merton College, to put into practice the expert mental methods with which he demonstrated conclusively that the blood moved in a circle. The little book "De Motu Cordis" marked the final break of the modern spirit with the old traditions.

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p. 8