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A LITERARY PHYSICIAN

THE SINISTER SHEPHERD. A translation of Giralomo Fracastoro's "Syphilidis Sive de Morbo Gallico." By William Van Wyck. The Primavera Press.

In this century even the hardiest of the young pathological fiction writers or Freudianized poets would hesitate before attempting to use a theme so terrible in a literary work. True, Aleister Crowley did write a sonnet sequence in which the dread malady was more than once described in detail; but the exception proves the rule.

GAVE IT A NAME

But what disgusts one century may interest another. And, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, "no opprobrium was attached" to the disease called "Christian" by the Persians, "Neapolitan" by the French, "French" by the Germans, and "Polish" by the Russians. Francisco de Villalobos, in 1548, was the first to write in verse about it; but it remained for that young physician who taught philosophy at Pauda. Girolamo Fracastoro, to internationalize its nature, describe its symptoms, give a likely hint concerning its origin and outline a fairly rational therapeutic method for its treatment in a poem that excited the envy of the literary critics and even the poets of his age.

Fracastoro was no ordinary physician. He was a geologist, astronomer, and physicist as well as a pathologist. He was the first man to speak of the earth's magnetic poles; one of the first to understand the significance of fossils, and he was probably the first man, says Singer, to suggest the modern doctrine of the specific character of fevers.

SPIRITED VERSION

But his fame has been most widely spread among physicians by this poem which represents the disease as a stroke inflicted by the sun on a shepherd. Compared with the lines of

Virgil, the poem was read all over Europe by men of letters as well as physicians. Today, when the great international language, Latin, has been flung into limbo, it remains a curiosity for collectors. But now again layman and physician may read it in Mr. Van Wyck's spirited translation, annotated in a scholarly fashion that will be a delight to the modern student and illustrated by excellent reproductions of old engravings and woodcuts.

Finally, this is a book that must instantly endear itself to the collector of fine printing. For the book was entirely designed and printed by Mr. Ward Ritchie, whose work has already attracted international attention. It is one of the most beautiful volumes ever issued by the Primavera Press.