

HISTORICAL SKETCHES:

A Series of Sketches of the Lives, Times and Works of the Old Masters of Anatomy, Surgery and Medicine.

BY JAMES MOORES BALL, M. D.

I--HIPPOCRATES, B. C., 460-380.



IN the early part of the fifth century, A. C., Hippocrates the Great was born upon the island of Cos. This small island, located in the Aegean Sea, off the coast of Asia Minor possessed by Greece in ancient times, but now belonging to Turkey, has been the natal place of many eminent men. Here the second of the Greek kings of Egypt, Ptolemy Philadelphus, was born. It was he who was so great a factor in the development of the Alexandrian school of medicine. Here Aristotle, the philosopher, pupil of Zeno, who despised logic as useless and deemed

ethics alone worthy of study, first saw the light of day; and here Apelles, master of ancient Greek painters, was ushered into this world.

Cos is twenty five-miles in length, is little more than a mass of limestone and is noted at the present day for two things: its fortress, and its gigantic plane-tree. The fortress, founded by the Knights of Rhodes, is supposed to occupy the site of the ancient temple of Aesculapius. The plane-tree is thirty feet in circumference and, if tradition may be believed, was growing when Hippocrates was born. In ancient days the island was noted for its purple and its wines; and the Coan robes were celebrated by poets for the delicacy of their texture. The population of Cos is little more than ten thousand souls, of whom one-third profess the religion of Mahomet, whilst the remainder are followers of Christ.

As Dr. Francis Adams* remarks, Hippocrates "flourished at one of the most memorable epochs in the intellectual development of the human race. He had for his contemporaries, Pericles, the famous statesman; the poets Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Pindar; the philosopher Socrates, with his distinguished disciples Plato and Xenophon; the venerable father of history, Herodotus, and his young rival, Thucydides; the unrivalled statuary, Phidias, with his illustrious pupils, and many other distinguished names, which have conferred immortal honor on the age in which they lived, and exalted the dignity of human nature." It was a period of astonishing progress, and medicine was not behind other sciences and arts. In Persia, Artaxerxes Longimanus sat upon his throne in Babylon; Nehemiah and Ezra, with this monarch's consent, were rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem, and only a short time previously, in the Orient, Confucius and Zoroaster had ended their career. It was during such a golden age that Hippocrates came upon the stage.

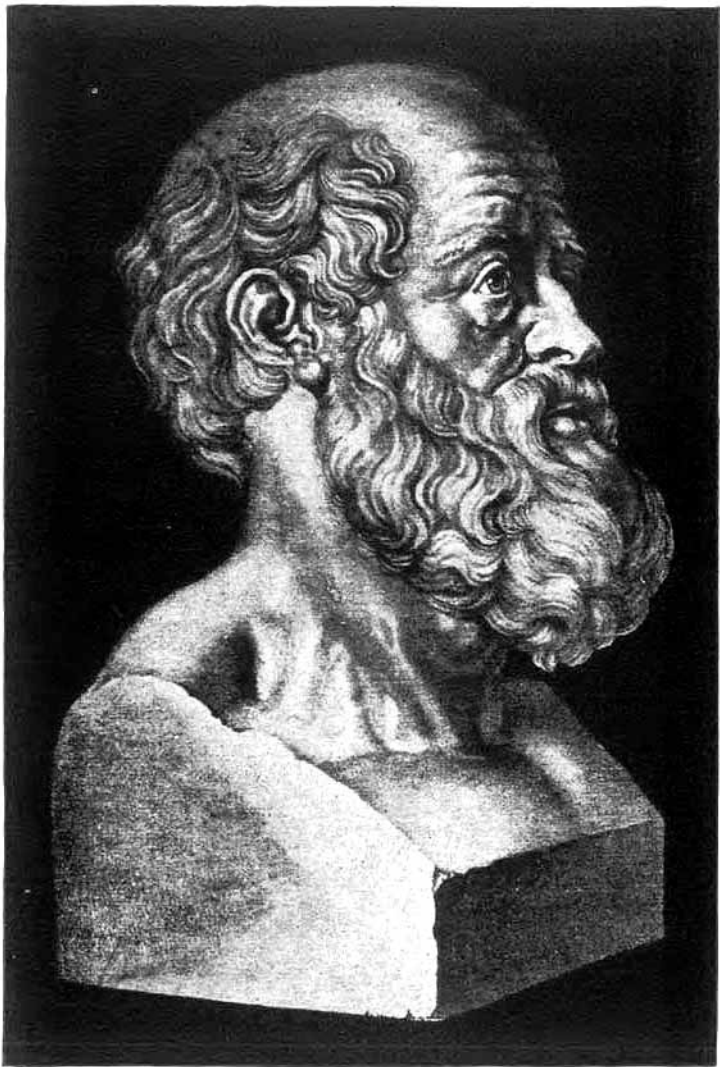
*Adams: The Genuine Works of Hippocrates, Vol. 1, p. 9, N. Y., no date.

The medical education of Hippocrates was obtained in the asclepion or temple of Cos. At a very early date the Asclepiadae established schools upon the islands of Cos, Cnidus and Rhodes. The fame of these establishments spread through many lands and patients came from far-distant climes to receive treatment at the hands of the priest physicians. Instruction was imparted orally and by means of observations recorded upon votive tablets and books of parchment. Doubtless Hippocrates commenced the practice of his profession in the temple of Cos, as his forefathers had done before him. How many years he remained in the temple cannot be told. Much of his life was spent in other cities than Cos. Thus he practiced upon the island of Thasos, and travelled through Thessaly where he stopped in the cities of Abdera, Larissa and Meliboa. He also journeyed into Asia Minor, Scythia and Thrace. He was everywhere received with honor and was venerated during life and worshipped after death. He was in Athens during the outbreak of the plague which has been so classically described by Thucydides, and is said to have advised the building of great fires to purify the atmosphere.

Nothing is more remarkable than the contrast between the obscurity of the details of the life of Hippocrates and the fulness of our knowledge of his medical writings. If his biography is meager and unsatisfactory, no such complaint can be made regarding his heritage to posterity. The genuine works of this author are indeed most wonderful and of themselves prove the truth of the proposition that even in the earliest ages medicine kept pace with, if it did not surpass, other branches of knowledge. At a time when the labors of philosophers, artists, sculptors, historians, orators, and statesmen proclaimed the emancipation of the human mind from ignorance and superstition, the Father of Medicine established his profession upon the foundation of reason and severed it from the domination of an ancient and superstitious guild. The ancient priestly doctrine that disease was an infliction of the gods, and was to be cured, not by physical agencies, but rather by sacrifice, incantation and prayer, was destroyed by Hippocrates. The theological theory of human ailments was cast aside, and reason, coupled with observation, supplanted it.

The power of graphic delineation of disease possessed by Hippocrates is well seen in his description of impending death and to this day the term *acies Hippocratica* is applied to the appearance of a dying person. The surgical knowledge possessed by Hippocrates was remarkably broad. He wrote upon injuries of the head, fractures and dislocations, ulcers, fistulae, hemorrhoids, etc. He reduced fractures and dislocations by means of ingenious apparatus; employed splints and waxed bandages in dressing fractures; trepanned the bones of the cranium; opened the thorax in empyema; tapped the abdomen in dropsy; amputated the extremities, and extracted the dead foetus from the uterus. His works are worthy of perusal. For nearly two thousand years he was looked upon as an authority.

The Cedar Valley (Iowa) Medical Society met in Dubuque, Oct. 10. The following officers were elected: Pres., Dr. S. W. Pierce, of Cedar Falls; Vice-Pres., Dr. J. A. Mueller, of Dyersville; Sec'y. and Treas., Dr. W. B. Small, of Waterloo. The next meeting will be held at Independence, Iowa, in October, 1894.



HIPPOCRATES.

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