

# SCIENCE

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## THE RELATIONSHIP OF HUMAN CONSTITUTION TO DISEASE<sup>1</sup>

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THREE years ago at the meeting of this association in Boston I had the honor of reporting before the anthropological section the results of the attempts of our Constitution Clinic at the Presbyterian Hospital to apply the technique of anthropometry to clinical medicine. It is particularly gratifying now at the end of three years to discuss before the section on medicine the results of the work. Now because our first approach to the study of the subject was along the lines of anthropometry it must not be supposed that we have looked upon morphology as the main issue. This particular path was chosen simply because it offered at the moment the most obvious and practical entering wedge. It was indeed quite clear from the first that the subject of human constitution was sufficiently extensive and involved to occupy fully the efforts of many generations of workers; and as we have proceeded we have seen how true was Pope's famous line that the greatest study of mankind is man.

Viewed from this aspect disease ceases to be an entity in itself, a thing as it were added to or carried by man, and becomes rather the inevitable expression of conflict between unique individuality and an adverse specific environmental force. It is of course no new thought that the factor of susceptibility or predisposition to disease is of equal importance with the external specific agent. But perhaps it is just because of its antiquity that this factor has been overshadowed temporarily by the intensive studies which modern workers in medicine are directing at the lesion and the external agent.

The logical outcome of such a conception of disease is to turn an equally intensive research upon the factor of susceptibility. Obviously this must be a quality of the individual, an integral part of his constitutional plan. The successful investigation of this attribute consequently, as of any single character of plant or animal life is doubtless best furthered by a general and complete study of the whole organism. And so the thoughtful physician finds himself not primarily a student of disease, or menacing environment, but

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