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MEDICAL PROGRESS IN THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS¹

By Dr. M. G. SEELIG

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IN the final analysis, however we may view the passage of the last one hundred years, what we here set down constitutes the recountal of a chapter in history. Not the formal stodgy detailing of name, date and place; not the mere description of men and of movements; not a philosophical interpretation of the causes and effects of events, but in the truest sense of the words the outlining of a pageantry of progress. During the past century, the mills of God have woven no other fabric so shot through, in both warp and woof, with the incomparably brilliant, gold and scarlet and royal purple as is the tapestry of medicine.

Your and my difficulty lies not in conceding the wonders of accomplishment of this century, but rather in setting down the facts on which they rest, without ending up with a mere catalogue of assets. And if we are to escape the dilemma of piling discovery on dis-

covery and of glorifying discoverer after discoverer, then we must recognize in the first instance that, like man himself, medicine can not thrive detached, but waxes and wanes in direct proportion to the inspirational impetus furnished her by the times in which she works. This is a truth, the generality of which is in no way invalidated by the fact that, on occasion, there comes from within the realm of medicine itself the stimulus that energizes and colors an entire era. Such was the case, for example, in the instances of Hippocrates and Galen, of Vesalius and his followers and of Harvey, to mention only a noted few.

Centuries, like men, have souls; but the perspective of time is required for their evaluation. Who among us would be bold enough to predict with assurance the final judgment of history on these hectic days through which you and I are elbowing our ways?

The seventeenth century was a time of individualism run riot. There were great writers—Shakespeare and

¹ Address before the St. Louis Medical Society centennial celebration, on April 6, 1937.

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