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DISEASE OF THE HEART¹

By Dr. ALFRED E. COHN

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As natural scientists we ought, I think, to seek earnestly and intelligently the place where our science fits in the general scheme of knowledge. Because there has been some measure of carelessness, the need is greater now, when exact methods of thinking are beginning to be used in the study of diseases. So much is usually included in accounts of disease in general, and of any set of diseases in particular, that what constitutes the essential properties in the description of any disease and so of diseases in general is often obscure. These remarks apply with especial relevance to disease of the heart. Folklore, tradition, anatomy, early physiology, contributions of the art of the clinic, bacteriology and therapeutics have all been included indiscriminately in accounts of

¹ Delivered before Alpha Omega Alpha, Tulane University Medical School, New Orleans, March 20, 1945.

the history of knowledge of this organ. How much earlier than Aristotle attention was paid to the heart and circulation is of little importance. The heart was recognized in any event as an organ of very great significance. Aristotle recognized in its performance the existence of rhythm. And rhythm in nature has been a subject which has always compelled speculation—whether this is applied to the daily reappearance of light or whether to the tides in the Euripus, in the case of Aristotle. Mention of Aristotle has value because it indicates when records on this subject began. It was not until about two thousand years later, in the middle of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth, that a sensible contribution was made by any one to a recognition, to say nothing of an understanding, of the

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