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Editorial

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Editorial

BEWARE OF GREEKS Bearing Gifts!" The letters were large. The color of the chalk was gold. The phrase was triply underlined. No matter where you sat in the lecture hall, the motto was visible and impressive. The dullness of the course in pharmacology encouraged repetitious imprints on your brain. The instructor was not helpful. To the question, "Why does such a warning occupy the whole upper third of the lecture board?" the answer was, "Time will tell." The course ended and the explanation was not forthcoming. Years passed, but the picture image is permanent.

In daily practice, the "Gifts" appear: white pills, pink pills, green pills, blue pills, yellow pills; white capsules, pink capsules, green capsules, blue capsules, yellow capsules; liquids as varied; ointments as numerous; syrups; powders. When the desk is groaning under the heap, the authenticating articles appear: first, the famous-named cautious report; then the less famous-named enthusing observation; finally, the unknown rabid flag-waver. You say you're not convinced? You say you want more—an attractive letter-opener, a permanent desk blotter, a perpetual calendar, an expensive volume with beautiful color plates, a year's supply of hand lotion for home and for office. O, yes! and a monthly bulletin of diseases folded nicely into glamorous lack of censorship that would make lay publications screech with envy.

And the "Greeks Bearing!" Adonis was an amateur. The suit of wool from the West of London, the homburg of Danbury Hatters, the hand-painted ascot, the high shine, are coupled with a knowledge of medicine to shame Osler, a diction to top the Barrymores, an etiquette acceptable to the Court of George. The bag is top grain. The containers suggest longer hours of design than the research of the product contained. Perhaps, in fact, the efficacy of the content is increased by contemplation of the total vision.

You mentioned the Cost? Doctor, you must realize the background of the manufacturer, the modern scientific laboratories,

the costly equipment, the subsidized research men, the annual trips to the home laboratories of the "Greeks." Again, you have the research grants carefully blanketing the country, the booth rentals to support the many medical conventions, the philanthropic donations to selected charitable institutions, of many cans, hundreds of packages, thousands of capsules, millions of pills. The medical magazines, too, must be kept solvent by the advertising—the more grateful the manufacturer, the larger the amount of gold-plated space. Exit, the bearers.

Misgivings? — Yes, there are some. Arguments against? — definitely. Scientific inaccuracies? — surely. Time mellows. Patients repeat. The white is psychologically dull; the pink, a repetition; the green, bilious; the blue, constipating; the yellow, allergic. "Well, Mrs. McGillicuddy, this is the very latest, the most accurate, and although it hasn't been used much locally, clinical reports are excellent; of course, some patients would call it pure gold because of its price. Yes, agreed; to get well is worth money — take according to directions, then." Forthwith and to furtherance, the grotesque cost of illness is sanctioned and victorious are the "Greeks Bearing Gifts."

WILLIAM J. EGAN, M.D.

The Guild of St. Luke of Boston