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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MEDICINE: YESTERDAY*.
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The profession of medicine is more than an organised form of human activity; it is a commonwealth, the members of which share a general outlook and face a universal enemy. Yet, although the purposes and span of the profession have been known and accepted since the remote days of Greece, Egypt and Babylon, it is only within the last two hundred years that medicine has become conscious of its position, and has begun to realise that it is a growing organisation which requires continual supervision. Many forces and influences in the past have contributed to bring about this awakening of medical thought, but only one or two need be considered as being of direct formative importance.

In 1605 was published Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, the first great work of secular interest to appear in English prose. In this revolutionary disquisition, Bacon set forth his now familiar method of inductive reasoning from facts to principles. According to this, all sound and fruitful philosophy is supported by a double ladder, one scale of which ascends from ascertained facts to the discovery of causes, and the other scale descends from known causes to their experimental verification. "On the truth of Nature," he declared, "we shall build up a system for the general amelioration of mankind."

In his quest for material, Bacon turned to the medical learning and doctrines of his day, and found them so inconsistent and contradictory as to earn the description of being chaotic. The clear springs of knowledge that had welled up in Greece during the age of Hippocrates and of Galen had reached Western Europe by three channels, Byzantium, Arabia and Rome; and the broad river of Renaissance learning now carried a vast accumulation of the superstitions, arts and errors of many nations and many centuries. According to Bacon, the remedy lay in the deliberate cultivation of a critical attitude of mind, whereby man might become "a match for the nature of things"; a distrust of self-constituted authority, and an individual pursuit of knowledge.

* Being Part One of an essay entitled *The Commonwealth of Medicine*, which has been awarded the Carmichael Prize of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.
along the narrow path of observation and experiment. By such means as these he hoped "to tune this curious harp of man's body, and reduce it to harmony."

Fifteen years later, in 1615, was published the famous *Novum Organum*, the subsequent step in the furtherance of Bacon's heroic plan for the reconstruction of all human knowledge.

Bacon had no personal experience of medical training, such as it was, but he had for his friend and consultant William Harvey, a leading physician of the period, who, with William Gilbert, stands among the pioneers of British experimental philosophy. Harvey's hand directed the axe of the Baconian method against the tangled jungle of contemporary science, and won immortality by his discovery of the vascular circulation as "a truth of Nature."

**The Makers of Modern Medicine.**

Medieval medicine in England began to falter shortly after the death of its most celebrated victim, Charles II, who expired in 1685 from the effects of a uræmia unmitigated by the attendance of fourteen physicians and the exhibition of sixty different empirical remedies. Among the London practitioners not summoned to the royal death-chamber was Thomas Sydenham, then at the height of his career, but under professional suspicion as an agnostic and an amateur of the Baconian philosophy. Sydenham, indeed, seems to have been the first general practitioner of ability who deliberately approached his clinical problems from an inductive angle.

He studied disease conditions impersonally and critically, seeking only for "evident and conjunct causes"; the more remote antecedents he regarded as being metaphysical and elusive. Like Hippocrates, his illustrious prototype, he was a natural historian of disease, content for the most part to watch and to wait. Like Bacon, his intellectual kinsman, he believed that every effect had a definite and ascertainable cause, and that facts must be collected before causes can be found. Like Pasteur and Lister, his spiritual successors, he found inspiration for his work in a deep sense of moral responsibility.

Sydenham's theory of disease is noteworthy for its simplicity and relative accuracy. Acute conditions he believed arose from the natural response of the body to harmful external influences; chronic conditions, on the other hand, were due to errors of long duration in habit and mode of living.

Fame springs from a man's own door, but may have to travel far in search of recognition. It was Archibald Pitcairne, of Edinburgh, who, stimulated by the writings of Andrew Brown, a pupil of Sydenham, carried the "new learning" across the water to his professorial chair in the University of Leyden. Among Pitcairne's students were Richard Mead, afterwards court physician to George II, and Boerhaave, whose assistant, Haller, diffused the doctrines of Sydenham throughout the continent.