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MEDICAL RESEARCH AND ITS ORGANIZATION¹

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OCCASIONS such as the one in which we are participating are peculiarly significant. They mark the advancement of knowledge—its principles and practice—through a training of both the mind and the hand in the power to comprehend and extend knowledge. All knowledge comprises one vast domain; there is to-day scarcely a line of separation between the pursuit of the knowledge called "humanistic" and that called "scientific." The object is one, since in both what is sought is the interpretation of nature, whether in the physical world about us or in the mind and spirit within. In all these fields, we are now used to exercise the privilege of free inquiry and to substitute for authority the evidences of our perceptions.

This high privilege is on the whole a recent acquisition. Although we date our intellectual freedom from the Renaissance period, it is fruitful to reflect on the diverse ways in which the revival of learning in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries affected on the one hand the development of letters and art, and on the other that of science. The interest awakened in the literature of Greece and Rome was shown in the admiration not only for the works of poets, historians and orators, but also for those of physicians, anatomists and astronomers. In consequence, scientific investigation was almost wholly restricted to the study of the writings of authors like Aristotle, Hippocrates, Ptolemy and Galen, and it became the highest ambition to explain and comment upon their teachings, almost an impiety to question them. Independent inquiry and the direct appeal to nature were thus discouraged, and indeed looked upon with the utmost distrust if their results ran counter to what was found in the works of Aristotle and Galen.²

It is not without significance for us that it was the anatomists of the sixteenth century who broke with tradition and determined to examine the human body for themselves, and it was owing chiefly to the labors of two independent geniuses, contemporaries for a time at the University of Padua, Galileo and Harvey, working in very different spheres, that the old order was overthrown and a new era inaugurated.

For medicine as well as for the physical sciences

¹ Address made at the Convocation for the Conferring of Advanced Degrees, Brown University, June 14, 1927.

² Harvey, W., "Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals," translated by Robert Willis, Everyman's Library, 1906; Introduction by E. A. Parkyn, p. vii.

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