

Address to the Medico-Chirurgical Society, on occasion of being elected president, including some remarks on homœopathy / by Robert Hamilton.

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A D D R E S S
TO THE
MEDICO-CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY, ON OCCASION
OF BEING ELECTED PRESIDENT,
INCLUDING SOME REMARKS
ON
HOMŒOPATHY.

By ROBERT HAMILTON, M. D., F. R. S. E.,
Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Edinburgh.

On taking the Chair of the Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society, (on the evening of the 2d December 1846,) Dr Hamilton stated that he had not intended more than a few words of thanks, in acknowledgment of the honour conferred upon him. But, in proceeding to note these down, they had insensibly grown into the following rather lengthened remarks, which he hoped the Society would receive with the indulgence he was sensible they required.

GENTLEMEN,—In undertaking the performance of the important duties of the situation in which you have recently placed me, I feel constrained to avail myself of the earliest opportunity to express—however imperfectly—the high estimate I entertain of the honour you have conferred upon me, and my sincere conviction that I owe that honour not to my merits, but to your kindness. When I think, on the one hand, of the illustrious individuals who have preceded me in this chair—such men as my respected teachers,—our Duncans, Russells, and Thomsons,—of my honoured master Dr Abercrombie,—of some of our earlier and departed friends, as Drs Kelly and Graham, and of those who still remain—our Woods and Mac-lagans, our Alisons and Christisons; and last, and I will add, not least, our learned and philosophical friend who immediately preceded me;—and when I look, on the other, to the many men of eminence whose names now adorn the list of our ordinary members, I cannot but consider the sentiment as alike natural and befitting.

It may be that I take a somewhat exaggerated view of the respect attaching to the office in question. But in my humble judgment, it appears entitled to rank inferior to very few of those honorary distinctions which in this far-famed city are connected with the learned associations that constitute not the least useful ornaments for which it is distinguished. I will not now dwell upon those societies which are devoted to the exclusive cultivation of some

department of pure science. I turn at once to those which are connected solely with the healing art. We have here two royal incorporations, severally including a large section of the profession, the colleges of physicians and of surgeons, venerable for their age, respected for the many enlightened and liberal men which compose them, and vying with each other in the honourable competition which will most efficiently promote the improvement of the art it is their duty to cherish, and the interests of their licentiates, who, whether they remain in their native land, or proceed to some distant clime, are charged with the weighty responsibility of encountering disease and death in all their varied forms. Honour is indeed justly due to associations animated by such principles ; and the distinction of presiding over them is one which, I trust, will ever maintain the high character it merits.

The constitution and functions of our society, I need not say, are wholly different from those of the bodies just named. We claim no corporate rights ; we neither enjoy nor covet any monopoly, to be used, far less abused. Our society aims at one object alone, the improvement of our science for the public benefit and our own, that we may be the better fitted efficiently to discharge our high duties. This society, then, we rejoice to think, numbers among its members by much the largest proportion of the fellows of both the royal colleges. In addition, it includes a number of those individuals, who, having been, or still being, engaged in the public services of their country, have had opportunities of witnessing disease under aspects which civil practitioners rarely enjoy. The society, moreover, numbers in its ranks persons not included in these classes,—many intelligent practitioners, and many of our country brethren, who take a lively concern in our proceedings, and enhance the interest of our meetings. In a word, I hold that this society is entitled to be regarded as in no degree sectional,—as having nothing to do with partial interests or claims,—as opening its ample door to every gentleman engaged in the cultivation of the healing art, and as being the embodiment and representative of the whole profession, in its untiring and unceasing efforts to extend its limits, and augment its efficiency in mitigating, as far as human skill can do it, every form of bodily pain and suffering to which man is heir. I regard it a privilege to be the humblest member of such an institution ; and having such sentiments, I leave it with you to judge if I have expressed too strongly my sense of the honour you have been pleased to confer upon me. It was one, I can truly assure you, I did not expect, and to which I did not aspire. I was fully satisfied with the reward you had previously dispensed to me ; and had my advice been followed, it would have been conferred upon some of the many more worthy and far more distinguished members of the society.

Withal, Gentlemen, let it not for a moment be supposed that I am ignorant of the true ground upon which you have acted in this matter. I well know that I have received this office at your hands, mainly from the circumstance that I was in some degree a humble instrument in effecting the formation of the society,—a pleasing task

which brought its own reward, and required no such honourable addition as that you have now bestowed.

Having finished the curriculum of study in this place, and having returned after an absence of five years, a considerable portion of which was spent in London and Dublin, where I made a large and intimate acquaintance with professional men, I both saw and experienced the advantage which such unions effect; and, moreover, was enabled to draw the conclusion, that if the profession in the capitals of England and Ireland could support such societies, then such were the character and the acquirements of our brethren in this city and country, that, notwithstanding the great disparity of our numbers, we could at all events follow in their wake, and accomplish our object in a way which would benefit both ourselves and the science.

The preliminary labour in the formation of the society was indeed a pleasant one,—that of obtaining a band of requisitionists, who would take the initiative, and consult with their brethren whether the scheme might be attempted. About fifty gentlemen were appealed to, and, so far as I remember, there was among them not one who declined. One object was uppermost in my mind, that the proposal should be free from every thing like party. The only other point I kept in view was to apply first to the junior rather than the senior members of the profession. I acted thus because in that quarter it was to be presumed there would be more elasticity and energy, and less fear, perhaps, of jarring and discrepancy. Of this, however, there was none. The fifty names were speedily obtained, including, I believe, most if not all our leading men. I hold in my hand the original requisition-paper, which has long lain by me, and which I shall request the society to preserve henceforward in its archives. We there find the signatures of Thomas Charles Hope, James Russell, James Bryce, George Wood, James Buchan, George Kelly, John Barclay, Thomas Spens, James Home, George Bell, J. H. Wishart, Henry Johnston, Andrew Duncan Senior and Junior, and many more whose autographs will with time become more and more interesting. Of the 53 requisitionists, I find that 30 are now dead, and 23 survive.

A meeting for embodying the society was called for the 21st day of August 1821. The constitution originally drawn up and revised—the same precisely as at present—was unanimously approved, and the first set of office-bearers appointed. These, as appears from the first billet, were as follows: Dr Duncan Senior, president; Dr Home, James Russell, Esq., and Dr Thomson, vice-presidents; Dr Duncan junior, Dr Abercrombie, Dr Spens, George Bell, Esq., James Law, Esq., J. H. Wishart, Esq., William Newbigging, Esq., William Wood, Esq., councillors; James Bryce, Esq., treasurer; Drs W. P. Alison and R. Hamilton, secretaries. Of these fifteen gentlemen, you will perceive that only four remain.

Dr Duncan Senior was our first president, and, as was to have been expected, that well-known individual, whose name is so closely associated with the periodical literature of his time, and with so-

cieties which still exist, whose object it is to promote good will and fellowship around the social board, was not backward in encouraging another, whose aim was to advance the intellectual improvement of that profession to which he was so much attached. He was an assiduous president, and among the first who tendered communications to the society.

Through Dr Duncan's instrumentality, and that of the many other FELLOWS who were members, the society was from the first most kindly accommodated in the hall of the Royal College of Physicians, an accommodation which continued uninterruptedly for more than 20 years.

The first meeting of the society for public business was held on the evening of the 5th December 1821, exactly 25 years ago, when, after an address from the chair by Dr Duncan, Dr Abercrombie read the first paper, the subject being the pathology of the heart.

Communications flowed in apace ; and, as is well known, three volumes of transactions were speedily published, under the auspices of a small committee. These volumes are now out of print ; they are often quoted in the current literature of the day, and are the depository of many valuable papers.

We have seen that about fifty individuals concurred in promoting the establishment of the society, and it now appears, from our last published list, that, including corresponding members, we now exceed more than three times that number.

With this accession to our numbers, and including in our body not a few possessed of talents not inferior to any who have gone before them, do we anticipate too much when we cherish the hope that the society will proceed in its onward course of usefulness with an accelerated and a firmer step ? The objects of the society are the same now as they were at the commencement, and the means and opportunities of promoting these objects are in all respects materially increased.

In becoming members of the society, we each and all, as I understand it, express our willingness to assist as we best can, in promoting the advance of medical science, especially in its more practical departments. In doing this we have a primary view to the public benefit ; for we do not forget that we are the servants of the public, and have been solemnly entrusted by that public, through the regularly appointed authorities, to discharge very high and solemn—I had almost said, sacred duties. From the earliest days, no expedition has departed for a foreign shore, nor has there been a struggle in a battle field, that the value of the science of medicine has not been most gratefully felt and most cordially acknowledged. And though the duties of the physician in civil life are widely different, yet every one is familiar with the fact, that in the current events of private life, in our humblest cottages and our crowded cities, there are daily occurring scenes where the medical adviser is called to perform a part quite as difficult, and often far more delicate,—making calls upon his hand, his head, and his heart, and demanding sacrifices of comfort and of time greater than all that is re-

quired amid the din and bustle of the battle and the breeze. The medical practitioner must be ever ready to meet disease and death, he knows not in what shape and form, and has committed to his charge the life of a fellow immortal suspended as by a thread, whose destiny, humanly speaking, may be determined by his ignorance and neglect, or by his assiduity and skill.

A second and not unworthy object, therefore, of every member of such a society as this will be to promote his own improvement. The science of medicine is vast and comprehensive, and one whose limits are every day most rapidly extending. No one, in all its departments, or even in a few of them, can keep pace with the ever-accelerating progress ; and while assiduously acquiring the new, how can he retain his familiarity with the old ? He especially requires to get his information by short and direct methods,—to interrogate and converse with others who know something different, and something better than himself,—to compare notes with his equals, and to be ever learning and pondering ; and where may such means of improvement be so appropriately found as in such an association as this ?

In such intercourse we look primarily for professional improvement, but there is no reason why the improvement should not be more general. Here all ranks of the profession meet. The young have the advantage of meeting with their seniors, and learning from their observation and experience ; and the old have the pleasure of meeting with the young, it may be just from the schools or from travel. Then, where is the individual among us who has not some weak point to mend, some rough corner to rub off, or who has not the lesson to learn, how most agreeably and efficiently to do the right thing in the best way ? That man is perhaps of all others the most to be pitied who has reached the state in which he has nothing to learn. His life, at all events his pleasures and happiness, are virtually at an end. Henceforward the dull monotony of his existence is wholly vegetative, and for him there are no pleasures, joys, nor hopes. I have sometimes heard it alleged regarding some of our more learned societies,—somewhat too stiff and formal, perhaps,—that their meetings are dull and tiresome. Such an allegation should never apply here, where all being conducted in an easy conversational style, there can be little to tax patience or forbearance. I have also heard the inquiry put ; What good, what information, do you acquire ? But who is he who, having thus apparently nothing to learn, takes no trouble to enlighten others ; and who has not found out that here, as elsewhere, it is ever more pleasing to confer a benefit than to receive one ?

This endeavour for individual improvement, and the improvement of our profession, is all the more necessary, inasmuch as both we and the profession are ever, more or less, exposed to adverse influences injurious alike to the science and its most deserving cultivators.

In the foregoing remarks I have proceeded on the assumption

that medicine is to be regarded as one of the sciences. But, marvellous to relate, this belief has lately been impugned in different quarters, and even by some parties who claim to be devoted to the art of healing ; and who, largely patronised, are not content with supporting their novel doctrines and extraordinary practices, but have combined in a crusade against that science which has hitherto been so highly honoured in every period of the world's history.

Those agencies which, in addition to the usual host of quackeries, are now in the ascendant, are chiefly Homœopathy, Hydropathy, and Mesmerism ; and what with their busy practisers, and their numerous partizans and abettors, they have succeeded in raising a clamour against the established system of medicine which would throw contempt on all our past labours, and put an end, for the future, to all rational inquiry.

As illustrative of the pretensions of the whole,—for our remarks must be summary—we turn to the first we have named—namely, *Homœopathy*, the most popular, perhaps, as the most prevalent of the three, and inquire what are its pretensions as the rival and substitute of the long venerated and cherished science of medicine ?

Homœopathy, it appears, insists upon a thorough and radical change of the whole theory and practice of the healing art. It deliberately contends for the thorough *reversal* of its every principle, and for the complete *subversion* of every thing that has gone before it in the science. It maintains that the whole structure, founded shall we say by the wise man of Cos,—the first man of his age,—the careful collector of whatever had been before accumulated for the mitigating of human suffering,—upreared by the Latins, our Celsuses and Galens, handed down to us and augmented by the Arabians, improved by our Linacres and Parés, our Cheseldens, Hallers, and Hunters, and hundreds more, dead and alive ; that all the products of their rare geniuses, their patient labours and ardent toils,—all are but splendid delusions, and irrelevant and useless facts, and that the system, composed of the materials of ages, must be razed and scattered to the four winds of heaven, that the new and improved system may rise in its stead !

This is passing strange. Stranger still, however, that any should have yielded for a moment to such unheard-of pretensions—and, eschewing what has been so long esteemed, should substitute what has been yclept a science, hatched as of yesterday !

We are solicitous not to exaggerate. But considering what the pretended science is, and on what it is grounded, we confess ourselves amazed and chagrined by the patience with which it is tolerated ; and the respect with which it has been treated in not a few quarters. Thus, in an ably conducted and influential journal, we find the *claims* of homœopathy put forth in such terms as these, “ Hahnemann is the founder of an original system of medicine,” (Brit. and For. Med. Rev. No. 41, 226.) Again, homœopathy “ is an ingenious system of medical doctrine, tolerably complete in its organization, and tolerably comprehensive in its views,” (l. c. 233.)

"It comes before us in an imposing aspect, and claims our attention on grounds which cannot be gainsaid." (l. c. 238.)

In general society, too, we meet with well-educated and ingenious persons who insist that homœopathy is the only philosophical medicine; and with others who adopt it in preference to the ordinary system, and peril their own lives, and those of their near relatives, on the faith of its superior virtues and powers.

The prevalence, again, of homœopathy has been pourtrayed in these words, published in January 1846: "Homœopathy comes before us now, not in the garb of a suppliant, unknown and helpless, but as a conqueror, powerful, famous, triumphant. The disciples of Hahnemann are spread over the whole civilized world. There is no town of any considerable size in Germany, France, Italy, England, or America that does not boast of possessing one or more homœopathic physicians, not a few of whom are men of high respectability and learning, many of them in large practice, and patronized especially by persons of high rank. New books on homœopathy issue in abundance from the press, and journals exclusively devoted to its cause are printed and widely circulated in Europe and America. Numerous hospitals and dispensaries for the treatment of the poor on the new system have been established, many of which publish reports, blazoning its successes, not merely in warm phrases, but in hard words, and harder figures of statistical tables." (l. c. No. 41, 239.)

How then are these pretensions so aspiring, backed with success apparently so flattering, to be met? Were they based upon truth, none certainly would receive them with more cordiality than the regular practitioner; who would thus find his studies, his labours, and anxieties curtailed, and his fond aspirings reached by a road far shorter and easier than any he had previously dreamt of.

Very different, however, is the estimate which every right thinking man is compelled to form.

1st. First he looks to the origin of this movement, and finds it was introduced by a man who, previous to the publication of "The Organon of Medicine" in the year 1810, had once before *deceived* the world by selling at a high price, under the name of *Pncæum*, a nostrum which consisted of nothing but borax. This is a fact, which, as stated by Dr A. Mühry of Hanover, has never been denied, even by his adherents, and which in strict justice should never be forgotten. (l. c. 44, 565).

2dly. In turning to the *speculation itself*, the enquirer encounters something the most transcendental and irrational that was ever imposed upon the world. This is especially true regarding the famous globules—those medicines through whose instrumentality the homœopath effects his cures. They constitute his *Materia Medica*, derived from substances all of which have long been catalogued in the regular *Pharmacopœias*. His only originality in this particular consists in the method of preparation and administration; and this by division and attenuation, by means of trituration and solution, to an extent exceeding alike the comprehensible operations of arith-

metic and all possible conception. Thus, as is well known, a grain of chalk or of charcoal, when triturated at the first attenuation, contains the 100th part of a grain, or of a drop of its primary solution ; at the second, the 1000th part ; at the third, 100,000th part of a grain, and so on to the 30th attenuation ; the effect of which, according to the statement of a learned member of our society, is simply this,—that when the 30th dilution is employed, the number of globules through which one *grain* of the drug is diffused is so enormous, that, (twenty globules being allowed to the inch,) they would, laid side by side, inconceivably exceed in length the line which has been traced by the annual revolutions of the earth round the sun, and by its diurnal revolutions on its own axis, ever since the creation !!

But this is not all. One of these globules of the 1st, or 3d, or 12th attenuation, is not only a fit and proper dose to be given as *the remedy* for severe diseases, but it is an agent of such potent influence upon the animal economy, that one dose of this amount will continue acting for 30, 40, or 50 days, and must not be interfered with by repetition, for fear of deranging or destroying its curative virtues ! Thus Hahnemann tells us that the sextillienth of a grain of carbonate of ammonia will act beneficially for upwards of 36 days,—that the dicillienth of a grain of oyster shell (*calcareæ*) will require 40, 50, and even more days to effect all the good it is capable of, and that a like dose of phosphorus will act for at least 40 days !! (l. c. No. 41, 230).

Once more, this original, fundamental, and unmixed folly of Hahnemann, one would have thought the very climax of absurdity. But far from it. Some of the professors of this art are going a great way further. Thus, Dr Grosse, a practising physician at Jütterbuck, has lately published a paper in the 21st Volume of the *Homœopathic Archives*, in which he contends for the extension of the attenuation from the 30th, Hahnemann's limit, to the 100th dilution, to the 200th, 300th, 400th, 500th, and so on to the 900th dilution, at the same time allowing the patient only to smell the remedy,—a favourite practice with the great inventor of the system,—and this but once a-month or so, in expectancy of the cure. (No. xlv. 568.)

One is almost driven to conclude that this must be intended as a mere hoax,—an extreme experiment upon the gullibility of the simple. But it is nothing of the kind. Grosse urges this improvement upon the system, because he has found in practice that the common attenuations are too strong, *only rendering the disease worse*, (I quote his words,) without in the least promoting the cure ; whilst, by his farther dilutions, he brings the agent to that pitch of perfection that its whole remedial power is developed, and acts so mildly and efficiently that it cures at once. This paper is gravely and seriously answered by Dr Böhm, a practising homœopath in Vienna, in "*the Austrian Homœopathic Journal*," and after this fashion is "the system advancing to its *perfection* !"

In strict accuracy, the extravagance of Dr Grosse is only to an infinitesimal extent greater than that of Hahnemann and his fol-

lowers: both, therefore, are to be judged of by the same rule. We confess we cannot understand the constitution of that mind which would seek for any practical application of what may possibly involve (as has been alleged) "an ingenious process of ratiocination," but must at once confound all human experience.

But let us now trace the progress of the system for a step or two.

1st, It is well known that Hahnemann himself, towards the end of his life, maintained doctrines which were inconsistent with homœopathic principles. The doctrines, says Dr Mühry, promulgated in Hahnemann's Treatise upon Chronic Diseases, met with few adherents; he had become inconsistent with himself, and became more so still when he recommended camphor in very large unattenuated doses for the cure of the cholera. (l. c. xliv. 565.)

2dly, Although this extraordinary system has been in existence scarcely a life-time, yet numerous are the changes it has undergone, and the oppositions and divisions which have arisen among its partisans.

Thus, as has been well remarked, at first it was an axiom that a globule was to be administered at long intervals, as of a week, fortnight, or more; now, however, very few homœopaths adhere to this, but, on the contrary, the great majority administer them frequently in the course of every day.

Formerly, it was generally some of the attenuations that were almost habitually administered, and now it is often a drop of the unpotentiated remedy, as it has been styled, that is employed. Thus, Dr Geo. Schmidt of Vienna, who, within the last few months, has published the result of many years' experience of homœopathic practice, states, from his personal observation, "that the present small doses are worse than useless, and that the mother-tincture, one drop for a dose, or larger doses of the first and second attenuations, ought universally to be employed. (l. c. xliv. 569).

Again, There is a considerable section of the school which have laid aside the very name of homœopathy and instituted that of "specific medicine." This section is numerous. It still holds the principle of *similia similibus*; but experiments with *large*, and not with infinitesimal doses. This section has for ten years supported a journal. (xliv. 566.)

Lastly, on this point, in the words of Dr Mühry, "The homœopaths bear the original name wrongly, being no longer true homœopaths, the majority having resumed a great part of allopathic medicine." This perfectly coincides with Dr Balfour's statement regarding Austria. "Homœopathy," he remarks, "is studied not from any beauty or truth to be found in its doctrines but from necessity of a livelihood. Many continue to prescribe according to both methods, not eclectively, but according to the wish of the patient, believing in neither, leaving inquiry to others, and stumbling blindly on." How humiliating a state of things is this. Would that it were confined to that country so low in the scale of general intelligence and medical skill, with a rate of mortality of 1 in 33 against that of Eng-

land, with all its overcrowded cities and manufacturing districts of only 1 in 46, and, in some of its agricultural counties, as low as 1 in 54. How far the substituting of what is called allopathy for homœopathy has been adopted by professed homœopaths in our own city and country, you, gentlemen, know full well.

3d, Dr Fleishmann's experience in the Homœopathic Hospital of Vienna, so injudiciously used to subserve purposes which cannot but be deprecated, demands a passing glance.

Dr Fleishmann, along with his homœopathy, employs many of the regular adjuvantia and medical appliances, which, from time immemorial, have been recommended in the medical schools, and have been employed by every medical practitioner. "Dr Fleishmann," says Dr Balfour, "uses cold applications to the head in delirium, sometimes in headach, and cold washing of the body in fevers; in arthritis, cloths dipped in cold water, and surrounded with oil-silk, are wrapped over the affected joints, and allowed to remain as long as damp, and are then repeated. He also uses for costiveness clysters of plain warm water, or mixed with a little salt; in diarrhœa, rice clysters are employed. Dr Fleishmann also stated to him, that neither he nor any rational homœopath ever employed emetics or purgatives, however simple." How "irrational," then, those in this place, who order castor-oil as freely, we believe, as any of us.

But this is not the only criticism which must be offered upon the famous reports of the Homœopathic Hospital.

The patients are very much selected. Of 320 patients, whom Dr Balfour saw during his late sojourn in Vienna, only fifty-five were above the age of 50, and one-half were under 25 years of age. This circumstance of the comparative age of the inmates must exert, as every one knows, a powerful influence upon the results which are obtained.

But more;—the patients are not only selected; the whole process of admission and discharge is mysterious. So much is certain, says our respectable informant, that most of those admitted have been previously visited at their own houses by the assistant physician. Many cases likewise not improving, or apparently not likely to improve, are summarily got rid of. Hundreds of trifling cases are also admitted there which would not be admitted into any hospital in England. Many of the patients get no medicine; a few a single dose. Many comparatively trifling cases remain for weeks, nay months, in the hospital, while acute and most interesting cases are hurried out too often with the cure incomplete. (l. c. xlv. 572-3.)

More could be added upon this head, but enough has been said to show that matters are managed differently at the Vienna Homœopathic Hospital from what they are in this country, and that results produced from such a quarter are not entitled to the slightest consideration.

Finally, The following is a striking statement of Dr Mühry, already so often quoted:—"I hesitate not to say that, although men of worth are to be found among the German homœopaths, there

prevails, generally speaking, both within and without the profession, a low opinion of the standard of their intelligence. In Germany no man of undoubted eminence has ever become a convert to the system. Dr Kopp of Hanau published a volume of observations regarding his own homœopathic cases, thus stamping himself a homœopath. A few years afterwards he issued another volume, with a further series of cases, but of an allopathic nature. The author thus declared himself reconverted, and he has remained so ever since." (l. c.) Let us entertain a hope that an example so commendable may be generally followed.

Fewer words perhaps might have been sufficient to demonstrate that homœopathy in itself is wholly unworthy of the attention it has received. The question remains, Whether, as has been alleged, it indirectly affords a prospect of improvement to the cause of suffering humanity? We at once and decidedly answer—No.

Much has been said regarding the aid obtained through means of homœopathy towards a knowledge of the natural history of disease; in other words, of our having an opportunity of witnessing the unchecked and unmitigated progress of disease preying undisturbed upon the vital frame for good or evil, until a conclusion is reached, in recovery, in irremediable disorder, or in the grave. But even such a secondary result as this cannot for a moment be conceded to the system of homœopathy; for any advantage thus to be obtained, through homœopathy or otherwise, is forbidden by the first laws of moral obligation. How could any one with his eyes open, and with the slightest idea that there were in existence means whereby disease might be mitigated and arrested, fold his arms and calmly see the thread of life injured, or snapt asunder? It would be nothing short of culpable homicide. And if, from any combination of circumstances, a class of men bring themselves to believe a baseless fiction fraught with consequences so appalling, it must be the duty of every honest man to use all legitimate means to arrest so flagrant an evil. Occasions in the infinite variety of experience will occur in which the progress of disease, free and undisturbed, will display itself; and these the physician will improve. But most certainly such occasions can never wittingly be created by the regular practitioner; and as little can they without guilt be conceded to the homœopath.

In their attack upon the science of medicine, the homœopaths have attached a nickname to it, styling it *Allopathy*; thereby meaning to express the notion, that, as it is by means of their globules they seek to alleviate the ills of humanity, so the regular practitioner, with the same object, has recourse to the numerous drugs which are catalogued in his dispensatory. That such an idea should be entertained and such a sobriquet invented in such a quarter does not surprise us. We can conceive how men grossly ignorant, or half-educated druggists, might adopt some such notion. But that any educated and intelligent medical man should even tacitly acknowledge the justice of the taunt, is what we cannot understand.

Though verbal, this criticism is most german to the present con-

troversy. The medical practitioner, recognising the *vis medicatrix* and *hygiene* as the main agents of every curative process, resorts to the use of drugs, as a humble auxiliary, to assist, direct, and accelerate the operation of the great powers of nature. But the homœopath admits no intelligent recognition of such powers. All his globules are *specifics*, possessing a direct and positive potentiality of cure; and while medical science recognises among its remedial agencies a few specifics, tested by careful and enlarged observation, the homœopaths, for their infinitesimal doses, resting upon nothing but a baseless and puerile speculation, claim a character and a virtue which every intelligent medical man would utterly reject, as respects ninety-nine out of every hundred parts of his ordinary prescriptions.

What more monstrous than this? Some recent homœopaths, indeed, have attempted to confound matters by their references to the *vis medicatrix* and *hygiene*. But what prominence, we ask, was given by Hahnemann and his immediate followers to a philosophical view of either of these subjects? And granting them a merit in this matter a thousandfold greater than any that might be assumed, why forget that the science of medicine was founded more than twenty-four centuries ago, upon a broad and explicit declaration of the existence, the potency, and the vital importance of this *vis medicatrix*; and that the science of hygiene, like the other, from that day to this, has had a most prominent and important part assigned to it? Let any one turn to the history of our science, and he will find these agencies and principles of the art of healing receiving throughout that distinguished place which they merit. Let him turn, for example, to any biography of Hippocrates, and he will there find it prominently put forward that the father of medicine ascribes all the phenomena of life and health to the operation of a fundamental principle, which he denominates nature, *φύσις*, all beneficial during health; and during disease ever tending to recovery and restoration; at the same time affirming that physic was nothing more than the humble handmaid of this power, now directing and arresting her abnormal actings, and now influencing and guiding them as far as possible in returning to the regular course; thus recognising at every turn the power of the *vis medicatrix*. Again, as to hygiene, "the means which Hippocrates employed for the preservation of health and the cure of disease were chiefly diet and regimen. Diet (I continue the quotation) was one of the most efficient weapons wielded by Hippocrates in his combats with disease; and was that part of his system upon which he peculiarly prided himself." (Hamilton's (W.) *Hist. of Med. &c.* I. 59, 61.) Hygiene, then, was thus the chief agent in the hands of Hippocrates; and I hesitate not to affirm that it has continued to be so in the hand of every judicious practitioner to the present day: so much so, that were the alternative to be forced upon any hundred medical men, whether, in combating disease, they would forego mere drug-giving—the allopathy of the present controversy—or hygiene, they would with one voice reply, Give physic to the dogs. Take up any cata-

logue of our literature, and you there find treatises on hygiene and dietetics of all ages occupying many successive pages. With all its faults and imperfections, and they are many, I should hold that the profession had sunk as far as its worst enemies have affirmed,—and these I fear have really been its intended friends,—if it did not practically not less than theoretically maintain, as its great ruling maxim, that if you dissociate the *vis medicatrix* and *hygiene* from the means of cure, you leave what, *alone and by itself*, is scarcely worth the keeping.

It must ever be the greatest blunder to confound the natural powers of the human frame with the potency of medicaments; and to forget, we will not say the omnipotence, but the vast influence of hygiene in influencing the *vis medicatrix*, and thus controlling disease. These agencies preserved in their undoubted and legitimate place, the question between homœopathy and our science is soon settled; or rather, but for some gross blundering on this head, there need never have been any such question at all. For who can doubt that physic judiciously, and consequently sparingly used, has an efficiency within the limits we have specified, which has been acknowledged nearly universally by the whole human race?

I fear I have been induced to dilate too much on this topic. I have done so, however, not from its intrinsic importance, but mainly because that, with *hydropathy* and *mesmerism*, as already hinted, it presents an apt illustration of real circumstances, under the adverse influence of which the medical profession and medical science itself have of late been doomed to suffer.

Did time permit, it would be easy to take a somewhat similar review of what is now so fashionable and vaunted, under the name of *hydropathy*. You well know that much, very much, has been done in ancient and in modern times, in investigating, *ex professo*, the effects of water, cold and hot, externally and internally, upon the human frame. Much has been done; much, perhaps, remains to be done; so that some benefit may result from the so-called *hydropathy*. Lastly, we would not altogether, and wholesale, condemn what now goes under the name of *mesmerism*, notwithstanding all the glaring imposture and vulgar trickery, which has been combined with it. In one or two particulars, it should be treated upon those general principles which guide men of science. It is not to the interrogating of nature we object; though assuredly in many points the faculty has gone quite far enough in this direction. What we protest against is, the injudicious and discreditable uses which are made of discoveries—real or pretended—uses to which they are perverted by designing men, not unfrequently by deceived ones,—and this mainly by abusing the weaknesses and infirmities of a certain portion of our race.

It is in short *quackery*,—of which the subjects whereon we have been dwelling are fitting specimens,—that in past ages has ever been, and in future will probably continue to be the great obstruction to the enlightened and honourable cultivation and practice of our art. The foundation of this delusion lies deep and firmly root-

ed in the human heart. A drowning man grasps eagerly at a straw ; and the dying, and still more the hypochondriac, finding that health has left him, and fearing or fancying that he is advancing from bad to worse, almost instinctively is tempted to try every scheme, and to cling to every reed, however frail and brittle it may be. This disposition is unquestionably exhibited much more powerfully in some classes than in others, especially in the lowest and most ignorant, and not less perhaps in the highest,—amongst our aristocracy, whose intelligence does not always correspond with their rank. For a time, metallic tractors and Dr Solomon's balm of Gilead may be in the ascendancy ; to this may succeed the *Eau médicinal*, or Spilsburg's antiscorbutic drops, which again give place to Parr's or Morrison's pills, and they to homœopathy ; and so the deception and the trade proceed, ever varying, but still essentially the same. To such competitions, shall I call them, and for such trials the profession must be ever prepared : knowing, moreover, that they have their exacerbations more violent and frequent, as we are apt to think is experienced at the present day. By this, however, we are not to be discouraged.

Thus, Gentlemen, have I been led to dwell for a little upon one topic which is calculated to stimulate the members of our profession to diligence and perseverance in the prosecution of their arduous pursuits, and to prize such opportunities as occur for cheering each other forward in their toilsome career. Many others and more striking illustrations of the same truth, might have been selected. What I have ventured to advance refers chiefly to our conduct when put upon our defence against the most constant of all our enemies. But the profession has other and higher functions to perform ; where union and mutual understanding are still more essential. What a wide and important field, for example, opens up, as respects the duties belonging to the government of a country, according to the adage, *Salus populi suprema lex !* How important the enquiry into the sanatory condition of our large towns ; and what medical man does not feel proud at the distinguished place which has been borne in the enquiry by many enlightened members of the profession ! It is the physician, and the physician alone, who can detect the many hidden agencies which produce effects so sad and destructive, and can supply the appropriate remedies. Then, again, there is the question of medical police over town and country ; which, again, is connected with the statistics of health and disease, and the modes of obtaining and constructing mortality tables ; also the operation of the New Poor-law Bill, in so far as it regards the sick poor, whether permanent or occasional. Many questions also regarding contagion and infection still remain unsettled,—as it respects our hospitals, our crowded closes and cellars,—or as bearing on the quarantine laws ; all of which will be best advanced by the combined observation of professional men, assisting each other in the varied circumstances in which they are placed. How mysterious,—as well as interesting—what has been called the medical constitution of the atmosphere, as ex-

hibited both at home and abroad. Highly favoured as is our country, it has had its visits of dread pestilence, now tracking the footsteps of famine, anon pursuing its solemn march from some distant clime, perambulating the globe. How desirable in reference to all such matters, to have in active operation such a society as ours, open to every respectable member of the profession, whither all may resort, if not to contribute his mite of intelligence, at least to learn what has fallen under the observation of his fellows, and to add his counsel and countenance to any combined plan which may be devised to meet the anticipated emergency. Union is strength. And the consciousness of mutual co-operation and support, of mutual kindness and good will, proves an incitement to all in the discharge of their dangerous and arduous duties, not more beneficial to them, than encouraging to the whole population among whom their lot is cast.

How interesting to reflect that in pursuing the tract we thus indicate, we are only following the footsteps of a society which existed in this city now somewhat more than a century ago, which published six volumes of Medical Essays and Observations, the most valuable which had then appeared, and whose enlightened efforts, I doubt not, did much to raise Edinburgh to the pre-eminence which it has so long enjoyed as a medical school. Its plan was good. It supplied a register of the weather with special relation to the constitution of the season, premising a medical topography of the city and environs. It published original essays on medicine and the kindred branches of science, and a series of cases in physic and surgery, a contribution to the great store-house of experience, and supplied an account of every improvement in the science, from whatsoever quarter it proceeded. Its prospectus concludes with an apology that the work was written in the English tongue, "because many of their correspondents might have been less likely to transgress the rules of Latin grammar; and though we," it is added, "may not write pure English, which cannot be expected in our country, yet we would willingly hope we may be able to express ourselves intelligibly, which is the principal thing in a work of this kind, where elegance of style cannot be expected, and wit would be hurtful." (Vol. I., p. xix.) Changes not a few have occurred in our country and science since the years 1731—42, among which the improvements in the healing art are not the least remarkable. Who doubts that the science of astronomy has advanced since the days of Newton, and that of mechanical philosophy since the time of James Watt? Equally true is it that anatomy, physiology, chemistry, pharmacy, and all the fundamental branches of medical science have made corresponding progress. No one, we believe, doubts that this is true of the art of surgery; and you well know, gentlemen, that this implies an equal advance in physic, for the two branches proceed *pari passu*. For that progress we were not a little indebted to the members of the society just alluded to,—the Alstons and Plummers, the Porterfields and Monros of past days;—and you, gentlemen, their successors in this city and school, will, I doubt not, still more effectively abet others in their advancing career.

The means whereby the ends and objects of our association, so cursorily reviewed, are to be attained are, as you well know, few and simple. They are chiefly the reading of papers bearing on the elucidation and improvement of the science, with conversation on the topics thus introduced ; and medical intelligence or news coming to the knowledge or occurring in the practice of any of the members, which may also lead to remarks and friendly discussion. Finally, after the more important business of the evening is discussed, there is our *converzasione*. Simple as these means are they imply mutual co-operation. Those members who successfully work and improve their several departments, must supply from their stores, such communications as their talents and opportunities permit. Those again who are ever occupied in the sick-chamber, must *viva voce* communicate their observations, the products of their hard-earned experience. And as it concerns the concluding part of our entertainment, which of us has not felt, upon further acquaintance with one previously unknown, how many prejudices may have been overcome,—many good points have been discovered, and we have been most agreeably disappointed to find so much excellence and worth which were never anticipated ?

The successful working of this machinery, simple as it is, implies that we should all aim at regular attendance ; for it must be a cheerless matter to read papers to empty walls, and narrate cases and submit difficulties to empty benches ; whilst, on the other hand, a company of educated men cannot well assemble for mutual improvement without interesting topics being introduced for the general advantage.

In conclusion, gentlemen, let me again thank you, for the high and unmerited honour you have conferred upon me. You have, free and unsolicited, bestowed it upon one who was far from anticipating, and who would rather have declined it. Let me then entreat you so to consummate your kindness, that your zeal may supply my many deficiencies, and thus vindicate the prudence, if not the abstract justice of your choice.





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