

## **Medicine in its relation to human progress / by James P. Warbasse.**

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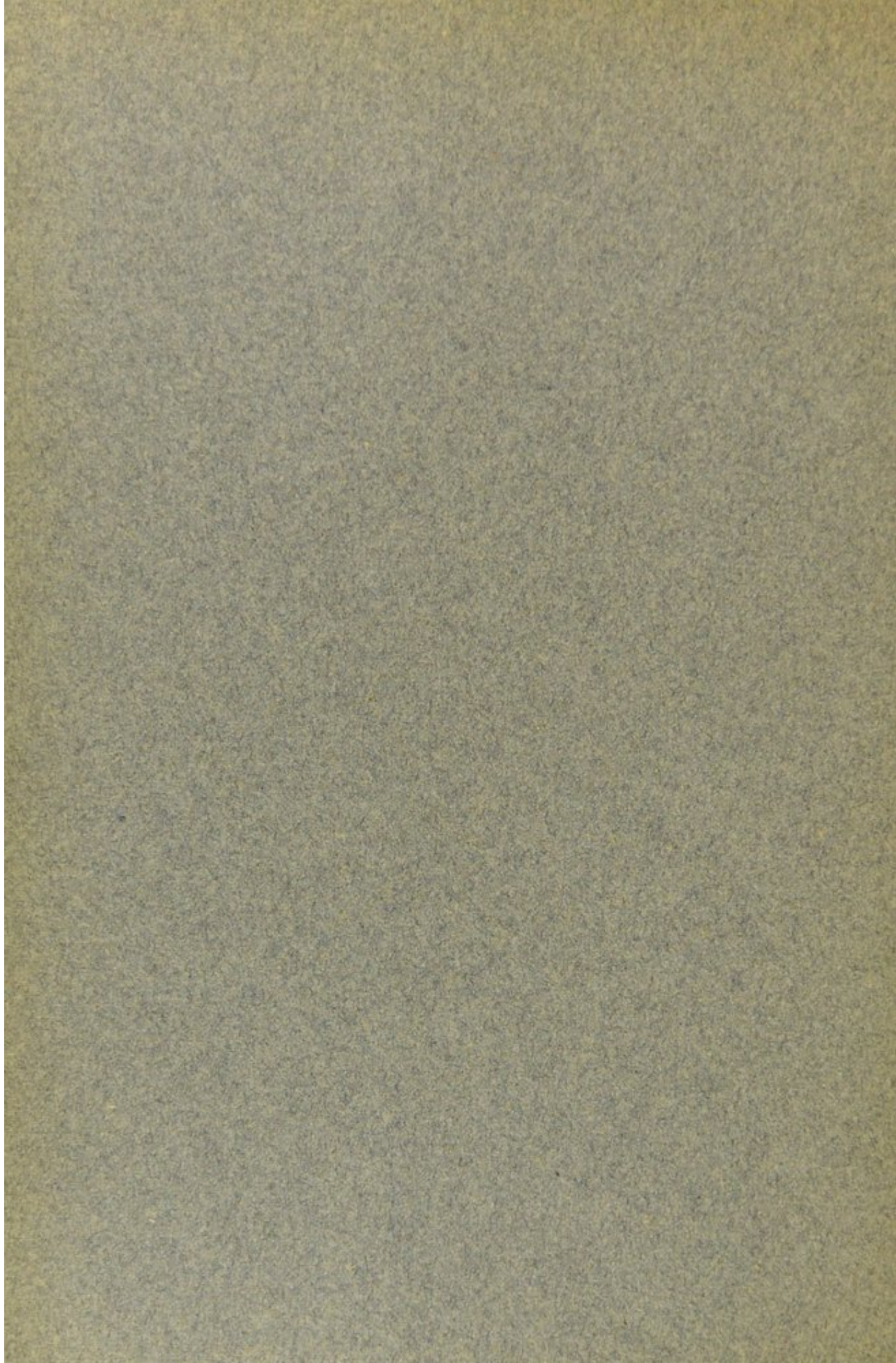
MEDICINE IN ITS RELATION  
TO HUMAN PROGRESS.

BY  
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## MEDICINE IN ITS RELATION TO HUMAN PROGRESS.\*

By JAMES P. WARBASSE, M.D.,  
New York City.

It is not in the history of the church or of the state or of art, but in the history of medicine that we find the best record of human progress. The history of none of the other sciences is sufficiently comprehensive and does not touch near enough the development of the humanities to be of value as a key to human progress. The practice of medicine lies close to the hearts and homes of the people.

In the history of medicine we strike every note that the progress of our race has ever sounded. From the deep diapason of the Hippocratic period to the shrill cry of distress of the middle ages, when the hand of bigotry smote the chord of progress, and the light of science and humanity flickered in darkness; from the Harveian period to the present time, we may read in the history of medicine the history of the rise and fall of sophistries, of the decline of prejudice, and of the always upward progress of the race of man towards better things.

Let the historian study the history of medicine of a particular period if he would gain an insight into the progress of the time. How fared it with medicine? Were the workers in this field encouraged, or were the Cervetuses Calvinized? Was university training in medicine broadened, or were the bodies of men held too sacred for dissection but not too sacred for the rack and the wheel? Which was respected the more, tradition or original thought? In the answer to these questions will be found the index to human progress.

The church and art prospered in the middle ages while humanity made no forward step. The official state in Rome grew corrupt. From the fourth to the sixteenth centuries, Europe groped in the darkness of twelve hundred years which

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witnessed the subjugation of intelligence and original thought. Only ecclesiastical things prospered, and the development of the art and science of medicine was at its lowest ebb. Medicine has risen and fallen with equal pace with humanity.

This is not altogether so with the other branches of science. Astronomy had attained a high state of development 4,500 years ago. The ancient Chaldeans, Hindoos and Egyptians knew more of the movements of the planets than did the majority of Europeans 4,000 years later.

Geology was stationary until the middle of the last century. The Mosaic doctrine of the creation of the world sat like a great incubus and hindered the development of the truth for eighteen hundred years.

Physics and chemistry were scarcely sciences until the eighteenth century, when Lavoisier promulgated his law of the indestructibility of matter.

The progress of biology and anthropology has been so held back by the strong arm of theology that it is only within the last fifty years that men have broken away from the ancient traditions and are no longer afraid to seek for truth concerning their own origin.

Art, as represented in ecclesiastical painting and architecture, on the other hand, made progress during the Dark Ages while medicine and humanity stood still.

The origin of medicine is contemporaneous with the origin of civilization. Strabo and Herodotus have shown that medicine was making steady progress during the development of the old Egyptian and Babylonian civilizations. We learn from Pliny that the kings of Egypt, during the reign of the Ptolemies, permitted the dissection of corpses for the purpose of discovering the causes of diseases, and that anatomy attained a high degree of perfection. With the waning of the ancient civilization of Egypt medicine declined.

The ancient Hebrews had a medicine as advanced as their civilization. This is true of the Chinese, Indians, Brahmins and Hindoos. The intellectual development of Greece and the perfecting of her civilization witnessed Æsculapius, the father of medicine. By a process of evolution and growth, the conditions of civilization, indeed, the very statutory laws under which we now live, have come to us, along with the doctrines of medicine, from the Greece of Æsculapius. From Greece to Rome they came, and thence across the continent to England. While Europe was under



the ecclesiastical blight of the Dark Ages, medicine in Egypt and Arabia advanced with the improving conditions of civilization in those lands.

Hand in hand with the march of civilization have gone the advancements in medicine. To-day the practitioner of medicine lives closest to the lives of the people. No other vocation brings men so close to the home. The clergyman knows people at their best; the lawyer knows them at their worst; the doctor knows them as they are. And yet the doctor is the most misunderstood of men. He strives to inhibit the very conditions from which he gains his livelihood. He conducts societies for the preservation of the public health; he strives for the prevention of diseases; he works to perfect means for shortening the duration of diseases; and, finally, he disseminates his knowledge of these things to all lands. He gives his knowledge to all the world and claims no proprietorship in anything which his colleague may use for the benefit of humanity. He patents nothing. Medical societies have opened their libraries to the public, from which the layman may learn to take care of his health and his family's. The physicians of the world are united into local societies, into national organizations, and finally into international congresses which meet and co-operate for these ends. No reputable physician has any medical information which his brother physician may not have freely for the asking. Are the lawyers of the world banded together to disseminate knowledge for the prevention of litigation? Have the tailors united in an effort to secure greater permanence in styles? Did Sheffield invite Pittsburg to a conference to teach her the secrets of steel? No: these are businesses. The layman is engaged in business and cannot understand these things.

The physician is misunderstood by the lawyer because, on account of these very things, the lawyer looks upon him as a poor business man. The public does not see that philanthropy has any place in business. None but a doctor can judge a doctor. The layman's judgment as to who is the most capable physician is apt to be wrong, for the reason that he measures by standards which we do not recognize. If the layman were wise he would employ a physician to advise him whom to employ to treat him.

As civilization and the mental development of the race have their erratic deviations, so are there kindred erratic exhibitions of medicine. As there are Anarchists and Dowieites, Socialists and Spiritualists, so are there Eddyites and Homeopaths, Osteopaths and Healers. These are not backward steps; they are the



products of a higher civilization. The time is not yet when the truth shall reign supreme and alone. There are the lie and the imposition and the bombastic pretense to peck at its heels and pick at the hem of its garment. These come and go. History has witnessed the beginning and the end of thousands of them. They are fungi that have their origin from things of virile life, but they have not the capacity to endure.

While these fads and sects seem to interfere with the progress of medicine, the contrary is really the case. Medicine takes from them the thing that has made them live, and eventually appropriates it to herself. It may be laid down as an axiom that anything which has the power of developing a sect or following must have something good in it. Medicine is an art, because it appropriates the best wherever it can find it and calls it its own. Its mission is to make the human body more enduring and beautiful, to surround it with wholesomeness, to make the senses more perfect and the hand more cunning; and that is a mission which must needs make for the uplifting of the spirit.

Because the physician is engaged in these things, he too is made better. He is uplifted by his own efforts to help others. He shares in the civilizing effect of his own work.