

Is There A Doctor In The House? If Not, Why Not?

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is a medical textbook, and it deals with its subject in a rational fashion. The subject is the treatment of physical injuries (and this is doubtless one reason magic and mumbo jumbo play almost no part in it: there is no mystery about the cause of such ailments).

The papyrus takes up 48 cases of injury-wounds, fractures, dislocations-in a systematic order, starting from the head and working downward: 10 cases of injury to the brain, four to the nose, and so on to the spinal column. In each case the condition is carefully described, and the descriptions make abundantly clear that an examination by an Egyptian doctor was a thorough business. It included interrogation, inspection and functional tests such as having the patient walk or move his limbs to determine the area of injury. Then followed a diagnosis and one of three conclusions: "an ailment which I will treat," "an ailment with which I will contend," "an ailment not to be treated"-in other words: favorable, uncertain, unfavorable.

Treatment recommended in the papyrus included reducing dislocations, healing fractures by the use of splints and casts, and bringing open wounds together with sutures, clamps or a kind of adhesive plaster. Mummies reveal numerous examples of fractures that healed without complication. What is striking is the level-headed approach of the handbook; it reveals a point of view that in some aspects differs little from that of modern medicine.

A second medical work, only slightly less impressive, is the Ebers

medical Papyrus. Unlike the Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus, it is not a monograph on a single subject, but rather a teaching manual for general practitioners.

It has a surgical section in the manner of the Edwin Smith Papyrus; a section on the heart and its vessels, which is a most interesting essay on speculative medical philosophy; and another on pharmacy. One of its remedies is a prescription for castor oil as a laxative.

Herodotus declared that Egypt's doctors were highly specialized, and this has sometimes been taken as an indication of the level Egyptian medicine reached. Quite the contrary-specialization is a well established feature of primitive medicine: the medicine man frequently limited his practice to certain areas or problems only. The Egyptian doctor's fame rests on what the medical papyri have revealed-the unquestioned presence of a rational attitude toward the aspects of medicine which an ancient Egyptian could deal with practically.

In their own day the reputation of Egypt's doctors reached far beyond the Nile Valley. They were the ancient world's equivalent of the Viennese psychoanalysts. The clay tablets found at Tell el Amarna indicate that Egyptian physicians were frequently sent to foreign courts in Syria and Assyria and the kings of Persia are known to have employed Egyptian doctors, and the Egyptians' herbal prescriptions and some of their treatments were so highly prized that they spread throughout the whole of the Mediterranean area.

Egyptian medicine is not the roots

of modern Western medicine. The Egyptian calendar is the basis of the modern Western calendar, for the latter is but an improved version of the Julian calendar. It is even possible that the hieroglyphs inspired the Phoenician alphabet, which is indirectly the prototype of the modern Latin alphabet.

It is fascinating to examine copies of ancient African papyri obtained from the principal museums of the world-prescriptions and medical procedures from the papyri Ebers, Berlin, Leyden, Edwin Smith, Ahmose, etc. Some read with an almost contemporary flair, "Take two capsules and call me tomorrow" (wonder if they had golf courses back then?). Equally interesting is the genius of the African in administrative organization, demonstrated here in medicine as fulling as in law, diplomacy, the military, and in navigation and tax codes. There were medical associations that supervised training, certified practitioners, and monitored the practice.

There was a great deal of spe-

cialization, internists, ocular (with emphasis on cataracts), Podiatrists, brain surgeons, dentists, masseurs, and others; many of whom were women. Atkinson tells us Egyptian medicine became the ground work and principal basis for Greek medicine. It is believed that the Greek, Hippocrates (after whom the famed oath is named) studied at the same African Temple Schools which Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras and other studied; "it is not known how else he managed to gain such a vast knowledge of diagnosis and treatment." Equally revealing is the background of the Caduceus, that universal medical symbol. It is not Greek at all, archaeologists having found it as early on as 7,000 years ago in Ethiopia, Nubia, and across the Red Sea in Punt (Arabia). "The sign which precedes our medical prescriptions is derived from the eye of Horus," the same eye over the truncated pyramid which is incorporated into the Great Seal of the United States.

This story will continue next week, "Today's Program Possibilities."

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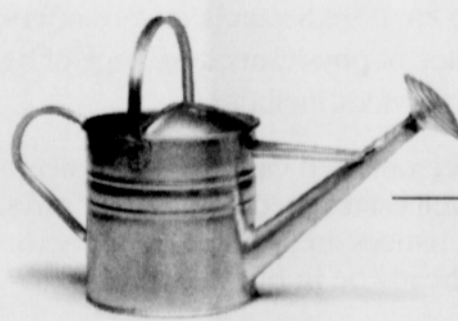
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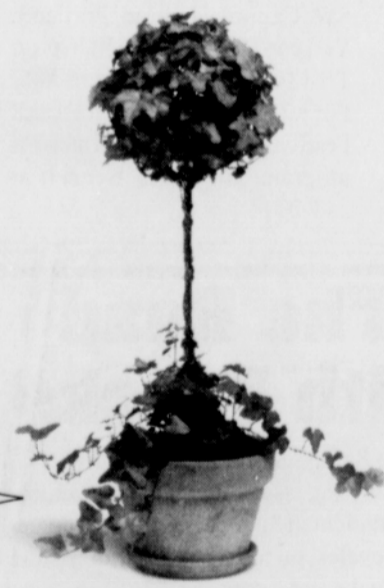
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