

## BOOKS

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LE JOURNAL DE LA MÉDECINE<sup>1</sup>

by

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In presenting this book to the reader, G. Duhamel points out that the author has already given us a work of literary journalism on present-day medicine. Surely the history of medicine which Dr. Soubiran now offers to his colleagues and the general public is a further addition to this form of literature? Indeed, together with Dr. de Kearney, who is a specialist in the field of medical journalism, he has assembled in this first volume of a new collection a series of "reportings", dating from the Babylonian period (3,500 B.C.) to the revival of medicine, on the art of caring for and curing the diseases which afflict mankind.

This work is presented to us in the form of a modern newspaper, with various leaders, reportings and numerous illustrations. The attractive page-setting and the lack of any over-abstract terminology make it agreeable to read this compact and strictly scientific work, thanks to which one can learn and be entertained at the same time.

Each *Journal* deals with an important period in the art of healing: Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, Alexandrian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Chinese medicine. As regards our own era, with the exception of the light provided by the Montpellier and Salernitan Schools, there are centuries of darkness to be crossed—with occasional flashes of light here and there—before arriving at the medical reform with Paracelsus and then the revival of medicine. Going from discovery to discovery (anatomy, physiology, pathology, surgery, mental diseases and pharmacology), this

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<sup>1</sup> Editions Segep-Kent, Paris.

first book ends with the work of William Harvey on the circulation of the blood in 1628.

It is necessary to make a choice in the stages of this struggle waged by doctors against the threats to man's physical and mental health. Thus, in the *Journal* which deals with the medical art of the Mohammedans, we find a remarkable page on the "humanization of war—Saladin and medical neutrality". The place is Jerusalem after the defeat of the Crusaders in 1187. The victorious Sultan Saladin organizes a veritable military medical service and gives the order that all the wounded are to be cared for, whether Moslems or Crusaders... The organization also looks after the European prisoners, the distribution of foodstuffs and the evacuation of the non-combatants towards the Mediterranean ports.

"Going yet further in his noble-mindedness, Saladin even provided for and accomplished the neutrality of the doctor in time of war. Richard the Lionheart's doctor, Ranulphus Besace, was authorized by the Sultan, *sub pacte pace*, to visit sick or wounded Christian prisoners."

On reading the pages concerning Saint Anthony's fire or ergotic poisoning, one cannot but remember the charitable work of the Antonites. Hastening to the call of populations periodically decimated by this disease, which came to be called gangrenous ergotism, the Antonites set up their houses at the great crossroads of the West. Thus, they built a convent with accommodation for wayfarers and a leper-hospital at Isenheim in Upper Alsace towards the end of the 13th century. It was for the church of this Antonite convent that Grunewald painted the famous altar-piece which can still be admired in Colmar. In this way, art and the care of the sick can be seen to coincide.

This book is intended as much for initiates as for the general public. It shows "how a long series of great doctors, of all times and all races, has built up little by little a bulwark of aid to the sick and of dignity which, in spite of the extraordinary developments of modern science, represents the groundwork of medicine today."

R. J.