

**A letter to the public on the necessity of anatomical pursuits : with references to popular prejudices, and to the principles on which legislative interference in these matters ought to proceed / by Corden Thompson.**

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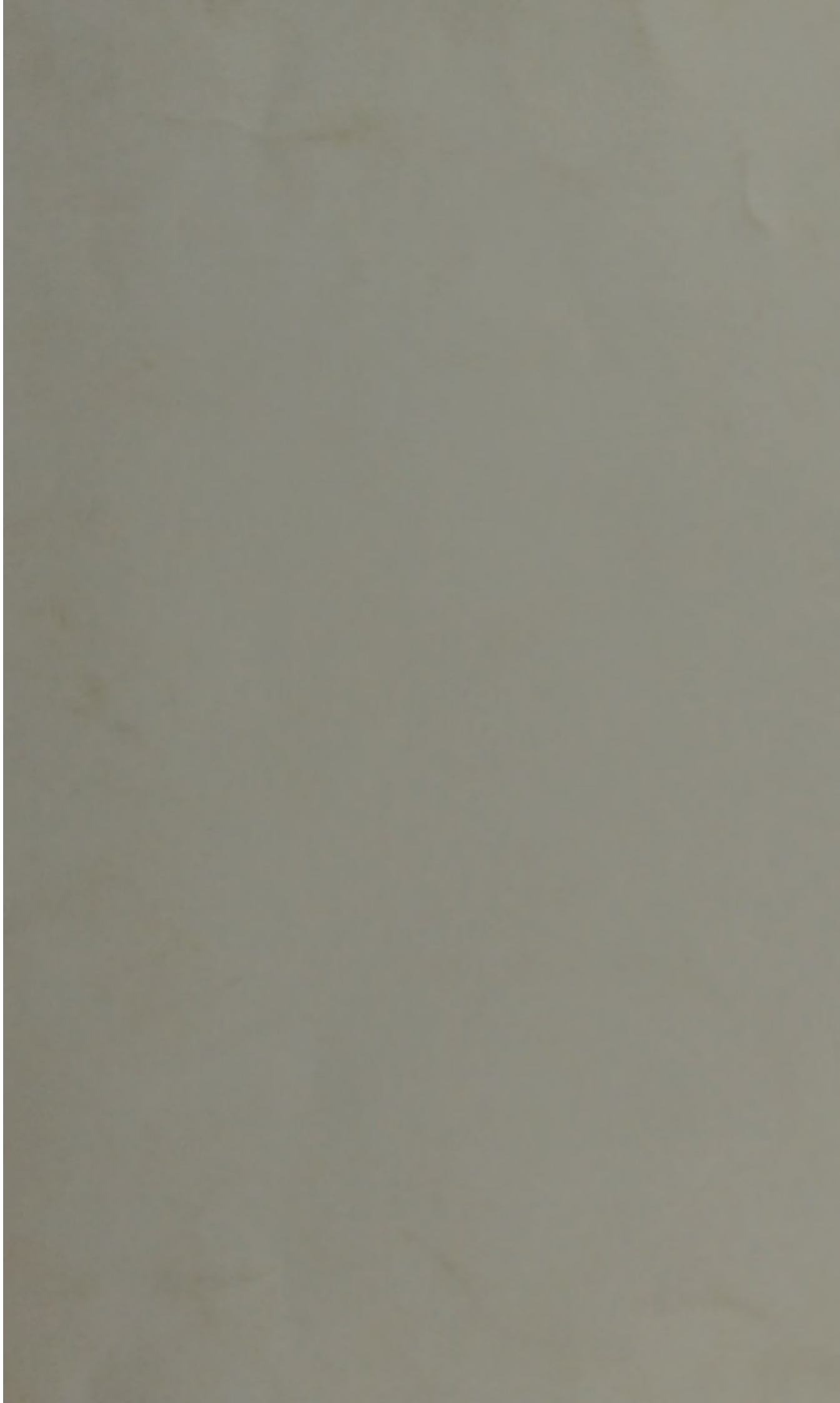
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A  
LETTER TO THE PUBLIC  
ON THE NECESSITY OF  
ANATOMICAL PURSUITS;  
WITH REFERENCE TO  
POPULAR PREJUDICES,  
AND TO THE  
PRINCIPLES ON WHICH LEGISLATIVE INTERFERENCE  
IN THESE  
MATTERS OUGHT TO PROCEED.

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BY CORDEN THOMPSON, M.D.

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“HONOS alit artes; omnesque incenduntur ad studia gloria, jacentque ea semper quæ  
apud quosque improbantur.”

CICERON. TUSCUL. DISPUT., lib. i. 2.

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1830.



LETTER TO THE PUBLIC

OF THE NATURE OF

ANATOMICAL RESEARCHES

AND THE

POPULAR PRINCIPLES

AND TO THE

PRINCIPLES ON WHICH LEGISLATIVE INTERFERENCE

IS BASED

IN THE

LETTER

BY CORBEN THOMPSON, M.D.

London: Printed by J. Blackwell, 1854.

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Bookseller and Publisher, in the Strand, near the Temple Church.

AND SOLD BY A. BLACKWELL, SHEFFIELD.

1854.

TO THE  
MARQUESS OF LANSDOWNE,  
THE ENLIGHTENED  
FRIEND OF SCIENCE AND HUMANITY,  
THIS LETTER

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

*THE AUTHOR.*

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE subject of the present letter has of late been so frequently canvassed, so repeatedly brought before the public in periodicals of every description,—quarterly, weekly, and daily,—that some apology may seem requisite for again intruding it on general notice. In truth, under the influence of a momentary excitement, writers seem, for the most part, to have given utterance simply to private and prejudiced feelings. So much, too, has been idly oscillated by careless and ignorant scribblers in

“Diurnals writ for regulation  
Of lying, to inform the nation;”

so much inconsiderate and misplaced antipathy has been evinced towards the members of a respectable and liberal profession, that considering the silence of abler advocates, we may hope for indulgence in attempting to vindicate its character and dignity. When, moreover, we contemplate the study of anatomy in its various relations to society at large; when we reflect on its vital importance to the healing art, to the ease and comfort of afflicted mortals; when we recollect the erroneous and commonly prevailing notions regarding dissection; and lastly, when we call to mind the sensation that has recently been produced in the breasts of all classes, together with the prejudices which many well-meaning, but ill-judging persons have thence imbibed, we



must at once feel both the importance of the subject, as well as the necessity for its full and impartial statement to the public. The humblest endeavour to exhibit in a clear and palpable light, that which is of paramount interest to every grade in civilized society, may justly presume on a candid attention. And further, since no professional writer appears to have insisted at sufficient length on the principles upon which legislative interference for the furtherance of anatomy ought to proceed, the author may be pardoned for urging considerations which to himself, at least, appear of the highest moment to the ultimate welfare of all ranks in the state.

There seems, indeed, to have existed great supineness, not to say culpable indifference on the part of the profession, taken generally, in regard to the bill lately brought before Parliament. One cannot surely but feel some surprise, that many whose names stand high on the roll of medical fame, should not also be foremost amongst those whose voice is heard in the sacred cause of science and humanity. Yes! be it never forgotten, that in pleading the cause of the anatomist, we are advocating the first and best interests of human beings.

Sheffield, December, 1829.



## A LETTER,

§c.

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“ O te ineptum si putas interesse supra terram an infra putrescam.”

SENEC. DE TRANQ.

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ANATOMY is a science of very ancient origin ; not that, on this account, it is the more worthy of attention and protection, but its existence in remote ages when superstition threw insuperable obstacles in the way of its regular prosecution, clearly indicates how necessary a branch of knowledge it was deemed by the early cultivators of medicine. Untaught, however, it would seem by the experience of past centuries, still swayed by superstitious prejudices, and insensible to the reiterated pleas of a profession which can boast amongst its members, men distinguished for all that is brilliant in intellect or excellent in philanthropy, the moderns deviate but little from the path of their pagan ancestors. They imagine, possibly, there is no very great necessity for practical acquaintance with the structure of the human frame, and they appear to look upon the dead with pretty much the same superstitious awe as did their fathers before them. They may not, it is true, be aware, that there are no departments of knowledge connected with the healing art, which have so largely and essentially contributed to its advancement, as those of healthy and morbid anatomy. Yet the whole tenour of medical history abundantly corroborates the truth of this assertion ; whilst at the same time that history painfully developes to us the unmerited obloquy and neglect with which these branches of



science have been treated. It is, indeed, curious to trace the perpetual fluctuation of opinion on some points, and its long stagnation on others. The question both as to the necessity, and supposed turpitude of dissection, is one which of old gave rise to discussions still warmer and more prolix than those of modern times. The disputants, however, were formerly confined to such as devoted themselves to the study of physic; and this controversy engaged their attention both prior and subsequently to the time of Celsus, who has concisely and elegantly narrated the arguments adduced by each party.\*

In the present day, addicted to mere empiricism, or grossly ignorant must that medical man be who should pretend to question the necessity of paying the utmost attention to anatomical pursuits. The progress of knowledge has so effectually enlightened practitioners on this head as to render their conclusion unanimous. Hence the disputes in which they were once embroiled respecting this subject have long ceased; and could the public be brought to view the matter with calm and dispassionate attention, we might possibly anticipate a similar termination to the contention which at present exists betwixt it and the profession. Every enlightened physician and surgeon is fully aware that all his medical knowledge ultimately rests on anatomy: this constitutes the foundation on which the superstructure of his acquirements are raised. And we imagine it can require no very prolix argumentation to evince even to the uninitiated the great importance of this fundamental branch of medicine; and at the same time to demonstrate that the interests of society at large are intimately associated with those of the practitioner; that in the present instance, in short, they are one and indivisible.

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\* His concluding words sufficiently indicate both the heat and the frequency with which the dispute was renewed: — “Cum hæc per multa volumina perque magnæ contentionis disputationes a medicis sæpe tractata sint atque tractentur, &c.”—Celsi præfat.



A slight perusal of past records will suffice to convince us that improvements in medicine and surgery have strictly kept pace with the progress of anatomy; and that in proportion as knowledge generally has become more diffused, the latter has ever formed an object of increasing attention and cultivation. Wherever circumstances have proved favourable to the prosecution of anatomical pursuits, there crude empiricism has yielded to a more rational and beneficial mode of treating disease: in the same ratio, consequently, the sufferings of mankind have been diminished.

The ancient Egyptians neither understood nor cultivated anatomical science, and accordingly we find both their medical doctrines and practices abounding in the most ridiculous and incredible absurdities. It has, indeed, been imagined that the art of embalming must in some measure have contributed to promote a knowledge of anatomy; but the mode in which that operation was performed, and the conduct of the bystanders towards the person who made the incision into the abdomen, at once indicate both the prejudices of the people, and the slender degree of information obtainable from this source. The anatomical knowledge of the Greeks likewise was exceedingly partial and superficial. Some slight zootomical information might, it is true, be afforded, by inspecting the viscera of animals offered up on the altars consecrated to the religion of that country; but this, in the hands of its priests, was converted to no useful purpose. The medical philosophers were the first to perceive the advantages which resulted from an acquaintance with anatomy; they confined their researches, however, to animals alone. To this, indeed, during a long series of years, they were compelled by the popular superstitions of the times. Erroneous and delusive notions were thus introduced respecting the structure of the human body; and a nomenclature, also, at the same time adopted, altogether incorrect and inappropriate. It is easy to imagine how injuriously this operated upon the medical theories of the day; and, indeed, on those also, of later times.



The vulgar prejudices which are transmitted like hereditary heir-looms, from one generation to another, become at length darling objects of solicitude which seem fated ever to obstruct the good of man. In all ages, influenced by similar feelings, men have run counter to their own interests. Unacquainted as the majority of mankind really are with the nature of science and philosophy, which they have been unwisely led to regard as consisting in abstruse and profitless speculations, calculated to amuse and occupy the vacant hours of the curious and erudite enquirer, it is very natural they should little dream that every step made in the advancement of knowledge brings with it a corresponding addition to their personal comfort and happiness. Yet, so it is; and from this ignorance, *feeling* generally prevails over *reason*; the former always points to an immediate gratification, the latter to a future benefit. Some excuse, some plausible ground or other is never wanting to justify the indulgence of feeling. It matters little how irrational the source may be whence certain prejudices originate, whenever time has thrown over them its revered and hallowing mantle, they continue to be cherished were it for no other reason than because others have cherished them before. In this manner prejudice falsifies the voice of nature, and not unfrequently causes even the learned to prostrate themselves at its shrine.

How amply do we find these truths illustrated in the case before us. In investigating the animal structure, with the highly useful aim of understanding its derangements, philosophers, as already stated, were obliged to restrict their studies to beings of an inferior order. Owing to the peculiar tenets of a religious belief, it was generally considered a heinous crime to treat, or, indeed, to look at the dead body of a fellow mortal, except with a kind of sacred awe. Condign and inevitable punishment awaited that person who, from levity, or even dire necessity, should be guilty of disregarding this popular superstition. The notions of the Greeks coincided almost entirely with those



of the Romans on this subject, and nothing could exceed their scrupulous attention to the rites of burial. In the estimation of these nations a dead body polluted every thing in its neighbourhood, even the air proceeding from it possessed the same contaminating properties — nay the mere sight of a corpse was enough to defile a person. Moreover, for the body to be *deprived of its flesh* was deemed of all ills the most grievous; and in the eye of a Roman it was violated by the act of handling. Even such as were merely present at the funeral of a deceased person must be three times sprinkled with pure or lustral water in order to free them from pollution.\* Since both Greeks and Romans believed that the souls of unburied bodies were not admitted into the abodes of the dead, or at least that they were doomed to wander 100 years previously on the borders of the river Styx;† we cannot wonder at the attention which they paid to funeral rites, nor at the reverential feelings with which they looked upon the corpse itself.

It is perfectly clear, that under the existence of these superstitious prejudices, medicine, based as it is on anatomy, could never march with other branches of knowledge. In fact, conformable to this state of things, we observe that

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\* Virgilii Æneid, lib. vi.,—v. 229.

† Thus the Sybil to Æneas:—

Hæc omnis, quam cernis inops inhumatæque turba est;  
Portitor ille, Charon: hi, quos vehit unda, sepulte.  
Nec ripas datur horrendas, nec rauca fluenta  
Transportare prius quam sedibus ossa quierunt,  
Centum errant annos, volitantque hæc litora circum.

Virgilii Æneidos, lib. vi.—v. 325.

Hence the urgency with which the unfortunate Palinurus, who had been drowned, requests Æneas to throw a little earth upon his body:—

Per genitorem oro, per spem surgentis Iuli,  
Eripe me his, invicte, malis; aut tu mihi terram  
Injice.

Ibid v. 364.

The most fearful death, in short, to the ancients was by shipwreck; and the most horrid imprecation to wish any one might die without burial.



with the Greeks and Romans, physic did not arrive at anything like the perfection attained in other sciences. And from a similar cause its progress has been retarded to the present hour; even the venerable Hippocrates never dissected a human body, and the only information which he possessed as to its structure, was derived from two extremely precarious sources; the casual examination of dry bones fortuitously thrown in his way, and the occasional inspection of parts laid open by wounds. We need feel no surprise, then, if the ancients could not distinguish an artery from a vein, or a tendon from a nerve. Neither will it appear astonishing that so many centuries should elapse prior to the discovery of what we now deem one of the most obvious and plain truths in physiology, namely—the circulation of the blood. Alcmaeon,\* of Croton, is the first zootomist mentioned by history. Democritus,† the abderite, was also a zealous comparative anatomist; and Diocles,‡ of Carystus, is supposed to be the first author of a work on anatomy. Harvey began to teach publicly his new doctrine in 1619, A.D. Is it not then humiliating to reflect that, for more than two thousand years, a superstitious regard for the dead should have so lamentably obstructed, and should still continue to obstruct the progress of one of the most useful and sublime branches of natural knowledge? In some countries, human folly even tended to deprive the student of the aid derivable from comparative anatomy; for the doctrine of metempsychosis rendered the carcass of an animal an object of special value and regard.§ Under these circumstances it cannot be matter of astonishment that medicine should for ages have presented a mere tissue of subtle and incomprehensible theories on the one hand, and on the other, a system of empirical and supersti-

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\* Flourished, 500—450 years B. C.

† ———— 495—404 B. C.

‡ ———— 364 B. C.

§ Thus the Indians build and endow hospitals for diseased animals!



tious practices. This necessarily resulted from an entire ignorance of the animal economy. It is, moreover, a singular fact, and one which pre-eminently and forcibly illustrates the truth of our remarks, that the Romans do not exhibit to us a single anatomist, and with one bright, but solitary exception, not even a philosophic physician. The profession was held in the lowest estimation; or, to speak more correctly, it was despised. And how could they regard its *polluted* members in any favourable light? Medicine, consequently, was left to be practised by slaves and sharpers, and hence Rome became the grand emporium of quacks and quackery. A few Greeks who resorted thither, were the only individuals that rose superiour to the empirics and rhizotomes with which the city was infested. These are circumstances which people would do well to reflect upon. But let us for a moment pursue the details of history.

With Aristotle\* a new epoch in comparative anatomy commences. This celebrated philosopher must undoubtedly be considered as the most distinguished zootomist among the ancients. By innumerable dissections of animals, in which he was countenanced and encouraged by his renowned pupil, he both rectified former errors, and made many new discoveries. At the same time, this illustrious individual regrets that so little is understood about the interior structure of the frame of man, and openly complains of the prejudices which compel the anatomist to substitute animals in the place of the human subject. Ardent as he was in the pursuit of science, Aristotle, it is clear, even aided and protected by an Alexander, could not obtain a human body for dissection. What, however, the zeal of this great man could not accomplish was shortly afterwards to be effected by others; and that, which it was impossible to practise even in secret, was now to be per-

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\* 350 B. C.



formed openly in the face of the whole world. At the death of Alexander, Egypt, it is well known, fell to the lot of Ptolemy, the munificent and liberal promoter of science. It was under his enlightened patronage that the Alexandrian school was founded; a circumstance constituting, beyond doubt, one of the most remarkable events in the history of human civilization. There, a knowledge of the human frame was not simply felt to be necessary, but sought after with zeal and ardour. It was no longer reckoned a crime to dissect the body of man; subjects were plentifully supplied, and so numerous did physicians discover the errors of their predecessors to be, and so great were the advantages reaped, that they even extended their views to the cultivation of morbid anatomy. The institution of *post mortem* examinations in order to detect the seat of disease, was especially promoted by the Ptolemies, who did not content themselves with simply exhorting physicians to adopt this practice, but likewise encouraged it by their presence, and still more by taking themselves an *active part* in the operation: "*regibus corpora mortuorum ad scrutandos morbos insecantibus!*"\* So anxious were they to promote the advancement of this new branch of medical science, and to remove the common prejudices against anatomical pursuits! How splendid was the example which these royal dissectors gave to the world! Yet no sooner did the study of human anatomy cease to enjoy regal patronage, than men became again blind to its utility and alive to their superstitious feelings. The rubicon, however, had been passed; the first step made openly, and the world shown that dissection, so far from being a crime, was an occupation not unworthy even of royal hands. It is impossible to estimate the benefit which must have accrued to science and humanity had this practice of the Ptolemies been duly persevered in. Unfortunately, inde-

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\* Plin. lib. 19, cap. 5. Sprengel Geschichte der Heilkunde.



pendent of the fourth Ptolemy's withdrawing his patronage from science, other circumstances arose which proved unfavourable to the cultivation of human anatomy.

Two of the most distinguished anatomists of these times were Herophilus and Erasistratus. These philosophers were the authors of numerous discoveries,\* and appear to have been contemporaries under the first Ptolemy. They were strongly impressed with the necessity of being intimately acquainted with the structure of the human frame, and in this they were correct. But, unhappily, they imagined that a just knowledge of the nature, appearance, situation, position, and connexion of parts, could be obtained only by inspecting a *living* subject. It should be here recollected that with the ancients the life of a slave, a gladiator, or a criminal, was a thing of no value whatever,—not worth even the most trifling consideration. Indeed the existence of these wretches was often forfeited to the purest caprice; yet no one thought it cruelty. With these notions, and under the firm persuasion that they were ultimately meditating the good of mankind at large, Herophilus and Erasistratus actually sought and obtained criminals for *vivisection*; “alleging,” says Celsus, “that it was not cruel, as some pretended, to seek by the sufferings of a few guilty individuals, to benefit the innocent of every age.”†

From a practice, at once so barbarous and revolting, it was quite natural for the strongest antipathy to arise both against dissection and dissectors. And this aversion, no doubt, would be still further augmented by the superstitious notions which people harboured respecting the dead. This early association of crime with dissection, we shall find in the sequel, has produced irreparable injury to anatomy.

After the decline of the Alexandrian school, researches into the structure of the human frame ceased; and from

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\* According both to Celsus and Galen they were the greatest anatomists that had lived.

† Celsi Prefat.



the practical direction which had been imparted to medical studies, practitioners again relapsed into their favourite and delusive speculations. Most medical sects began to neglect anatomy altogether, and some even ventured to treat it as entirely useless; maintaining this notion with much vehemence against their opponents.

In default of human subjects, Galen, as others had done before him, was obliged to have recourse to animals; and as apes bear the closest resemblance to man, he particularly chose these for the objects of his contemplations. In this manner, innumerable errors were *again* introduced into anatomical science, and an occasion was afforded for the fabrication of that theoretical network in which physicians remained entangled for nearly the space of 1400 years. Galen *never saw a human skeleton\* but twice*, and on both occasions by accident. In one instance the body had been washed from the grave; in the other, it was unburied, and the flesh had been torn off by birds. By adroitly combining, however, the gleanings of his predecessors with the knowledge which he had himself acquired from monkeys, he managed to display the whole to much greater advantage than had hitherto been accomplished. Of course it was not in the power of his successors to point out the blunders which he had committed. Neither, indeed, do they seem to have possessed the inclination. In a short time the authority of Galen became established; and during the dark ages which succeeded he reigned with undisputed sway. It was now deemed a crime to question his infallibility; whatever was found in his writings passed for undeniable truth, even though men saw it contradicted by their own eyes. In fact, they absolutely preferred the words of Galen to the testimony of their senses, and whenever the

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\* Had Mr. Warburton's bill passed into a law, and been strictly enforced, some centuries hence, English skeletons would have become curiosities. A sight of one would then be as rare to an Englishman, as were these bones in Egypt to Galen.



one was at variance with the other, ingenuity was immediately tasked to reconcile them, without ever daring to suspect that Galen *might possibly* be wrong. Greeks, Romans, Arabians, and the nations of Europe in general, bowed submissively and successively to the will of the great medical autocrat.

We have seen, then, how extensively and deeply rooted the prejudice against dissection was prior to the Christian Era; and very naturally so, since it was intimately blended with their religious feelings and hopes. We might suppose *a priori* that the establishment of Christianity would have removed these feelings, since it introduced purer notions respecting the doctrines of soul and body, and whilst it elevated and dignified the former, taught that it was of little consequence what became of the latter. In changing their religion, however, men do not always lay aside their previous prejudices, and those commonly entertained against anatomical pursuits were still encouraged, and kept alive by the fathers themselves of the Church, who openly declaimed against the old anatomists, in terms of no very measured or mild description, as the following passage from Tertullian, who died about the close of the second century, will evince: “Herophilus ille, medicus aut *lanius*, qui sexcentos exsecuit ut naturam scrutaretur.”\* We regret that the members of our profession should originally be indebted to a holy father for so opprobrious an epithet; it is one which the vulgar have not yet forgotten. That the church of Rome should interdict the practice of anatomy or surgical operations by ecclesiastics may, to many, seem nothing strange. But it did more; for Pope Boniface the 8th went so far as to issue a bull† against the preparation of human skeletons; thus precluding even the regularly educated practitioner from cultivating an acquaintance with

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\* De anima. Spr. B. 1, S. 534. Sexcentos! Must we consider this as an hyperbole, or a *pious lie*?

† A.D. 1300.



the human frame. Considering the unenlightened state of the period in which he lived, there is perhaps nothing very extraordinary in this circumstance, although its occurrence is deeply to be lamented, since nothing in those days so effectually operated on the mass of mankind as measures adopted by the hierarchy. It is manifest, however, that Boniface was influenced by vulgar prejudices, and not by any doctrines of the Christian religion. In fact, his successors in process of time became more liberal in this respect; letters gradually revived, and Italy became at once the birth place of polite literature and natural science.

Mondini dei Luzzi was the first who, after so long and dark a period, again openly prosecuted anatomical researches on the human body.\* Several of his countrymen soon followed Mondini's example; the consequences of which were such as might naturally be anticipated; the same repugnant feelings, the same superstitious notions as those prevalent among the Romans, were once more revived. Hence, Berengar, who had rendered himself remarkable for the indefatigable zeal with which he studied anatomy, very unmeritedly suffered the imputation of being a *vivisector*. The vulgar and the ignorant have always dealt largely in illiberal accusations against men of science; and we ought not, therefore, to feel surprise at this aspersion of Berengar's character; more particularly when we reflect on the influence of the church in those times. Still, one cannot but lament that men, whose minds ought to have been infinitely elevated above popular prepossessions and superstitions, should have been the very instruments of fostering and cherishing them. The universal darkness then prevalent may, we are aware, be urged as a strong plea in palliation of their conduct, and it is one, certainly, which cannot be adduced in behalf of the dignitaries of the church who have so lately shown themselves hostile to anatomical pursuits.

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\* 1315.



Notwithstanding these various adverse circumstances, it was impossible, as men became more enlightened, to prevent researches into the human body. The church itself, in fact, seems to have perceived and acknowledged its error; for, about the year 1376, the faculty of Montpellier\* received permission from the see of Rome, to *practise human dissections*; and a similar favour was subsequently granted to the university at Tübingen.† Men, however, were still very slow in reconciling themselves to the lawfulness of anatomy; for even so late as the sixteenth century, Charles V. had a *consultation of divines* at Salamanca to know whether in good conscience, a *human body might be dissected for the sake of comprehending its structure!* Such were the first steps made towards the restoration of anatomical science. Paracelsus had already loudly impeached the authority of Galen in matters of theoretic medicine, when Vesalius, in 1543, completed the total overthrow of Galenical despotism in respect to anatomy. Eustachius, Columbus, and Faloppia, are bright names in the history of this science; and although France and Germany can boast of some excellent anatomists in these days; yet, from time the of Vesalius to that of the immortal Harvey, Italy maintained the first rank. Harvey had studied under the celebrated Fabricius ab Aquapendente; and though he began to teach the doctrine of the circulation of the blood in 1619, yet he did not venture to publish it until after *twenty-five years of experiments and dissections*. This great discovery aroused the attention of his countrymen to anatomical pursuits, and from this period to that of the illustrious Frenchman, Winslow,‡

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\* The University here was established in 1150, A.D.; the medical faculty in 1220.

† Established A.D. 1475.

‡ A.D. 1732. Prior to his time, for example, flourished in Britain, Highmore, Glisson, Warthon, Willis, Lower, Collins, Ridley, Cowper, Douglas, Cheselden, Monro, *primus*. In Holland,—amongst others, Ruysch, De Graaf, Diemerbroek, Swammerdam, Leeuwenhoek, Bidloo, Verheyen.



Britain and Holland produced a greater number of eminent anatomists than the other countries of Europe; since then, however, France and Germany have decidedly taken the lead. We need scarcely direct the reader's attention to the important fact already hinted at, and which these brief details place in so conspicuous a light, namely, that the study of anatomy became gradually more extended in proportion as men *grew better informed generally*; and this, too, in spite of superstition and ecclesiastical authority. We exhort every man to pay a little serious attention to the pernicious influence exerted by official teachers over the progress of truth. By men, that is to say, who live by teaching certain doctrines; who are salaried to restrict their efforts within a certain boundary; whose duty and interest, therefore, it is to uphold a particular system. Hitherto, the grand sources of light, the seminaries of public instruction,—the Universities themselves,—as they were constituted in the middle ages, and indeed as they in some measure still remain, proved the most powerful obstacles to the advancement of knowledge. The mode of conducting education, the subjects submitted to the student's attention, the ideas prevalent respecting the nature of knowledge, together with popular and religious prepossessions, all formed so many barriers to the growth of physical science. Bacon was well aware of the unhealthy influence of a University atmosphere over those who continue to live in it, and has severely censured in this respect, the public seminaries of his own time. It is in allusion to this fact, that the late admirable Playfair remarks, "It would be gratifying to be able to observe, that the Universities of Europe had contributed to the renovation of science. The fact is otherwise;—they were often the fastnesses from which prejudice and error were latest of being expelled." There is not a science of which the free development has not been repressed by the Church of Rome; scarcely a discovery, during its sway, of which the author has not been persecuted even unto death. Some, indeed, are pleased to vaunt the learning of the Je-



suits; yet that learning always ran in one channel, and we challenge any man to prove that it was calculated to benefit mankind generally, or that it is possible to do so by writing learned commentaries on the *opinions* of others. This, in fact, constituted the essence of all public instruction. Instead of cultivating or teaching a knowledge of the objects around them, Professors taught from some prescribed and determinate *book*: delivering, consequently, merely the doctrines of their predecessors, from which, indeed, it would have been heresy to swerve. They commented upon the opinions of others, explaining and illustrating them, in a certain manner, and according to certain rules, but they never thought of confirming or rectifying them by recurring to nature. This grand text book for all teachers they knew not how, or rather did not choose, to read.\*

Agreeably to this state of things, we every where discover, during the middle ages, the same indifference to practical anatomy. Faloppia and Fabricius ab Aquapendente, favoured by the momentary caprice of Italian Princes, form, it is true, distinguished exceptions; but the general ignorance and neglect of this science may be tolerably well conceived, when we state, that in *the middle of the sixteenth century*, two Professors, at Heidelberg, disputed with the physician to a certain Margrave about the situation of the heart, and this

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\* Prior to the time of Mondini, (1315,) the restorer of anatomy, instruction in this science consisted in *naming* the different parts of the body, in *describing* them almost verbally from Galen, and to crown the whole, in dissecting a dog or a pig! The lecturer delivered his instructions from a compendium *prescribed* by the ecclesiastics of his seminary, who knew, probably, as much of anatomy, as an Esquimaux does of divinity! Human dissections do not appear to have occurred publicly in universities, till Mondini had set the example; after which, the custom of exhibiting once or twice *annually*, the dissection of a human subject, became prevalent in all universities. But this dissection was a perfect *farce*; it was performed by the barber, with a razor! The teacher then explained the exposed parts from Mondini's or some other author's compendium! Does not an *annual* exhibition still constitute all the anatomical instruction afforded by some of *our own universities*? Such is the tardiness with which we move forwards!



knotty point was ultimately settled by examining the body of a swine ! We cease to wonder, when we reflect on these circumstances, at the miserable state of medical and surgical science in those days. Nothing, in fact, was so much dreaded by the surgeon as the performance of operations : these, consequently, fell to the lot of illiterate and strolling quacks. Life was thus placed in the hands of a number of unskilful and reckless fellows, who wandered from one town and village to another, committing the result of their operations to the care of Providence. No improvement could be made in surgery, without a corresponding one had previously been effected in a knowledge of the human frame. Every step advanced by the surgical practitioner, requires the aid of anatomy ; but being unacquainted with this, whenever disease resisted his salves and plasters, the store of which, in former days, was infinite, the patient was resigned to his fate : the removal of diseased parts by the knife was never dreamt of.

It is worthy of remark, that surgery seems to have made very considerable progress in Egypt at one period ; since bass-reliefs, representing limbs amputated with instruments pretty similar to those now in use, are still to be seen, according to Larrey, on the walls and ceilings of the temples at Thebes. The perfection of this branch of medical science in Egypt, most undoubtedly sprung from the circumstances already pointed out.\* But after the fall of the Alexandrian school, and during the universal darkness which subsequently reigned, surgery again declined. And greatly as the practice of medicine suffered from an ignorant and bigoted priesthood in the middle ages, surgery was treated still worse at their hands. The council of Tours, in 1163, denounced it as a *profession unfit for priests and men of learning* ! In the same century, it was *banished from the*

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\* It is not a little interesting to observe, that within the last year or two, Mahmoud Ali has re-established the Medical School in Alexandria.



*universities* ; and ecclesiastics, who principally drugged the sick, were prohibited from performing operations, for a reason which, probably, the reader might not very easily divine, namely, “*quia ecclesia abhorret a sanguine!*”\* How lamentably characteristic of human folly and inconsistency ! For what are we to think of this “pretended horror of blood,” to use the words of Professor Richerand, “this dogma of a religion which shed it in torrents for useless quarrels !”

In defiance, however, of papal bulls and ecclesiastical denunciations, in spite of vulgar prepossessions, there were minds that dared to prefer the light of nature to the injunctions of authority and the frivolous speculations of schoolmen. Paracelsus as unhesitatingly renounced the infallibility of Aristotle in philosophy, as did the Reformers that of the Romish doctors, angelic, cherubic, and seraphic, in matters of faith. He had, moreover, entered into the hitherto unknown and vast domains of experimental enquiry. The spirit with which philosophy was cultivated began to assume a practical tendency, and in various places the learned united together in order to carry on their researches with greater freedom and mutual benefit. Thus arose the *Academia dei Linci* at Rome, established by Prince Cesi, in 1603. The formation of the Parisian Academy and the Royal Society in London, soon followed. Similar unions also took place in Germany, and the influence of these societies on the progress of knowledge was unexpectedly great. The learned in all countries vied with each other in exploring the regions of experimental philosophy, and to these practical researches they were not a little excited by the discovery of the microscope,—an instrument which unfolded new and unsuspected wonders. It was from this obvious direction of mind in general, that our countryman Harvey was led to the practical course

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\* Because the church has a horror of blood !



of study which he adopted, and from which he reaped immortal fame.

Investigations of the human structure became now daily more diffused throughout Europe; indeed, it is impossible to convey in a few words the labours and discoveries of the distinguished individuals who flourished from Winslow down to the commencement of the nineteenth century. It is in this period that the illustrious Haller and his school shine so conspicuously eminent. No greater name is enrolled in the records of medical history than that of Haller; no one ever contributed more largely to the improvement of his profession. And this he accomplished by *unwearied assiduity in dissecting men and animals!* The infinite number of experiments, too, which he performed, with a view of illustrating the laws of organic action, imprinted a still more decidedly practical bias on medical studies. The consequences were sufficiently natural; medicine and surgery experienced a rapid and almost incredible improvement. There is no description of disease respecting which some error has not been banished and some new elucidation acquired. Numerous cases formerly considered as hopeless and irremediable, now admit of speedy cure. Operations, moreover, once deemed inadmissible, or even impracticable without loss of existence, have become matters of daily execution. All this has been effected by the exertions of the dissector.

Thus has the state of physic, in all times, flourished or languished, according as anatomy has been cultivated or neglected; indeed the greatest improvers of the healing art have generally been teachers of this science.

The prejudices of men have not less powerfully opposed the advancement of morbid, than they have that of healthy, anatomy. The only useful information relative to the nature of diseased changes must be acquired by an inspection of the parts affected. Without this autopsy what possible progress can be made in the knowledge of diseased structure? If medicine be ever raised to the rank of a po-



sitive science, it must be on the basis of pathological anatomy,—a department of medicine which, alas ! is yet in its infancy. The French, however, have here disclosed to us a rich land of promise, and the ardour which they have exhibited in its cultivation is worthy of the talents of that enlightened nation. Totally negligent and disregarding of practical research, men continued to speak of disease until they looked upon it as something distinct from the organization ; a sort of entity or principle independent of the parts in which it exists. The tangible and visible changes obvious in organs, they regarded as an effect, and not as the disease itself ; and if, on casual inspection, no *apparent* organic alteration presented itself, then the malady was said to consist merely in deranged functions, without any morbid change in the instruments performing those functions ; as though it were easy to conceive the possibility of such a case. “ L'idée,” says an eminent pathologist, “ d'une maladie essentielle où indépendante d'une alteration materielle des tissues, devient de plus en plus vaine et chimerique, et bientôt n'en doutons pas, elle sera ridicule.” Physicians are beginning to suspect this truth : observation and experience daily confirm it. How has it been elicited ? By *post mortem* examinations ; by dissections, in a word. The secrets of nature, respecting the human frame when suffering from disease, can be acquired in this way alone. It is not books that we must interrogate ; it is nature herself. To act otherwise is, in fact, to be guilty of wilfully shutting our eyes to truth,—of committing a gross delinquency in duty. Healthy anatomy is the basis of physiology ; morbid anatomy, that of practical medicine. All the advantages, therefore, which flow to mankind from an improved state of the latter, result immediately from a practical study of the human structure, in its healthy and diseased state. This is not a mere theoretical deduction ; the experience of past ages amply confirms its truth. In proportion as science and civilization in general have advanced, the value of anatomical pursuits has been more duly appreciated. These



have been found to be not simple matters of curious and interesting research adapted for the amusement of learned ease, but of universal importance, and teeming with blessings to society at large. In fact, they come home to the bosom of every individual,—of the poor and the vile, as well as of the rich and the noble. All are liable to disease, and all naturally desire a speedy and safe cure when labouring under it. A man, therefore, seeks the advice of one who is well acquainted with the structure and situation of the various organs that compose his frame, and with their deviations from a healthy state. Such a person, of course, is most capable of forming a correct opinion as to the nature and seat of a complaint, and at the same time of suggesting the most speedy and certain mode of arresting its progress. Aware, too, of the perils which may arise, he can best ward them off. Again, if owing to some accident,—and who is exempt therefrom,—an operation must necessarily be performed on an individual, does the latter not wish for an operator thoroughly acquainted with the structure of the parts implicated? One, whose knowledge both enables him to avoid the attendant dangers, and effectually guards him against the embarrassments of any sudden emergency? One, in a word, who can operate speedily, safely, and with the least possible aggravation of suffering?—thus combining the three grand desiderata, “*citò, tutè, et jucundè.*” Such a one, however, must be an anatomist; and yet, how few people are there, who, considering the practitioner in this character, do not look upon him with prejudiced feelings!

Nevertheless, anatomical pursuits are neither criminal in themselves nor yet fraught with dishonour or disrespect to the dead: they outrage no feelings but such as are of a superstitious nature; neither do they in any way deteriorate or brutalize the character of those who pursue them. Insinuations of the latter kind are, indeed, frequently thrown out, but we repel them with meet and honest indignation. We appeal to observation for the truth of our statement,



when we assert, that society does not present another class of individuals more numerous and respectable than that of the medical profession; and one, at the same time, against the general moral conduct of which so little reproach can be made. There is none, too, possessed of more varied and valuable information. In these respects, physic has no occasion to shrink even from a comparison with divinity. With temptations infinitely stronger and more diversified, practitioners in medicine do in nowise cede to the clergy, taken generally, in the morality of their conduct. It ought, moreover, to be borne in mind that the very vocation of the latter, by abstracting them from temptation, diminishes the merit attached to the rectitude of their walk. At the same time we need not hesitate to affirm that more benevolent, more *truly* kind and charitable individuals, than those which have adorned the profession of physic can nowhere be found. No description of men, whatever their calling or station in life, render such valuable services to the poor and needy sick; none expose themselves to dangers equally numerous and great, without the remotest prospect of pecuniary remuneration. They work silently, yet not the less effectually. They make use of no ostentatious preconization of their good deeds, which are of unsolicited and spontaneous origin; and whilst others are idly preaching the duty of charity, they exemplify it in their daily converse with man. No one is better acquainted with the distresses of poverty and sickness than the practitioner; and no one, therefore, can more fully and deeply sympathize with the afflicted. What a bright galaxy of medical philanthropists does history exhibit to us! Of men who have conferred lasting and invaluable blessings on society; who have laboured through evil and through good report, for the benefit of their fellow creatures!\* And do they not still labour in

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\* By way of practical illustration we may mention one or two instances; the limits of a letter forbid us to expatiate on the subject. Haller was an excellent poet, and general scholar; of immense erudition, and exalted vir-



the same cause? Do they not pursue the same undeviating path of benevolence; gratuitously devoting their time and talents to the indigent sick? We will say nothing of what

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tue. Yet he was a successful and unwearied cultivator of *experimental physiology*, and the most *indefatigable of anatomists*. His zeal, in fact, was so great, even at a period when the value of anatomy was far less understood than at present, that early in his career, he was compelled to make a precipitate retreat from Paris, *an information being laid against him for dissecting human bodies*. Haller, however, was subsequently patronized by George the Second, and made Professor at Göttingen. Here he used his influence with the King to establish a *school for surgery*; an *academy of sciences*; a *hospital for lying-in women*; a *collection of anatomical preparations*; and a *school for design*, the pupils of which were instructed to draw *accurately* all objects of natural history. After a lapse of seventeen years he returned to his native town, Berne, in Switzerland. There he became the *chief promoter, and first President of the Economical Society*, and the *father and founder of an Orphan Hospital*. His literary undertakings, it may be added, were truly astonishing; what he accomplished for his profession, the members of that profession can alone appreciate. Such is the character of a *persecuted anatomist*.

Boerhaave, whose temperance, fortitude, humility, piety, talents, and knowledge, have, perhaps, never been exceeded, was an *anxious and assiduous cultivator of anatomy*! Dr. G. Cleghorn was an *indefatigable dissector* even in the warm climate of Minorca. After quitting that country he became professor of anatomy in Dublin, where his noble generosity is sufficiently known: "Notus in fratres animi paterni."

And who has not heard of Mark Akenside, whose "Pleasures of Imagination," independent of the genius which they display, exhibit so much chasteness of design, and purity of moral? Yet this work appeared about the time of his graduation, so that his medical studies had not operated prejudicially on his mind. Sir Simon Baskerville was a most eminent and virtuous man, and at the same time celebrated for his *skill in anatomy*. Bertin, too, was unwearied in studying this science, and yet his piety, virtue, and excellence, have rarely been equalled. And can the generous character of the eminent Dr. Brocklesby ever be forgotten so long as the names of Johnson and Burke are remembered? But to be brief; to whom are the names of Mead, Garth, Arbuthnot, and Friend unknown? Did the study of anatomy render these celebrated characters less witty, less learned, less *elegant* writers, or less virtuous and amiable than other men? Were not Drs. Hawes and Cogan the founders of the *Royal Humane Society*? And was not Lettsom, in conjunction with Dr. Hulme, the first establisher of *Dispensaries*? Need we advert to Fothergell, the founder of *Ackworth School*, or to Dr. Sims, the principal promoter of the *Philanthropic Society*? Time would indeed fail us to enumerate one half of the public and private deeds of virtue performed by men who have been *cultivators of anatomy*!



is privately wrought in this respect ; let our public hospitals, our dispensaries, and asylums, be consulted; let them speak. There are very few such institutions, in which those who have the care of the soul are not adequately remunerated for their trouble; whilst, *universally*, those who cure the body bestow their time and ability gratuitously. And yet, time is infinitely more precious to the latter, than to the former.

Again, no body of men in the community can boast of brighter ornaments to science than are to be found amongst the members of the profession of physic. Where shall we find more truly liberal and enlightened philosophers? Individuals, that have more effectually contributed to dissipate error and superstition, or more zealously promoted the general good of mankind? Where, in fine, shall we meet with men who have united higher cultivation of mind with a more truly virtuous nobility of character? It is well known that there are no students at Edinburgh more industrious or better informed than the medical. There is nothing in their lucubrations which exerts a restricting or confining influence on mind; nothing which *demoralizes* or *obtunds* the finer feelings of humanity. The frame of man presents a wide field for observation, in which all may freely expatiate, and on that frame the meditations of the medical philosopher are fixed; not on a system of doctrines calculated to cramp the sinews, or repress the energies of intellect. Medicine imposes no dogmas, requires subscription to no tenets, except such as are obviously written in the grand volume of nature herself.

We repeat, then, neither in mental nor moral attributes does the profession of physic yield to that of theology. Let no one imagine we are instituting an invidious comparison, with the intention of exalting the merits of one body in the community, by depreciating those of another. We have no aim but that of evincing the general worth, industry, and acquirements of medical practitioners. We wish to show that the study of anatomy does not exert any baneful



influence on their characters; that it does not deprive them of the distinguishing sensibilities of humanity, and thus render them callous to the sufferings of their fellow men. No! they pursue an honourable and dignified vocation, and are urged on in their career by the noble ambition of achieving the utmost possible good. It would be difficult, indeed, to point out in society, individuals of a more laborious, persevering, and indefatigable character. At all hours, at the table of repast, on the couch of repose, amid the inclemency of weather, the harass of an anxious mind, and the oppression of bodily fatigue, they must be ready to obey each capricious call! And yet, how ill-treated and ill-requited! Patients rigorously exact an assiduous attention; whilst with all *latitude* which may suit their *fancies*, they will *follow* the advice of a medical attendant, yet immediately suspect the extent of his skill, should the melioration *demanded* not ensue. But this is not all; they even seek at the hands of the law to obtain compensation for any supposed deficiency of skill, to the attainment of which, nevertheless, both themselves and the law are equally opposed!\*

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\* We have many *gothic* customs; and prosecutions of the nature now mentioned, are amongst them. According to the laws promulgated by Theodorich the West Goth, and which prevailed in the greater part of the West, till the 11th century, the first thing the practitioner had to perform, after considering the case of a patient, was to *give surety*, and then bargain for the sum to be received on curing him; but which sum he was not to demand in *fatal* cases. If a surgeon injured a nobleman in bleeding him, he must pay 100 solidi; and should death ensue, he was to be given up to the relations, who had full liberty to do with him as *they thought proper*. If the same happened in the case of a slave, the medical man was bound to find another in his place.

In Ethelstan's laws, (930 A. D.,) a *value* was set upon every man from the king to the cobbler; and even in the time of William the Conqueror and Henry I., (1100,) a *price* was put on every member of the body; so that each knew what he had to pay in the event of depriving his neighbour of a hand or a foot. A surgical practitioner, accordingly, was not always to be found, who would undertake to cure diseased members, lest, after having done his best, the ailment should prove irremediable, and he himself have to pay for the lost limb.



Can anything be more oppressive or unjust towards the surgeon? Acknowledging the indispensable nature both of his vocation, and the means by which his education must be perfected, is it not time that a nation, which, like ours, lays such arrogant claims to a pre-eminent degree of civilization, liberality, and discernment,—a nation that boasts of introducing the principle of *common sense* into philosophy, should, in the name of that *common sense*, banish these inconsistencies?

But, having dwelt thus long on the indispensable nature of anatomical pursuits, having pointed out their influence on medical and surgical practice, and the consequent benefits which they confer on society in general; having, moreover, vindicated the character of those who prosecute them, let us turn for a moment our attention to the operation of dissection itself, in so far as it regards the dead. That which so many excellent, wise, and enlightened men have practised and approved of, cannot surely partake of any moral or religious turpitude.

Ignorance, superstition, and prejudice form a tripartite coalition, against which, in all ages, reason seems to have waged unequal combat. Opinions, once extensively diffused, remain as established prejudices long after the causes, whence they originated, have ceased to exist. The aversion to dissection entertained by the ancients sprung very naturally, as we have already mentioned, from the superstitions in which they were educated. This aversion, moreover, was powerfully increased by the idea of *criminal punishment* becoming subsequently attached to dissection; and the too ample occasion which was at one time given for impeaching the humanity of those who practised it, tended to confirm and fortify this feeling to the very utmost.\*

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\* It appears from a passage in the writings of Faloppia, that even in his time (1561,) criminals were occasionally given up, whilst yet living, to the anatomist, who subsequently dispatched them *in his way*;—that is to say, by means of opium.



Notwithstanding, however, these various grounds of repugnance to anatomy have long since vanished, the prejudices built upon them still continue to luxuriate amongst us. During the middle ages, they were carefully fostered by the fathers of the church, and in modern times the cant of refined feeling has become the cradle in which they are rocked. But it is in a more especial manner by the laws of the country, that the notions of infamy, punishment, and cruelty have been permanently associated with the prosecution of anatomy. The vindictive legislator, taking advantage of the common horror entertained against dissection, in order to render the penalty of the law doubly ignominious, extended his brief authority beyond the deprivation of life alone, by finally ordering the body to be anatomized; thus proclaiming this operation to be the most condign of all punishments, and fitting only the vilest of beings! The principle on which this law is founded, seems admirably consentaneous with the heathenish opinion, that it is a grievous evil for a body to be stripped of its flesh. And shall we, as Christians, not blush at the thought of perpetuating such a superstition?

But there is another circumstance which ought not to be lost sight of here. This same law converts the members of an enlightened and liberal profession into mere executioners; introduces them before the public to accomplish the final prescriptions of justice,—to perform, in short, what the common hangman is unable to effect! How, we demand, under such circumstances, can the vulgar avoid blending their feelings towards the hangman and the anatomist in one common sentiment of aversion? This, indeed, is actually the case; and hence dissection can never be thought of without creating an idea of its being the penalty due to some villanous murderer, nor the operator himself, except as an inhuman Jack Ketch. Reason in vain lifts its voice against the association of crime with dissection;—an association which, from its very commencement, has never ceased to injure the cause of science and huma-



nity. And yet we have senators, who are unwilling to part with this precious relic of ignorance and barbarity !

Nothing can be more groundless in itself, or more unworthy of Christian legislators, than the principle which appears to pervade this portion of the statute law. No evil whatever is inflicted by dissection ; the soul or immaterial part of man does not suffer thereby, if that were the infernal aim of the legislator ; no corporeal pain is superadded to the criminal's sufferings, nor yet any real infamy or disgrace. The enactment in no way prevents the commission of crime, since no one who is insensible to the fear of punishment in this world, as well as in that which is to come, can possibly be deterred from it by reflecting on an operation which is of no sort of consequence to him. In what instance did it ever happen, that murder was prevented by the thought of dissection ? To us, we confess, the idea is unspeakably ridiculous, for he who is totally lost to all the better feelings of humanity, cannot, surely, be very delicate on this point. If the law operate in any way, it is by unjustly heaping an additional cause of grief on the guiltless friends, who cannot possess themselves of the body in order to bestow on it, what they deem, a decent and becoming interment. Shall we then continue to perpetuate a law so useless in its intended effects, and so obviously hurtful to the advancement of the healing art ? A law, which indirectly countenances Anti-Christian doctrines ? Which assigns an importance and sanctity to a dead body that have no real existence ? A law which on the very face of it exhibits the impress of that monster, superstition ? For what *punishment* can dissection be to a man who has been *hung by the neck till he is dead !*\* If none ; what does the

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\* We are here reminded of an anecdote which Cicero relates of Diogenes. This celebrated philosopher ordered his body to be cast forth without burial ; upon which his friends answered,—“ *Volucribusne et feris ? minime vero, inquit ; sed bacillum propter me quo abigam ponitote. Quí poteris ? illi ; non enim senties. Quid igitur mihi ferarum laniatus oberit nihil sentienti ?* Friends. *Thrown*



law more than teach the inviolable nature of a dead carcase?—that this said carcase is *violated* by handling—that the soul is hurt by the indignity offered to the body—that it must wander some (Heaven knows how many) years on the banks of the infernal river, or some such like nonsense? This is absolutely what the law encourages; it is its chief tendency and effect. In short, it has been adopted from the Romans, with whose religious notions it perfectly coincides. They, for reasons already stated, considered it the greatest misfortune to be deprived of funeral rites. Hence, by way of *punishment*, the bodies of executed criminals were not *buried*, but *exposed* before the prison, and afterwards dragged with a hook, and thrown into the Tiber. Do not *we* hang and expose criminals, and then refuse them burial? And have we not imitated these heathens in attaching the bodies of capital offenders to a cross and then leaving them to birds of prey? And do we not follow their example in refusing *decent burial* to the self-murderer? Like the Athenians of old, have we not permitted dead bodies to be seized by a creditor? And this, too, in spite of the reverential feelings which, in common with the Athenians, we share for the dead?

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*forth! what, to be devoured by birds and beasts? Diog. O dear, no! place a stick near me that I may drive them away. Friends. But how can you? you will not perceive them. Diog. Then what does it matter if they tear me in pieces since I shall not perceive it!*" Nothing surely can more clearly demonstrate that the *fear* of dissection does not operate in the way of deterring men from murder than the case of Burke and Hare, who actually supplied, by their murders, a *dissecting room*, to which they *knew they themselves must be carried*, if detected.

- \* Nec furtum feci neque fugi, si mihi dicit  
 Servus: habes pretium; loris non ureris, aio,  
 Non hominem occidi: *non pasees in cruce corvos.*

Horat. Epist. lib. I. Ep. 16, v. 46.

Suppose a slave should say, I never steal,  
 I never ran away—"nor do you feel  
 The flagrant lash"—no human blood I shed—  
 "Nor on the cross the ravening crows have fed."—

FRANCIS.



And have modern times never witnessed fanatical attempts to wreak vengeance on the dead by dragging them, as the ancients did, from the place of their interment?

Is there, then, no eloquent voice in the senate, to plead the cause of reason, of justice, and of humanity? Is it not sufficient for the ignorant and bigoted to indulge in prejudice and superstition? Must these be also patronized by the high and the noble? by men holding forth pretensions to learning and liberality? by men who scorn the aspersion of not rising superiour to vulgar prejudices? Extensively as the latter seem to prevail in the Upper House, it contains, we are aware, many enlightened individuals, from whose exertions much may be anticipated. The promised motion of the Marquis of Lansdowne, for the repeal of that part of the penal code which relates to the dissection of murderers, and the probability that this motion will be conjoined with the renewed proposal of measures for obtaining a supply of subjects, appeared sufficient inducements to the writer for dedicating the present letter to that distinguished senator, who, he trusts, will not desert the cause of anatomy, till he has obtained for it that legal sanction which its importance demands. Much, too, is to be expected from the co-operation of the Noble Premier himself; his language, in the late debate on this subject, warrants such an expectation.\* The example of these statesmen cannot be without influence on the public mind.

When the uninformed and illiterate witness their superiors, whom they *imagine* at least, to be instructed and enlightened, entertaining the same prejudices with themselves, they reasonably enough conclude, that such prejudices are well-founded. They little dream that the very persons, to whom they look up, are frequently as ignorant as they themselves. It is, therefore, particularly desirable, in the present case, that the public, generally, should be

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\* The excellent speech of Lord Calthorpe on the same occasion cannot be too generally read.



fully apprized of the nature of anatomical pursuits. This is the sole method of undeceiving the credulous as to the meaning commonly attached to the appalling terms *dissection* and *anatomizing*. There is here nothing to conceal from general knowledge; nothing to withhold from the eye of public scrutiny. The anatomist practises no arts of which he is ashamed; he carries on no system of abuse or deceit, from the examination of which he shrinks. He has no sinister motives in view, no secret and unworthy aim to compass; he does not seek in any way to enrich himself by injuring others. The end of his labours and researches, is the ease and comfort of his suffering fellow-creatures; and the means he employs for this purpose, are not less honourable than necessary.

It cannot, surely, be deemed a crime, to study any portion of the works of creation; much less, to institute a minute examination of the great masterpiece of them all. Is it not rather our bounden duty, and ought it not to be an interesting occupation? Is there any other mode of advancing knowledge, except by practically investigating the objects of creation? Is there any other philosophy but that which nature unfolds to us? Can we expect to be taught that, about which we make no inquiries, no investigations? What, then, is dissection? It is an inquiry into the nature of the animal frame; it is an investigation of the various parts, organs, or instruments, of which it is composed; it is a search into their mutual connexions, relations, and dependencies, in order to ascertain the various laws and properties of the admirable machine of life. And shall we freely examine, with these views, every creature, from the crawling worm, up to the majestic lord of the forest, and yet exclude "the noblest work of God?" Shall man, "the proper study of mankind," be neglected? Is his frame alone unworthy of study and admiration? Is there something polluting, something unnatural; is there some moral turpitude in this study? In what does the stain affixed to dissection consist? In nothing under the sun, but superstition, pre-



judice, and the effects of an absurd legal enactment, the origin of which we have already pointed out. It is, therefore, *purely fictitious*.

Let any one, for a moment, dispassionately reflect on the operations of the anatomist, and on his object in performing them. He examines, with careful and measured steps, every part of the human fabric. He marks its exterior form and proportions; he then displays to view the interior parts. In all this, pain or suffering is out of the question; and what man is so foolish or besotted as to imagine, that to exhibit the beautiful structure and mechanism of the body, and to make them the objects of profound study and attention, can be any profanation, either to the student or the subject of his meditations. And if, further, he carefully preserves some curious part of this admirable frame, by immersing it in spirits, does he commit an unpardonable act of impiety? Or if the more durable basis of the human form, the osseous fabric, be neatly prepared, and arranged as an imperishable monument of Creative power, does this constitute a heinous offence against man and God? In the eyes of weak and superstitious mortals it may, it once did, appear to be a crime; but to Him, who made all things well, it cannot be otherwise than pleasing.

To examine with minuteness, to study and sedulously preserve the master-piece of the Creator's wisdom, can surely be offering it no indignity; treating it with no disrespect; heaping upon it no insult. On the contrary, we should rather think that such a proceeding manifested the high degree of estimation in which the body is held; that it evinced our admiration of Omnipotent power and goodness. And yet this study of man's frame, this examination and conservation of its parts, is *every thing* which is meant by *anatomizing and dissecting*; in which there is, in truth, nothing to alarm the most delicate and sensible. For even according to common notions current amongst us, the honour conferred on a body by making it an especial object of contemplation, or by carefully protecting its parts from



the destructive influence of surrounding elements, must undoubtedly be acknowledged preferable to a formal deposit in the earth, there to corrupt and decay, the sport and riot of worms and reptiles. Yes! the time will probably arrive, when men will have the sense to confess, that the appropriation of the body to the elegant preparations of the anatomist, illustrative of the beauties of human structure, constitutes an infinitely more rational and honourable mode of disposal, than that of yielding it up to a mouldering and loathsome corruption. With multitudes, the very word *dissection* seems to convey some confused and frightful image to the mind, which, like a fabled sprite or ghost, is known to all in thought, but to no one in reality. We have no wish to wound the feelings of any man, nor yet violently to tear from any one an endeared notion, apparently founded on an amiable disposition. But when we hear people talk about *decent burial, quiet repose, respect for the departed, the hallowed sanctuary of the dead*, and so forth, we cannot but wonder at the extraordinary force of prejudice. Decent burial! Is it, then, more decent and becoming to suffer a fellow creature to decompose into a mass of noisome putrefaction in a shroud, than to prepare and afterwards preserve his body in the museum of the anatomist? Were people for a moment to throw aside the fictitious opprobrium attached to dissection, so unfortunately perpetuated by prejudice and a preposterous law; were they calmly to reflect that, at least the body reposes as quietly when submitted to the observant eye and careful hand of the anatomist, as it does when consigned to the destructive dissection of loathsome animals, we really conceive they would be desirous their dead bodies should be taken care of by a fellow mortal, rather than be thrown to voracious reptiles. Most men are anxious to perpetuate their memory — themselves — in a word, after death. Would not, then, the preservation of their osseous fabric form a more lasting memorial than a tombstone? And would not its conservation, amidst other works of nature, in some well ordered museum, be an unspeakably more



desirable destiny than a useless and ceremonious deposit in the clay cold earth? Yes, ! Heaven knows full well the too common nature of a "*decent interment*." Maugre every pretended reverence and respect for the dead; maugre the affected whine of feeling; maugre the little anxious demonstrations of concern on such occasions, how fain are people to get rid of the lifeless corpse ! How uneasy whilst it yet sojourns with them ! And when once covered with a little earth, how quickly is the trite old proverb fulfilled !—This we can daily witness, in all classes, and amongst all denominations of society. We may, indeed, conceal the fact, until we doubt its existence; yet it will not be the less true :—

" 'Tis too much proved,—that with devotion's visage,  
And pious action, we do sugar o'er  
The devil himself."

With a religious concern for their relatives, and a *pious horror of dissectors*, men will cast their departed friends to the *monsters of the deep*, or hide them from their sight in a *hole of the earth*, to be the prey of reptiles and vermin ; as though the teeth of animals were less defiling than the scalpel of the anatomist ! If people really imagine that a knife, or a living hand does so horribly pollute a dead and corrupting carcase; if they are really anxious this same carcase should have a peaceable and lasting repose till the day of resurrection, why not at once embalm it after the manner of the Egyptians ?\* This, to us, would be a far more convincing proof of regard than inky cloaks, and windy suspiration of forced sighs. It is one thing to treat the remains of a fel-

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\* The Egyptians, as will appear by the following extract from Champollion's 13th letter, had other reasons for this usage than such as are commonly supposed. By the side of a representation of the happy souls after death, it is stated that these are they who have found favour in the eyes of the Great God, and they inhabit the abodes of glory. "*The bodies*," it is added, "*which they have abandoned, shall repose for ever in their tombs, till they shall enjoy the presence of the supreme God.*"



low mortal with rational and becoming respect; and another to look upon them with a childish awe, and foolish superstition. Yet, in our country, so disgraceful is the extent to which these feelings are indulged, that even a *post mortem* examination can with difficulty be obtained. If in some case of disease it be deemed necessary to amputate a limb, dissect out a tumour, or even lay open the inmost parts themselves, provided the poor sufferer consents, the relations have no objections to urge, how uncertain soever the issue of the operation may be. No: but should the individual die without being operated on, and you ask permission to examine the diseased structure of the limb; the peculiarities of the tumour; or, in short, the state of any other part, then matters are altogether changed. Without the least apparent feeling about an operation on the *living*, people now become sensibility itself for the *dead*, and your demand is quickly negatived, because they do *not like the body to be touched!* But wherefore? "Oh we should not like it," is the reply. Is not this, now, intolerable? They will unhesitatingly permit a friend to be *partially dissected alive*, but when he is unsusceptible alike of pleasure or pain, they will not hurt one hair of his head! No! he *shall not be touched!* Inimitable pathos! "Such is the stuff that man is made of," remarks a keen observer of human nature, "in principle and in practice, in a right track and in a wrong one, the rarest of all human qualities is *consistency*."

But it may be retorted; so long as an individual lives, he is at liberty to use his own judgment; when, however, his breath has departed from him, it is an act of kindness to prevent the *further molestation* of his corpse! Kindness? to whom, or to what? To insensible fleshly remains, rapidly hastening to decomposition? To one who is now reduced to the level of *every other extinct organic being*, and whose elements must ere long, in part, be driven to and fro, the sport of the winds; in part, become integrally united with other living animals; or recombine themselves in some



new vegetative process? If men thought the soul incapable of entering the blissful mansions bereft of its former tenement, there would be some plausible ground for their pretended anxiety about the dead. But since the volume of revelation itself teaches us to take little thought or care about this same body, even whilst living; and since we are informed from the like source, that it is *of earth, and shall return to earth*, what must we think of the frivolous solicitude which men evince for its final disposal in this world.\*

But further; it should be remembered that operations are frequently requisite when the patient is not in *a state to use his own judgment*; yet no one *feels so deeply* for him as to *object* to their performance. What, however, still more strongly illustrates the nature of this boasted kindness and delicacy of feeling, is the manner in which the last requests

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\* When Lysimachus threatened Theodorus, of Cyrenæ, with the cross; the magnanimous philosopher answered, "threaten your purpled attendants with tortures, Theodorus cares not whether he rot BELOW or ABOVE ground." Anaxarchus is said to have made a similar answer to Alexander on a like occasion. When Crito, a little before Socrates swallowed the fatal draught, inquired of him how he wished his body to be disposed of after death, Socrates chided him for his anxiety about a lifeless corpse, and turning to the rest of his friends, continued, Crito may *dispose of my body as he chooses*, but let him not mourn over it as if *it were Socrates!* Cicero has ably exposed the folly of mankind in reverencing dead bodies. Sentiments, these, the fruit merely of an admirable philosophy: "Nam efficit hoc philosophia; medetur animis; inanes sollicitudines detrahit; cupiditatibus liberat; pellit timores." Philosophy, however, like religion, to be productive of benefit, must be sown in a suitable soil, for the same elegant writer continues, "Sed hæc ejus vis non *idem potest apud omnes*; tum valet multum, cum est *idoneam complexa naturam*." And Christians, with their elevated hopes and expectations, after reading such examples of magnanimity in heathens, do not blush? Again; when the same philosopher cites the following lines as highly jejune:

Neque sepulchrum quo recipiat habeat, portum corporis;  
Ubi remissa vita humana, corpus requiescat malis;

and then observes, "Vides quanto hic in errore versetur: portum esse corporis et requiescere in sepulchro putat mortuum. Magna culpa Pelopis: qui non erudierit filium, nec docuerit, *quatenus esset quidque curandum*,"—ought it not to incite *us* to teach *our children* at least more sane notions respecting the REST of the dead?



of the dying are attended to. When an individual solemnly and expressly desires, that after death, his body may be inspected, should we not expect that *kindness* would dictate an unreserved and ready compliance with the last wishes of a departed friend? Most indubitably we should. Wherever the request is just and feasible, the neglect of it must be deemed an infringement of one of the most sacred duties of friendship. In the present case, that neglect is notorious. Here, again, there is the same selfish cant,—the wonted refined plea,—“we should not like the body to be touched!” What wayward and childlike conduct is this!—conduct evincing no regard or respect to the deceased; nothing but an ignoble and pitiable subjection to selfish prejudices and feelings. This, people disguise under the colouring of respect. A respect, indeed, it is for themselves; a deference to their own *better* judgment; a mere gratification of that important creature, *self*; but not one particle of regard does it testify for the dead. Where just and real esteem pervades the bosom; where the desire to please and satisfy the wishes of a friend is genuine; there the indulgence of personal feelings and opinions will be sacrificed to considerations of duty and esteem. The extent of the sacrifice will be commensurate with the degree of the latter; and precisely in proportion as we shun such sacrifices, do we betray the predominance of selfish principles and motives of action. There is, too, such a thing as common integrity,—plain simple honesty,—and that, in the case before us, is outraged and violated. For if an individual leave his body altogether for anatomical purposes, the friends refuse to give it up.

The end, moreover, for which *post mortem* investigations are made, should be distinctly kept in view; namely, the benefit of posterity in general; the alleviation of common suffering. If, therefore, people are willing for their friends and relatives to be operated on when living, in order, as it is pretended, to rescue them from danger and suffering, how much more ought they cheerfully to permit similar operations on the dead, with the view of promoting, not simply



*individual*, but *universal* good? Such conduct, reason tells them, would be just and becoming; but, alas! it is not by reason, it is by the gratification of their own prejudiced feelings that men, for the most part, veer, and tack, and steer their course.

From what has preceded, it will be tolerably apparent, we imagine, that a dissected body undergoes no abuse, dishonour, or infamy; that to be anatomized, in a word, is no *unnatural* or *frightful* process; that it presents nothing more revolting to the feelings of an unprejudiced and sensible person, than the common mode of disposing of the dead. So far, in fact, as levity or profanity of treatment towards the latter is concerned, all must allow that it is a mark of much higher respect and esteem, to be at great pains and expense in preparing and preserving the mortal remains of a fellow-creature, than to throw them heedlessly into the murky grave, there to await certain corruption. Turning with disgust from the thoughts of this inevitable change, men have represented it under *more delicate and refined terms*. They have converted the *loathsome putrefaction* of organic matter, into an *undisturbed natural decay*, a *gradual mouldering into clay*; and the grave itself into a *peaceful haven of rest*, a *sacred receptacle*, in which the dead *sleep quietly!*\* Vain illusion! This quiet repose in the sanctuary

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\* As death and all things concerning it were ominous and ill-boding, the Greeks expressed it under *softening* terms. So that instead of '*to die*' they made use of the words *to be unborn*—*to depart* out of the world—*to sleep*—*to repose*—*to sleep* the *common sleep* of man—and the tomb itself was called a *sleeping place*. The language of the Romans was of a precisely similar nature. *Denatus, obdormivit, abiit, vixit, fuit, &c.* Thus a later Latin poet;—

Quidnam sibi saxa cavata  
Quid pulchra volunt monumenta?  
Res quod nisi creditur illis  
Non mortua sed data somno.

The very *ground itself* where the *dead reposed*, was considered *sacred* by the ancients, and when once *consecrated by a dead body*, it ever afterwards remained a sanctified spot. Indeed no earthly power could destroy this sup-



of the dead, this crumbling into dust, is simply a flattering fiction of pride. Nature has other uses for this same sacred carcase of man ; she did not intend it to rot *uselessly* in the earth ; nor has she endowed it with any prerogatives over the remains of other irrational beings, the disunion of whose elements is rendered subservient to beneficial purposes. Hence the interred do not merely afford nutriment to myriads of diminutive beings, but to animals of a larger description.\* These fearlessly intrude upon the hallowed rest

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posed sanctity of the soil. "*Sepulchrorum sanctitas in ipso se lo est quod nulla vi moveri neque deleri potest.*" Cicero Philippica, IX. 3. Hence, violation of the tomb was deemed a heinous offence, punishable even with banishment or death ; and the *τυμβωρύχοι*, or spoilers of tombs, as the most impious of men. Here again we witness the effects of superstition. It was supposed by many, that the ghosts or spirits of the dead haunted their shrouds, as being still in love with their former habitations, and that they had an acute sense of the accidents which befel their bodies. Hence the common wish that the earth might *press lightly* on their friends ;—" *Sit tibi terra levis :*" or *heavily* on enemies and the wicked,—

" *Gravisque tellus impio capiti incubet.*"—SENECA.

The costly ornaments, moreover, frequently interred with the corpse, both in earlier and later times, became, no doubt, a strong temptation with some to disturb *its repose*. Need we advert to the *servility* with which in all these matters we have copied the ancients ? And men call this *nature* ; and they are *horrified* at the *unnatural* anatomist, because he is *less superstitious* than they are ! Alas ! as it was in the beginning, in these matters, so it is now.

\* Namely, mice and rats ! These animals, so plentiful in all common sewers, abound also in places of interment. Of the *incredible ravages* on bodies committed by these depredators, the present Professor of Anatomy, in the Dublin University, possesses some admirable specimens, which he is in the habit of exhibiting to his auditors, by way of proving that the voracious tooth of the rat is far *less sparing* than the *scalpel of the dissector*.

In the celebrated museum of anatomical casts in wax, at Florence, there is a painfully faithful representation of the plague with which that city was visited. Although an observer might, at first, suppose the artist had drawn largely upon his imagination, yet he no sooner espies the animals in question, busy at their hungry work in the pit of corruption, than he at once feels convinced the author of the scene must have witnessed what he represents. The whole, indeed, is an inimitable production of its kind. We must receive, therefore, with due modification, the old saw, "as poor as a church mouse." Our forefathers seem not to have been aware what dainty repasts even a country church mouse occasionally obtained.



of the dead ; these are the daily and nightly marauders that violate those sacred precincts which man is at such fruitless pains to secure ; these are the reckless beings that outrage *our notions* of decency and humanity !

Neither, then, is nature in reality, nor yet revelation in its declarations, so very chary of the dead. We have seen, too, that the opprobrium attached to dissection is entirely of a fictitious character, originating in pagan superstitions, and perpetuated by an absurd law, which is both useless in its professed aim, and injurious to the interests of humanity. We cannot, therefore, too urgently insist on the abrogation of this law, which has no other effect than that of keeping alive hurtful and unfounded prejudices. These, it is true, time alone can totally banish ; nevertheless, it is our duty to shorten that time as much as possible. In some classes of society, the dawn of sounder views already peers through the mist of antiquated superstitions. Among the lower orders, particularly, the prepossessions against anatomical investigations are on the decline. When the object for which *post mortem* examinations are instituted, is *properly* stated and enforced, there is seldom much reluctance in yielding assent to their performance.\* Indeed, generally speaking, it is not from such kind of people that the greatest opposition to the progress of science is usually experienced ; but from the *pretenders* themselves to learning and philosophy ; from men early imbued with a peculiar set of notions and principles beyond the magic circle of which they never step ; from men, in a word, who search for truth in the vain lore and sterile *systems* of the schools, instead of looking for it in nature herself. Such men have ever thrown the greatest obstacles in the way of human im-

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\* It is stated, on the authority of a medical man who passed many years in the service, that were a military surgeon to *neglect examination of a body after death*, he would be considered by the soldiers as *failing in his duty*, and would *speedily lose their confidence and respect*, under the suspicion that the case had not been *properly treated*.—Med. Gazette, Vol. 4, p. 336.



provement,—they worship idols\* of their own creation, and with a savage ignorance would fain extirpate all who do not worship with them. It is in this sense that a little knowledge becomes a dangerous thing, because it serves to clothe error in plausible colours. The malignant accusers of Socrates were sophists; the unrelenting persecutors of the immortal Galileo, were *learned doctors* of the Church! And so great was the devotion of many to Aristotle, that, after the invention of the telescope, they *absolutely refused to look through it*, because the discoveries which it revealed subverted the doctrines of their master. We need feel no surprise, then, at the opposition lately manifested to the anatomical bill by certain peers of the realm; we need not, in the least, be amazed at the prejudices and deficient information which they have displayed. History forbids that we should. Yet, we may lament that individuals, of so elevated a rank, should partake of such groundless and erroneous opinions; that under the specious plea of *decency, feeling, respect, and humanity*, they should conceal a *superstitious regard for their own persons*; — a regard, of which, the magnanimity of even heathen philosophers might render them ashamed. Happily for the good of society at large, no great penetration is required to discover that neither hereditary wealth and dignity, nor yet the profession of divinity, exempts men from the frailties, follies, and inconsistencies common to our species.

In immediate connexion with the supposed disgrace of being dissected, is the odium reflected on the dissector. It appears to be a prevalent notion, that an anatomist is either destitute of natural feeling, or become callous and blunted to the ordinary sensibilities of humanity. He is looked upon as one who reaps especial delight in that which is offensive to the common delicacy of other men. This false and ridiculous idea arises, in the first instance, from the

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\* These idols have been pointed out by Bacon.



antipathy, which was once justly entertained against *vivisectionists*, being now transferred to anatomists generally; in the second, from the illegal modes of obtaining subjects at present resorted to, owing to a defective legislation; and, in the third, from the light in which existing laws exhibit the anatomist when legally pursuing his researches. In the present state of things, of course, he is regarded as a kind of smuggler or dealer in contraband human flesh; as one who carries on secret and disreputable practices, except when fulfilling the office of executioner. A supply of bodies sufficient for anatomical purposes can, under present circumstances, be had by disinterment alone. This the law forbids and punishes; consequently, people must conclude that dissection itself is illegal and reprehensible, and ought not therefore to be tolerated. What is prohibited by law cannot be even necessary, much less laudable. Exhumation, again, it is re-echoed on all sides, is a profanation, a violation of the repose of the dead! The opprobrium of this, also, must be borne by the medical practitioner, who is thus made to suffer not merely in the eyes of the world, but also under the clutches of the law. For if he be ignorant of his profession, and ignorant assuredly he must be, unless he can devote himself to anatomical investigations, the law fines and mulcts him for that ignorance which it will not permit him to correct.

The law heaps *obloquy* and *disgrace* on dissection, where it is at all *allowed*; and in every other case prohibits its performance. At the same time, like a hard and churlish master, it turns and castigates those who, fearing to offend, do not contravene its orders! Is it not, indeed, grievous, that he, whose labours are for the common good, must encounter both the odium of the public and the penalties of the law? A very trifling consideration of the subject, will suffice to shew how undeserved this odium really is. What is the part which the practitioner really acts in the business? He does not endeavour to cheat or defraud the community; he reaps no direct pecuniary advantages from the study of



anatomy; on the contrary, he incurs considerable expense. His investigations, too, exact the utmost diligence and perseverance; they are tedious and uninviting, and cannot be made without the sacrifice of personal comforts and feelings. The anatomist is endowed with precisely the same senses as other people are, and the effects of natural decay in organized matter are not a whit the less perceptible by him than by any other person. It is not hasty and occasional moments, but long hours of patient labour that he must devote to the study of this organic matter, however unpleasant and disagreeable it may be to his senses. Dissection has no exterior or meretricious allurements to captivate attention, its value and attractions are wholly intrinsic; and nothing, we may be assured, except imperious necessity would lead all those who embrace the profession of physic to commence their career by attending to practical anatomy. A few individuals, from natural curiosity, might be tempted to search into the structure of the human frame; they might derive satisfaction from unfolding the secrets of its curious and complicated mechanism; yet, were it not for the immediate relation which this knowledge bears to health and disease, and the entire ignorance they must remain in respecting the latter, if unacquainted with the former, the great mass of practitioners would inevitably neglect this part of medical education. Indeed, without compulsion, how could we expect to find men poring day after day with unwearied assiduity over objects naturally uninviting to sense? The zeal of the anatomist must surmount these inseparable discouragements, as well as the obstacles presented by popular prepossessions. In proportion as the object of his studies is high and momentous, the consideration of personal inconvenience vanishes. It is the vital importance, the paramount interest of his occupations that carry him forward. He has a station in life to hold, an office to fill, and he must prepare himself for the faithful and conscientious discharge of the duties which thence devolve upon him. For this he can properly qualify himself in the dis-



secting room alone; and how little delectation soever he may there find for sense, he must sacrifice its gratification for the advantages of information.

With the reflecting mind, moreover, there are motives of a pure and intellectual order, which contribute in no mean degree to animate and encourage the anatomist. Nature everywhere presents objects, the study of which is calculated to impart admiration and delight; but in a still higher degree do we experience these emotions when contemplating the most finished work of creation. Admitting, as we presume all do admit, the superior excellence of man when compared with the rest of created beings, can we at the same time refuse to acknowledge the paramount interest which must attend the investigation of his frame? Can there be any subject of natural knowledge of a nobler or more elevated description? or one in which man is more nearly and deeply concerned? Is there any object more worthy of contemplation, more fitted to raise the mind from nature up to nature's God, than the human organization? "*Quæ compositio membrorum, quæ conformatio lineamentorum, quæ figura, quæ species, humana potest esse pulchrior?*" To examine, then, the various beauties of this admirable structure, study the nature and correlation of its parts, trace the matchless order and design which reigns throughout their distribution, and mutual adaptation, to investigate the properties and actions of these parts,—this constitutes the occupation of the dissector. And surely, it is no uninteresting or degrading pursuit, no demoralizing or unbecoming employment. The greatest philosophers, indeed, have justly esteemed it a delight; and we cannot be surprised, that even kings should have thought it not unworthy of their attention.

What, then, must we candidly think of those legislators who have joined the popular outcry against dissection? Do they, with the vulgar, suppose that it consists simply in cutting and hewing to pieces? Do they never think of it except in connexion with a bloody knife? It



would really seem so. The reverend gentlemen in lawn appear not to have forgotten the epithet applied to Herophilus by Tertullian. To account for their conduct, we are compelled to suppose, that they regard practical anatomy as a sort of impious mangling of the dead; a species of butchery which, possibly, with a pious horror, they wish again to see *banished from our universities*.\* We would

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\* A very fine specimen of this sort of feeling has lately been displayed by a *Divine* of the Scotch Church. Mr. Pollok, in his operose production on the "Course of Time," speaking of the resurrection at the last day, thus introduces the anatomist:—

" And as the anatomist, with all his band  
Of rude disciples, o'er the subject hung,  
And impolitely (!) heaved his way, through bones  
And muscles of the sacred human form,  
Exposing barbarously to wanton gaze,  
The mysteries of nature, joint embraced  
His kindred joint, the wounded flesh grew up,  
And suddenly the injured man awoke,  
Among their hands, and stood array'd complete  
In immortality—forgiving scarce  
The insult offered to his clay in death."

The preceding is *one only* of the numerous instances of wretched taste and ponderose diction with which this admired (!!!) writer abounds. But the taste of the multitude consists in having *no taste* at all. There never was, we will venture to affirm, a more complete example of the *Bathos* in writing than the one now cited. "The anatomist with his *rude band impolitely hewing his way through bones and muscles*:" *aye!* bones and muscles of the *sacred* human form! *Hic labor, hoc opus est!* But to worms and other vermin it is quite a delightful and recreating amusement to find their way through these parts, *sacred* as they are in the poet's eye. And, then, to *expose barbarously to wanton gaze the mysteries of nature!* Horror of horrors! Execrable wretches! What! strip nature naked, and expose her to the wanton gaze of a rude band of dissectors? *Proh pudorem!* And again; only think, the poor *injured* man, after the resurrection, scarcely can *forgive* the *insult* offered to his *clay* in death! What an elevated and sublime idea! How truly Christian like!! Now, suppose he had found a thousand revelling worms at work; or a huge fish tearing off a limb; or a wild beast picking a bone;—would he have forgiven these creatures? And, after all, we dare say the numerous readers of this Scotch Milton (!!!) find a *comfortable* strengthening of their prejudices in perusing this pitiable nonsense; for pitiable, indeed it is, when we recollect the concise and animated language of Paul. Yet, be it remembered, this



conjure them, however, to reflect a little on their conduct in endeavouring to cramp and fetter the cultivation of a branch of natural knowledge, at once of the most elevated and important character. Posterity, most assuredly, will not forget so illiberal an attempt to perpetuate barbarity and ignorance. The prevalence of information is too general, and the dissipation of antiquated notions too common, to permit a stationary state of things. Neither bishops nor archbishops can now persuade men, that there is any thing unworthy of letters or devotion in studying the inimitable plan and design exhibited by Creative wisdom in the human structure. The conviction of the necessity of *being better acquainted* with this structure, and of the *imperative duty* of making it a *more constant object of inspection and meditation* than has hitherto been the case, is now so thoroughly implanted in the minds of professional men; the progress of improvement has been such, and the wants of society are become so loudly urgent, that two alternatives alone remain for us,—either anatomy must be liberally encouraged, or we must throw into prison or transport the man who renders himself fully competent to answer the expectations which the community require of him as a professor of the healing art. In a word, we must open the flood-gates to quackery and impudence, recur to a system of *medico-theosophy*, drug and treat patients by astrological indications, again introduce the supernatural machinery of angels and devils to regulate health and disease, and thus degrade our-

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linsy-woolsey stuff is from the pen of a divine in the nineteenth century; from one who talks about the “unfallen, holy, religious sea!” How forcibly does it remind us of *Merops* in Lessing’s fables. The reader will excuse our translating it for him:—

“I wish to ask you a question,” said a young eagle to a very sage and learned owl. “There is a bird, they say, called *Merops*, which, when it rises in the air flies with the tail foremost, and the head towards the earth. Is this true?” “Nonsense, child!” answered the owl; “this is a mere silly fiction of man. Perhaps he is himself such a kind of *Merops*, for he is always trying to fly up to heaven, but never by any chance loses sight of earth!”



selves and the character of God who made us. This will be the inevitable result of discountenancing anatomical pursuits. Our capital, like ancient Rome, must then one day become a mere emporium of empiricism.

It is not a little singular that the reverend members of the bench, who, from the elevated nature of the doctrines which they profess, ought to be the last either *to feel or express* anxiety about their earthly remains, should be precisely those who betray the greatest fear of being molested after death; that they should be amongst the foremost to cherish vulgar prejudices, and to preach up the heathenish notion of profanity attached to disturbing the *repose* of the dead; and that from such vain and idle considerations they should come forward as the most obstinate opposers of one of the most instructive, edifying, and indispensable branches of human knowledge. How different were the sentiments and feelings of the early Christians in this respect! So little, indeed, were they careful about the body, that they often erred in the other extreme by voluntarily seeking martyrdom. They thought very lightly of the indignity suffered from being devoured by wild beasts; nor, indeed, did they seem at all troubled at the idea of any indignant treatment which their bodies might undergo after death. We never find them giving pusillanimous directions as to the disposal of their remains; nor yet expressing a distrustful fear that their repose might possibly be disturbed. But so great is modern superstition, so high the value set upon that, which the early Christians with cheerfulness threw away, that people are actually blind to their own interests and welfare.

Man is nourished and fed by the liberal hand of nature; whatever he finds palatable in the animal or vegetable kingdom, he does not hesitate to convert it to his own use. He walks abroad and expatiates on the works of creation; to close his eyes on, or turn from examining the harmonious disposition and beauty of the universe, would argue something worse than senseless apathy. None but the cynic, or he whose moral appetite is morbidly depraved, would ever refuse to



drink at a pure fountain of enjoyment. Does not the theologian himself justify the appropriation of God's creatures to the good of man? But wherefore do we not act on these principles in reference to the case before us? Every man in peril seeks all possible means of escape; negligence, indeed, would here become criminal. Now existence is instinctively dear to us all; yet to render that existence tolerable it must be coupled with health. But health is liable to derangement from a thousand circumstances, many of which are beyond the reach of human control. Every organic being, vegetable or animal, is *naturally* subject to disease; to the casual interruption of its functions, and which, unless removed, must inevitably terminate in death. This event every sane person considers it a duty to obviate by all possible means which he can justly command. But these means can be obtained only by a profound study of the structure and laws of the animal frame. No man would send his watch to be repaired by a person entirely ignorant of its machinery; and few reflecting people, we imagine, would place much confidence in the medical skill of an individual utterly unacquainted with the nature and construction of the animal body. Since, then, the machine of life is subject to derangements, and since it is both our duty and interest to remove these derangements; and since, lastly, this cannot properly be accomplished except we render ourselves as thoroughly masters as possible of the construction and actions of this machine, there can be no question as to the course which ought to be pursued. It is indeed sufficiently obvious, we apprehend, that the assiduous study of our own frame does not simply conduce to personal comfort and ease, but that it is a *moral obligation* which we cannot evade with impunity. We enjoy, moreover, ample means of arriving at the information we seek without inflicting the slightest pain or injury on any one. The sole obstacle in our way is the existence of certain feelings and prejudices which, we have before shown, are of a vain, unbecoming, and pagan nature. The entire tenour



of revelation, most expressly discountenances their indulgence. The doctrines of Christianity are of an exalted and spiritual character, infinitely elevated above a low and grovelling solicitude about the fragile and momentary tenement of the soul. It is to the latter, the nobler and immaterial part of man, that they invariably point, not to the baser and perishable portion of his nature. But if we wilfully and obstinately discard the means of remedying disease, or obviating death, what do we, to use the language of divines, but tempt God? It is impossible rational beings should look for a favourable issue to the mere blind and empirical exhibition of remedies by one who is profoundly ignorant of what he is doing; unless, indeed, they imagine that the finger of Providence will especially interfere to aid and assist man whenever his indolence or prejudices will not allow him to employ his utmost exertions.

Here, however, as on other occasions, our duty, comfort, and happiness are inseparably united. The performance of that duty, we grant, may require some sacrifice; and where is the duty which does not? But, let us ask, by whom is this sacrifice made? Not surely by the public; for we cannot consistently with truth affirm that violence to the artificial, sickly, and mawkish sentiments of any class of men, is a sacrifice. No; this falls altogether on the medical man. It is he who must encounter all the disagreeableness, the inconvenience, and even dangers, often highly imminent, which are inseparable from anatomical researches. These, from the decomposition to which the remains of organic beings are subject, must inevitably prove highly unpleasant to the investigator, whose life also is continually endangered. The slightest scratch may be productive of the most fatal results; and whilst the practitioner is thus engaged in preparing himself to administer an antidote to the sufferings of his fellow men, he is perpetually exposed to the effects of the most deadly virus. And yet so little serious reflection is bestowed on these matters, that people commonly speak of anatomy as though



it were an occupation simply of pleasure and delight, wholly divested of inconvenience, trouble, or peril. They suppose the dissector is either differently constituted from other men, or that habit has so inured him to his pursuits as to cause them to yield some peculiar satisfaction distinct from that which flows from scientific investigations and discoveries. Do, now, any of these same individuals imagine, if necessity compelled them to walk daily for a few months in the train of a nightman's cart, that their olfactories would eventually become enamoured of the odour proceeding therefrom? If not, possibly they may learn to acknowledge that the same sense cannot be much gratified in the anatomist. Should, however, any be still sceptical as to the truth of these matters, we most sincerely advise them to make the experiment.

Considering the naturally uninviting and forbidding consequences of putrefaction, the risk of life which the operator runs, the odium and prepossessions which he must brave, and still further, the difficulties and penalties with which dissection is fraught, the most prejudiced will surely believe that nothing but imperative necessity could perpetuate its practice.\* And further, we may deduce this very important conclusion, that so far from *placing any restrictions upon the cultivation of anatomy, it ought to be encouraged in the most free and unlimited manner possible*; since, in its own nature, it presents *inherent impediments* to any abuses which may be anticipated from its unrestricted permission. Dissection can never prove the source of immorality or crime, except from the *imposition of unnatural and impolitic restraints*. In no country on the earth, except our

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\* Some who promised to become the brightest ornaments of our profession, men, at once admired for their talents and urbanity, have fallen early victims to their zeal for the acquirement of anatomical knowledge. The most assiduous students in the schools of the metropolis, though they escape any injurious results from wounds, frequently suffer very severely from the continued inhalation of the noxious atmosphere of the dissecting room, and some are thus commonly cut off yearly.



own, ever did or could such crimes be perpetrated as those which have lately disgraced the northern metropolis. Is the cause demanded? seek it, we reply, in existing laws; seek it in the difficulties which have been thrown in the way of dissection; seek it in the careful and studious perpetuation of the ignorance and folly of our ancestors. When the necessity of having recourse to exhumation shall be done away with, then will every temptation to immorality connected with dissection cease. But no *legal pains or penalties, however great, will ever abolish disinterment, so long as there exists a scarcity of subjects.* That dissection cannot be carried on without having recourse to the resurrectionist is, no doubt, another circumstance which greatly contributes to augment the force of prejudice against anatomy. Every petty print is constantly teeming with invective and declamation against these midnight depredators in church-yards; conjuring up horrible tales for the edification of the ignorant and the credulous, at the expense of the common good. By these means fuel is continually added to the flame, and the prepossessions of people become so exceedingly strong, that the bare mention of the words *anatomize* and *dissect* excites so many frightful and terrifying apprehensions, as to scare them nearly out of their wits,—

“ Who would believe what strange bugbears  
Mankind creates itself of fears!”

So thoroughly idle and vain are the fears of men in this case, that nothing but ignorance and indulgence in the grossest prejudice could maintain them in existence. The outcry commonly made against dissection, creates a strong feeling of repugnance, by referring primarily to disinterment. “No man is safe in his grave,” is the watch-word which passes from one to another; and the alarm once given, few are at the pains to inquire into the nature of the danger. But we shall do it for them. Safe, then, from what, we would ask? From corruption? from afford-



ing a nidus for the revelling riot of myriads of reptiles? from the gnawings of vermin? No! from these dangers no man is secure; but such are not the perils which appear most to be dreaded. Men fear they shall fall into the hands of one who will carefully prepare and display the wonderful mechanism of their frames; they are alarmed lest their bones should be cleansed from impurities, arranged in comely order, and protected alike from weather, worms, and decay! We repeat, this is *every thing* which the most infuriate detester of a dissecting-room can reproach the anatomist with; *every thing* which any person has to *dread* from being *anatomized*! And yet, under what appalling and disgusting ideas do certain people of *feeling* represent this process to their minds! They cannot conceive an anatomist endowed with the same sensibilities as other men. Nevertheless, these delicately minded individuals, these unsunned creatures of sensibility, these lovers of respectful decency, and preconizers of humanity, can stomach many a dirty practice in common life, defile themselves with deeds of immorality, indulge in filthy, sensual habits, pander to the body, and neglect the mind, and then, in true Pharisean style, bid the poor anatomist stand aloof, because, forsooth, he is an unclean thing!!

Some would do well to remember, that it is possible to carry even sensibility itself too far. Instead of expressing disgust at that which is indispensable and invaluable to society, they might better employ their sensibilities about the luxuries and refinements of life: at least, it would be consistent to extend them likewise to these matters. And then, possibly, we might witness the exquisite delicacy of certain people horrified at the bee, for tempting them with virgin honey, seeing that it is simply the *undigested matter* which that animal *vomits up*! And alas! what would our modern beaux and belles exclaim, did they know the sources of some of their choice perfumes! And were men rigidly to analyze their daily food, or to trace the processes by which their nutriment is perfected from its earliest stages, the fastidious,



we doubt not, would be thrown into utter consternation and dismay at the thought of the vile stuff which nature thrusts down their throats.

Some, we fear, must inevitably be placed in this predicament in respect to anatomy; they are too much influenced by prejudiced feelings to be ever satisfied with any enactments on this subject, and too fastidious ever to yield themselves to simple and homely reason. Such must necessarily be compelled to swallow what they will not take voluntarily. For our part, we are thoroughly convinced, that no sanitary law is more urgently called for, none would prove more practically useful, more prolific in beneficial consequences to society, than one which should render imperative the *post mortem* examination of *all bodies* whether belonging to the rich or the poor. If the life of its subjects be precious to a kingdom, then such a law would be an act of great state policy; and if each individual is naturally desirous of possessing health, without which, existence becomes a worthless boon, he ought surely to be anxious for so salutary an enactment. Nor would any thing, probably, be more effectually conducive to the general dissipation of the erroneous impressions prevalent respecting anatomical pursuits, than the countenance and approval of the latter by the laws of the land. At present, the law publicly brands them with infamy and disgrace; so that, what the practitioner ought to obtain as a matter of pure right and justice, considering the requirements exacted of him by the public, he can now expect as a mere favour, if peradventure the very solicitation to investigate a diseased structure be not construed into a *love of cutting and slashing*, as people *sagaciously* term the examination. However distinguished for integrity and talent the medical man may be, however single his eye for the benefit of mankind, however pure and disinterested his views, however assiduous and anxious his previous attentions to a patient may have been, a request of the above nature cancels, for the time, all his virtues, nullifies the merit of his labours, and exposes him to suspicion, coolness, and insult. Few



men appear to have felt the harshness of this conduct more keenly than the late Dr. Parry,\* of Bath. This eminent pathologist laboured incessantly to promote the improvement of medical science, and the well-being of society at large. His posthumous writings abound with dissections, and cases of the most interesting and valuable description; yet, in collecting them, he had waded breast-deep through prejudice, risked the loss of practice, and perpetually encountered obstacles and repulses, when he ought to have met with assistance and encouragement. It will appear nothing strange, if the healing art advance with a lingering and tardy step, when we reflect on the opposition which is thus made to its progress by the public. In addition to the natural discouragements attending the practical investigation of disease,—such as the minute attention and length of time required, the disagreeableness of the operation, and the circumstance of its having to be instituted in the midst of other cares, anxieties, and fatigues,—the practitioner is still further disheartened by the unmerited treatment of which we have just spoken. Hence, the majority of our profession never trouble themselves about these matters, being content to let the stream of prejudice run its course, rather than incur the displeasure of their patients, in attempting to render them a service.

From the reluctance manifested in submitting bodies to inspection after death, one might really conceive people wished to carry their infirmities and diseases along with them into the next world. It is unspeakably ridiculous to witness the fear which is entertained that some part of the body may be deprived of *the privilege of rotting* in a cemetery. To remove a diseased organ, cleanse it with a little pure water, display the nature of the morbid actions which have taken place, and then immerse it in spirits in order to preserve it as a specimen of a peculiar affection for the in-

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\* See the preface to his posthumous works, where he very severely censures the prejudices and folly of men relative to this subject.



struction of the rising generation, constitutes an act of so *shocking* and *inhuman* a character that no one can look upon it without horror! The prejudices of the pious and the learned are here of a similar nature with those of the profane and the ignorant.\* If philosophy be incapable of diffusing purer and more rational views amongst mankind, at any rate we ought to expect something from religion. Independently of the general exalted tenour of Christian doctrines respecting soul and body, there are numerous passages in sacred writ immediately relative both to the nature and value of the latter, so that, as consistent professors of Christianity, we ought undoubtedly to lay aside prepossessions inherited from the pagan notions of our ancestors.† Even the very ritual of our Church, daily

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\* The latter, it is true, express their feelings on the occasion with less restraint than the former; they do not hesitate to call their medical attendant an unfeeling wretch,—inhuman monster,—bloody butcher—or d—d doctor. We need not so greatly wonder at all this, considering, as already mentioned, that the pious fathers of the church knew not better than to promulgate such admirable trash worthy alone of bigots and blockheads.

† Of the well known passage in Job, remarkable in another point of view,—“And though after my skin worms destroy this body,” &c.—I am well aware that different versions exist, which impart to it a totally different meaning. Let any one, for example, compare Luther’s translation with our own. In either case, however, we see that Job’s faith was not affected by the changes which he full well knew the body would undergo after death. Christ himself expressly enjoins his disciples not to be “afraid of those that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do;” an injunction clearly evincing that it is of little moment what becomes of the material part of man. St. Paul, however, is still more explicit on this subject; he tells us unequivocally, that “man is of the earth, earthy”—that “*flesh and blood* cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption;”—thus corroborating what he had previously stated regarding the resurrection, where he says, “It is sown in corruption, and raised in incorruption; it is sown a *natural* body, and raised a *spiritual* body: there is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body,” (1 Corinth. chap. xv.) In his epistle to the Philippians, he calls it a *vile* body (chap. iii. ver. 21.) The low estimation in which it is held by the inspired writers, might easily be illustrated by a multitude of citations; but these are too familiar to need repetition. Suffice it to observe, that we commonly find it represented as a clog, a weight, a let, and hinderance to men in their aspirations after a better world.



pronounces the solemn truth, as each corpse is deposited in the grave;—"earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust." What a coil do men raise about a few ashes, a handful of dust! Yes! the very men who will not allow the industrious anatomist, intent on aiding suffering humanity, to touch a hair of a dead carcase, will unite and march to the field of battle, there to deal forth death-doing blows, to hew their fellows into pieces, and scatter the mangled corpses to the beasts of the forest and the fowls of the air! And should the fate of war grant them a short interim of repose after their bloody labours, they calmly proceed to the last *sad* offices of *plunder* and *burial*! Yes! even here they must be *decent*. Heaping together the gory mass of windowed carcases and shivered limbs, they throw over them a *little earth*, as if to hide such foul unpitying deeds from heaven; and then retire with some feeling sentiment, no doubt, in their breasts;—"requiescant in pace." Rest, warriors, rest! And all this men have enacted, and will again enact, from mere motives of revenge, of petty jealousy, and insatiate cupidity, or with the view of establishing uniformity of religious faith! But enough of these inconsistent cruelties of a *refined sensibility*; we are not sanguine enough to hope for their speedy correction, being too well aware, that though reason may be convinced, the *virtue*, the *honesty*, to *act accordingly*, is rarely found.

Every reasonable person, we apprehend, must be sufficiently convinced of the absolute necessity of anatomical pursuits. Unless, indeed, life is to be at the disposal of ignorance and presumption, unless we are reckless of the pain superinduced on humanity already borne down with suffering, we must allow dissection to be altogether indispensable. It is more; it is pregnant with blessings of no inconsiderable magnitude to every member of the community. To promote and facilitate the study of anatomy ought, consequently, to form a primary object of civil policy. But the question arises, how shall this object be best attained? Here the utmost diversity of opinion prevails,



and though the legislative assembly of the country lately took the matter into consideration, they left it as they found it. Nothing whatever has been effected. The Commons, it is true, possessed sufficient *common sense* to perceive that something was requisite for the interests of society, but an equal degree of penetration does not seem to have been the lot of many of the Lords, either spiritual or temporal. To be sure, Mr. Warburton's bill was complicated, injudicious, and, in many respects, *impracticable*; not to say directly prejudicial to the attainment of the ends at which it ostensibly aimed. It was not, however, on this account that some of their Lordships opposed the bill, such an opposition would have reflected credit upon them; but they objected, it seems, to the *principle* of the bill,—the very point in question, which all sensible and well-informed men admit.

At this distance from the legislative arena, it is impossible to conjecture into what hands the counselling and drawing up of Mr. Warburton's measures fell; but we can with safety affirm that they are not calculated to accomplish the end desired. This, we think, has been misapprehended.

In framing an enactment of the nature in question, surely the advice and suggestions of the most enlightened and intelligent members of the profession ought to have been consulted. Then, instead of being constructed on narrow, erroneous, and partial views, it would have proceeded on those broad and liberal principles which the progress of knowledge, and the interests of society, so urgently demand.

There are clauses, indeed, in Mr. Warburton's bill, from which one might conclude that the framer never thought it worth his while to ask the opinion of a medical man on the subject; clauses which the most superannuated amongst us must obviously have rejected. In fact, the ignorance displayed in this production, respecting the *manner in which anatomical pursuits are carried on*, is so gross, that we really feel some surprise at witnessing it in any person of decent edu-



cation. The bill, it is true, has universally encountered the disapprobation of the intelligent part of the profession, for the very plain and cogent reason, that it is not calculated to facilitate the cultivation of anatomy; and, therefore, the progress of medical science, and the welfare of society. On the other hand, it tends obviously to obstruct practical anatomy; and is clearly inadequate to prevent the traffic in dead bodies. The positive enactments are not simply vicious, but on some important points there are manifest deficiencies.

The three grand ends to be obtained are—1stly, The abolition of all secret traffic in dead bodies; 2dly, The prevention of exhumation; 3dly, The protection and *encouragement* of anatomical pursuits. The measures adopted ought to be efficient in securing the attainment of each of these ends; individual, as well as public, interest exacts these conditions.

We are well aware that, properly speaking, to obtain the third end now mentioned, something more than a mere supply of subjects is requisite; but since this is all that can be legally or nominally effected, the whole difficulty resolves itself into that of obtaining an ample number of subjects without the intervention of resurrectionists, or others *secretly* dealing in dead bodies. Now dissection, it must be granted, affects the dead alone, yet all the clamour which is raised against it originates from certain *feelings and prejudices of the living*. That these feelings and prejudices are in themselves idle and superstitious we have already shown. But in order to accomplish what is here desired without calling the latter at all into play, it has been proposed to consign to dissection such as have no survivors, whose feelings would be excited on the occasion. ‘Take,’ it has been said, ‘those who, after living at the public expense, must also be buried by the public. Let *all unclaimed bodies, without exception*, be given up for anatomical purposes.’ Even allowing people to retain their prepossessions, still, considering that subjects *will*, and in some way or



other, *must* be had, the preceding plan ought, one would think, to appear highly equitable to every rational mind. But the refinement of our busy-feelers (for we have busy-feelers as well as busy-bodies on the occasion,) is so exquisite, that they are not satisfied with *feeling for themselves and their friends*, they must also extend the pathos of their sympathy to the most indifferent persons. An enactment of the nature in question would, no doubt, chiefly affect the friendless poor. But why, it is asked, must a person be given up for dissection because he is poor and destitute? This may be no fault of his; why, therefore, must he be punished for it? In this manner do idle meddling people trouble themselves about the concerns of their neighbours, although those neighbours care not a straw about the matter themselves. And yet, after all, it would seem, not so much in reality for others, as for themselves, that they feel. They are alive to the possibility of a reverse in fortune. But this is *no reason* why *they* should not be subject to the same salutary and indispensable law: it is not *individual* feeling or interest that ought to be considered, but the *public good*. Subjects, it is evident, *will* be had so long as medical men exist; all the criminals that are executed, on whatever grounds, would not be an adequate supply: exhumation must still be resorted to. Besides, there are insuperable objections to the delivery of criminals for dissection. In arguing, then, against the surrender of unclaimed bodies, the *feeling* gentlemen will neither be *dissected themselves*, nor *suffer any other person to be so*. To be sure, such *sympathetic* individuals can dispense with dissection better than most people, since they are more easily the dupes of quackery and pretence; they would, doubtless, place greater faith in the *sympathetic powder* of the Rosicrucians, than in the prescriptions of a well educated physician. A law, however, to the effect stated would neither be unjust nor harsh. Unjust it cannot be, since it would apply equally to the rich, as well as to the poor; neither can it be harsh, seeing that no survivor re-



mains to have his feelings injured. And if, on the other hand, the law did principally, if not entirely, affect the poor and labouring classes, it ought at the same time to be borne in mind, that they are precisely the individuals who would profit most by the enactment. From the nature of their occupations, and the circumstances in which they live, they are infinitely more liable to serious accidents and diseases; they are more frequently the subjects of operations, and must, therefore, be more greatly benefited by a general diffusion of anatomical and medical knowledge. The rich, we should remember, can at all times command the attendance of a skilful physician or surgeon; but the poor have not the means of doing this. They must resign themselves into the hands of the nearest practitioner, however ignorant or incapable of rendering the requisite assistance. The lower orders, therefore, it is clear, would enjoy a much higher degree of advantage from the better education of medical men, than the upper ranks of society. If, then, they contributed more largely than the latter to the general diffusion and improvement of medical and surgical skill, by affording a greater number of subjects for anatomical purposes, where, we demand, can be the injustice of this?

But why do not the squeamish gentlemen who are so very *tender of the welfare of others in this matter* pursue their feeling cant to its legitimate extent? Why do they not protest against the poor and destitute being compelled to enter a parish workhouse? The respectable and wealthy merchant, without any want of foresight, without committing any act of imprudence, may be suddenly reduced from affluence to beggary. Must he, too, live on parish bounty? Why do they not exclaim against the hardship and cruelty of the case? Why do they suffer those who have known

“ The luscious sweets of plenty ; every night  
Have slept with soft content about their head,  
And never waked but to a joyful morning,”

now to languish on a scanty pittance ; to stretch their



withered limbs on straw, with aching heart, and head oppressed by thought and care; to rise each morning to obey the orders of iron-hearted overseers, or unfeeling governors of poor-houses? Why are the unfortunate *legally* doomed to this state? Is it their fault that they are poor, and naked, and starving? And why, we ask, is not every deserving indigent man clothed, and fed, and made to fare liberally every day? Yes! a person may undergo every thing which we commonly look upon as degrading, whilst he is yet *living*, whilst he is still *capable of feeling* his condition; he may endure the greatest penury, suffer all the privations and misery, of want and destitution; be compelled to choose between starvation and a workhouse, though he deem the latter an intolerable degradation. Yet, no sooner is life extinct in this same individual, than lo! a thousand sympathising minds are ready to *plead the cause of his dead carcase!* His immortal part is gone; it has fled far beyond the reach of human influence; and all that remains of what once constituted the man, is a little decomposing earth. This, however, may yet be rendered of important use to society at large by devoting it to scientific purposes. But, no! this is not to be permitted; death seems to have consecrated that which was previously neglected and despised. Such is the nature of *common feeling and philosophy* on this subject. It would really seem as if people could not duly discriminate betwixt the value of the dead and the living; or that they cannot perceive how just, how reasonable, how kind, and how imperative a duty it is to alleviate, by every possible means, the pangs of disease, and to restore the mangled and broken limbs of their fellow creatures to soundness and utility. They do not appear capable of comprehending how important it is for a necessary operation to be performed neatly, dextrously, and with as much ease as possible to the sufferer. They are not aware of the very interesting and apparently paradoxical fact, that although the *number of surgeons* who perform difficult operations has astonishingly increased, yet the *number of opera-*



*tions* actually performed has considerably diminished. The pain and suffering of men, therefore, must also have been lessened ; a satisfactory and practical demonstration of the more general diffusion and advancement of medical knowledge. And this has been entirely effected by the increased zeal with which healthy and morbid anatomy have of late been cultivated. Shall we, then, arrest this beneficial progress of science ? Shall the benign and soothing aid which the healing art proffers to the meanest of earth's sufferers be withheld from them by prejudiced superiours ? Yes ! if we are to listen to these *feeling reasoners*, these *feminine philosophers*, the *living* must be *sacrificed* ; the *dead spared*.

But there is another point that must not be overlooked ; that of considering dissection as a punishment.\* We need scarcely reiterate the absurdity of this notion, which is countenanced simply by a preposterous law, that cannot be too speedily abrogated. Its repeal, in fact, we consider as an indispensable preparatory step ; because nothing is more natural than to regard as infamous and degrading, that which is inflicted on those alone who have perpetrated crimes of the deepest dye. Surely, every enlightened person must see the impolicy of retaining this part of our statute law, productive of no earthly good, and serving to cherish hurtful prejudices. Nothing, we apprehend, would ultimately be so effectual in removing the prepossessions against anatomy, as the complete dissevering of the union betwixt *crime* and *dissection*. Were men once persuaded, that there is nothing derogatory to humanity in the latter ; that it is neither morally nor physically an evil ; that it presents nothing which any one need wish to shun or fear ; then we should cease to hear complaints about the scarcity of sub-

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\* This has actually been seriously urged against the measure now proposed for supplying the profession with subjects, and a *pathetic* tale got up about the injustice of "*the last punishment inflicted on murderers*" being assigned to the poor and friendless, simply on account of their poverty and destitution !



jects, and cease, we may presume, to require legislative interference. Let, then, the law in question be abrogated; mankind will gradually become better informed on the subject of anatomical pursuits; prejudices will vanish by degrees; and in the meanwhile we cannot perceive any *rational* ground of objection to the appropriation of *all unclaimed bodies* to the uses of the anatomist. Let there be no invidious distinction here; let the legislators themselves practically demonstrate that they have no intention of enacting laws, from the operation of which they seek to be excluded; that they wish to take no advantage of the condition to which the poor are often brought. Let them evince, in fine, that like honourable and worthy senators, they meditate nothing further than salutary regulations for the *common* good. Doubtless the members of our national council have often read, with secret and approving admiration, instances of heroic self-devotion and denial for a country's weal, both in the pages of ancient and modern history. Let, then, each act the part which he so greatly admires; let him sacrifice his previous erroneous views and prejudices at the shrine of public utility. Posterity will applaud the deed.

Every unclaimed body, therefore, we contend, should, if required, be devoted to facilitate the cultivation and improvement of the healing art. In France, where the large public hospitals are in the hands of government, this is easily accomplished, without any interference of the legislative bodies, and at the same time without the least injury or violence to any one's feelings; there is never the slightest question in that country, about who is, or who is not, to be dissected. The government knows well that dissection is a matter of public utility, and cannot be dispensed with. It supplies the wants of the profession, accordingly, from these large medical establishments, which it is their object to render at once useful both to science and to suffering humanity. Hence the very name of a resurrectionist is unknown to them;



and but for the injudicious interference of some people, might be so amongst us.\* In the present state of things, however, we cannot expect that our hospitals should be so ably and so economically managed, or that they should be rendered so subservient to the common good, as similar institutions in France, where the grand and broad principles of utility are consulted, and not individual caprice. The affairs of hospitals, in our own country, being regulated by a very heterogeneous body of men, styled governors, we cannot be surprised to find the majority pretty nearly as conversant with the proper object and nature of such institutions, as honest Ralph was "deep sighted in intelligences." The adoption of the plan practised in France would immediately set the matter under discussion at rest; but as that is not to be expected, it remains to be seen what the wisdom of parliament will effect. Any enactment, however, on this subject, should not *merely legalize* the giving up of unclaimed bodies for dissection, but render it an act *imperatively obligatory* on the governors or officers of public charities. Otherwise, if it be left to the option of the latter, as in Mr. Warburton's bill, any petty driveller might thwart the intent of the law. At the same time it ought to be specified that the medical person receiving a body should incur no expense of any kind except that attendant on its removal. No money, under any pretence whatever, should be allowed to be given to an officer or servant of a charitable institution on such occasions. Moreover, full provision ought to be made for

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\* Many, for example, gravely tell us, that the measure in question would depopulate our public charities. Nothing can be more erroneous than such an assertion. We again repeat, that the greatest prejudices against anatomy do not exist amongst the lower classes. Why are not the hospitals of France, Germany, and Italy deserted? These countries have made the experiment, without any detriment to their institutions. The prepossessions of people were found to subside very quickly; and Englishmen, surely, would evince as much good sense in this respect as their neighbours. Of this, indeed, we have, in some measure, already practical proof, in the feeling manifested on this subject by the soldiery. See note, page 45.



the transfer of bodies from one place to another ; a permit being granted for this purpose without any charge except that of registry.

In this manner, by repealing that part of our present statute law which consigns the bodies of murderers to dissection, and by enacting regulations of the preceding description, the interests, both of the profession and the public would be effectually secured. Many, we observe, are exceedingly vociferous and urgent in demanding the most condign punishment against the exhumers of bodies as well as against the receivers of the latter. But we have no hesitation in affirming, that a law of the nature before mentioned, would more *certainly* and *promptly* abolish the practice of exhumation than all the pains and penalties which the spirit of the most vindictive legislator could invent. And the reason is sufficiently obvious ; there would be no purchasers for the commodity of the resurrectionist, and consequently all inducement to pursue his vocation would at once cease. In every case, there is always some motive, some incentive for action ; and in the present, it is gain. When this becomes impracticable, the resurrectionist will cease to exist, and not till then. No man that lives by his wits will pursue an unprofitable calling. Where there is no temptation to crime it is useless to enact measures against its perpetration. Hence we do not perceive the slightest necessity for altering the law as it now stands on this subject ; it will prove more than sufficient for the purposes at which it aims ; indeed, it is difficult to imagine what law could be required under the supposed circumstances.

Again, since the indifference of men to the last solemn requests of their friends renders such a measure necessary, if any person, either verbally, in the presence of competent witnesses, or by written deed and testament, desire that after death his body shall be given to any surgeon or surgeons, for the purposes to which they may think fit to apply it, compliance with this desire ought to be legally enforced. After our previous observations on this point, no additional



remarks can be requisite to corroborate the necessity of such a clause in a document purporting to regulate the supply of subjects for anatomical uses. It is not enough, as in Mr. Warburton's bill, to say that a body under the circumstances just detailed *may* be lawfully given up; its surrender, if required, ought to be made *imperative and absolute*; for no reliance it seems can be placed on the *honourable feelings* of *pretended* friends on these occasions. We have, indeed, heard of some bequeathing their property to their survivor or survivors, on the sole condition, that the testator's body should be given for dissection. This, to be sure, is an admirable mode of silencing cant; it constitutes a sort of argument addressed to avarice, which even the most supercilious and whining sensibility cannot surmount. What an excellent test of motives and feelings!

Further, it should be lawful for people to dispose of the body of a deceased friend or relative for dissection, whether the death of the individual occur in, or out of, a public charity. There are numerous instances in which the relatives would willingly spare themselves the expense of an interment: in such cases, there can be no possible impropriety in giving the body to a surgeon, since the only individuals *affected* by the circumstance express *their* consent, and our *busy-feelers* (permit the expression) will not, surely, carry their sensibility so far as to compel the poor creatures to pay for a funeral without money, or to run in debt for the sake of burying a dead carcase. The transaction should, of course, be ratified by a magistrate, in order to prevent the possibility of any abuse arising.

The next and last point for which we contend is, that every *graduate in physic or surgery* ought to be allowed to possess and dissect, on his *own premises*, bodies legally obtained. The establishment of this grand and important principle cannot be too much insisted on, since it is *vital*ly connected with the future progress of medical science. In every case of the disposal of bodies, a certificate of permission might be obtained from a magistrate; this certificate



should be presented to the medical gentleman, and considered as authorizing him to receive such body or bodies, and on its or their reception, he in turn ought to notify to the nearest magistrate, or bench of magistrates, his having possession of the body or bodies specified. In this manner, the constituted authorities would always be acquainted with the places in which dissections were carried on, and possess a sufficient check upon all transactions relating to dead bodies. With respect to the penalties that ought to be attached to the infringement of any of these regulations, as we look upon them in a secondary point of view alone, we shall leave them for the determination of others.

By these few simple enactments, then, we conceive that every thing which is desirable regarding anatomy would be abundantly obtained. There is no necessity for the creation of any new authorities in the state; none for the existence of commissioners empowered to grant and revoke licenses for teaching anatomy; or in other words for the nomination of a set of men to decide upon matters of which they have no correct knowledge. Mr. Warburton's bill is a sufficient proof of this. In that complicated, prolix, and yet defective production, the wants both of the profession and the public have been entirely misapprehended. The bill is not calculated to facilitate and promote the cultivation of anatomy, but to obstruct and prevent it; it is a bill for the *better punishing of resurrectionists, and the legal extortion of money from those who study or teach anatomy.* Commissioners for the licensing of schools in troth! We repeat, the framers of that bill were ignorant of the real nature of the evil which they attempted to remedy. There is no call whatever for the establishment of this new power, whose authority must manifestly interfere with that of the universities and colleges already existing; and very soon most effectually impede the progress of medical science. Surely people are singularly forgetful, for ignorant they cannot altogether be, of the nature of education and study in general. To some, it is true, we may possibly be about



to disclose a secret; nevertheless, it is one of which every well educated person ought to be aware, and one to which we most earnestly solicit the attention of our legislators. It is this; that in the common routine of instruction, during a pupil's attendance at public schools, his anatomical acquirements must be more or less superficial, conveying little beyond a general knowledge of the human structure. He may obtain sufficient information to enable him to pass the usual ordeals, but this is very far from constituting him an anatomist. There is not a more egregious mistake than to suppose that all requisite anatomical knowledge can be acquired during one or two winter courses of dissection. The entertainment of this opinion is in the highest degree injurious to the advancement of anatomy. Science is not promoted by mere school exercises or labours. We should consider, moreover, the multiplicity of objects which necessarily occupy the medical student's attention during his brief stay, or rather race at a metropolitan school. Reflect for an instant, how naturally his views and efforts are directed to the preparations indispensable for passing an examination, on the result of which his credit and prospects in life depend. The period of study, it should be remembered, is ordinarily limited by the scanty pecuniary resources of the pupil. Now let any liberally instructed person pause for a moment, and reflect, how very little of that which he was taught at school, had, on leaving it, been made properly his own. School knowledge may, for the most part, be termed merely artificial; the master seeks with infinite pains to drill it into the mind of the pupil, who learns things by rote unspeakably more rapidly than he comprehends them; and consequently where the memory is good, such kind of knowledge may be paraded forth to gratify a fond parent, or it may serve a vain possessor wherewith to strut, and fume, and vapour; but it is not that solid, profitable, and digested matter which makes an individual really wise. It constitutes the materials on which the reflective mind acts; affords the preparatory steps



by which it ascends to the seat of wisdom. It is only by frequent repetition of our youthful studies, by revolving and reviewing them in the mind again and again that we can turn them to advantage. It is, indeed, humiliating to think how full the head may be of words, and yet how empty of ideas; to see what a mass of current phrases generation repeats after generation, without attaching any precise meaning to them whatever. How many subjects are there, upon which the greatest part of us, never permit ourselves to think in the least? We retain the very language of early instruction, without knowing its meaning; something vague and undefined it conveys to the mind, but nothing palpable and comprehensible. The notions and doctrines in which men are disciplined continue to form the atmosphere of their thoughts, beyond which they never dream of light; and should this even be made to obtrude its brightness on them, they do not hail it welcome. So addicted are people to authority, that they labour, toil, and sweat; nay, even fight for the opinions of their forefathers,

“ Whose honesty they all durst swear for,  
Though not a man of them knows wherefore.”

These are considerations that ought to have great influence in the case before us. For no science ever suffered more from implicit faith in dogmas than the medical. And as this science rests altogether on anatomy, the adoption of other mens assertions on this subject, without examination, without recurring to nature itself, ought to be discountenanced by every possible means. Of this we need no better illustration than that afforded in the history of Galenic despotism, of which we have already spoken. Anatomical knowledge cannot possibly be improved by mere study during an academical course of instruction, even supposing that it constituted the *sole* object of attention. It requires the labour of years to become a thorough proficient in anatomy; it is a science, too, that exacts unremitting cultivation, since few acquirements are of more difficult retention.



Anatomical discoveries are the result of long and patient labour. And, we beg to ask, did the immortal Hunter content himself with the dissections of his pupilage? Was his splendid museum filled with specimens of animal structure that had been prepared during the two or three first years which he devoted to the study of his profession? Did he acquire his anatomical knowledge by the inspection of plates and diagrams? Were his discoveries and improvements in the healing art effected simply by meditation in the closet? In brief, is it rational to suppose that science of any kind can be advanced by those who are just entering on its study? And how is it possible for physic and surgery to be duly improved, so as to yield all that relief to suffering humanity, of which they are capable, so long as ninety-nine members out of a hundred in the profession, are prevented from duly prosecuting their studies? And this must still continue to be the case, unless every legal member of the healing art can have opportunities of carrying on practical anatomy under his own roof. It was thus that Hunter passed his leisure moments at his own *private establishment* in the country. Should a practitioner wish to refresh his memory, to prosecute some point of practical inquiry, or should he be desirous of devoting his spare moments to the further improvement of anatomical knowledge, must he run to and fro, to the ends of the world, must he resort to some metropolitan school for these purposes? A notion so utterly absurd cannot for a moment be entertained. The avocations of a medical man are such that he cannot even assign any stated periods to his researches, and, consequently, he ought to possess the power of pursuing them at his own dwelling whenever opportunity may offer. Practical investigations into the nature of the animal frame, and of the laws by which it is governed, constitute the proper business of his life, and to which he ought continually to direct his thoughts and attention. In no other way can he expect to obtain a thorough knowledge of the art which he professes, or to render valuable services to his fellow crea-



tures. To deprive him of this power, is at once to plunge him into that dark labyrinth of speculation which has so long been the bane of a benign and noble science. It is to clog and impede the progress of improvement; repress the native bent of genius; discourage the efforts of industry, and blight the ardour of zeal. Every member of the profession ought to possess the same means of honourable distinction; we can never sufficiently deprecate the introduction of any measure which may tend to restrict anatomical researches to a few favoured teachers. To limit the dissection of bodies lawfully obtained, or to throw any obstacles in its way, is to impede the progress of medical knowledge, and arrest the stream of beneficence which flows thence to man. Against unjustifiable restrictions of this kind, every honest voice ought to be raised. The members of the profession constitute, surely, a sufficient limitation in their own number. They who speak of permitting dissection to a certain extent only, do not consider that the very nature of the process will always limit its practice. There is not the *least fear of its undue extension*, and no occasion, therefore, for artificial restraints. It is very far from being one of those pleasing and agreeable occupations in which all delight. The steady pursuit of anatomy is the result of a natural thirst for knowledge, and an ardent desire of improvement, which, alas! comparatively few of the profession evince. It exacts, moreover, a greater sacrifice of time than many are able or willing to make. These inherent obstacles to anatomy are of no trifling magnitude, and they yield additional evidence of the necessity of affording every possible means for its facilitation. When it is remembered how many practitioners are careless and indifferent about the advancement of medical science; how many look upon it simply in a lucrative point of view; when it is further borne in mind how many lack the energy and zeal requisite for the continued prosecution of researches into animal structure and functions; and lastly, when we weigh the incompetency of a great number, and the aver-



sion of others for these studies, no rational man, we conceive, can for a moment suppose that any restrictive measures regarding them are at all called for. To impose legal restraints in addition to those which already exist so numerous, so inseparably, and of such important magnitude, would indeed be folly. It were to pursue a line of conduct not simply impolitic, but flagrantly unjust to the interests of society at large. To impede our study of the human frame, to limit our acquaintance with its nature, is to deprive us of a knowledge of the best means of preserving health, and subduing disease; it is to rob us, in short, of that which we are all most anxiously desirous of possessing.

Whilst, however, we contend for this liberal and enlarged principle of legislation, in reference to anatomical pursuits, whilst we maintain that it is of the utmost moment for the interests of our profession, that every legal member of it should be permitted to cultivate an acquaintance with anatomy in his own dwelling; let no one suppose we advocate the indiscriminate authorization of any man to *teach* this science to others. Every one, no doubt, ought to be allowed to teach those who may choose to follow his instructions; it is a natural right, and one which is acted on in every other branch of learning. In this respect, there ought to be no limitation of teaching. But whether or not the public bodies, which at present regulate medical education, may think fit to acknowledge the validity of any person's teaching, is a totally distinct question, and one which has no essential connection with the measures to be adopted for procuring an adequate supply of subjects for dissection. From misapprehension, however, this has been made a prominent part of Mr. Warburton's bill. The public, no doubt, ought to be protected from the evils which the presumption of ignorant pretenders might bring upon them; and it behoves the managers of every university, college, or public school, to appoint competent teachers. But what ordeal the latter shall undergo to prove their competency, or how they



shall be selected, is of no consequence here; we have nothing to do with the regulation of medical schools; it is not our object to determine how many, or how few there shall be; or in what manner the education of professional men may be best conducted; all these points remain for future consideration. Much reformation in the present system of medical education might, no doubt, be effected; but that is a subject totally distinct from the one at present occupying our attention; it involves questions and interests of a nature altogether different from those relating to anatomical pursuits. Our present object is the removal of the prejudices against dissection; the abolition of the traffic in dead bodies by the resurrectionist; and finally, the procuring of an adequate supply of subjects, in the least objectionable manner. This is every thing which a bill to facilitate the cultivation of anatomy has to embrace; the institution of schools is totally foreign to the purpose, and cannot be entered upon without remodelling the present system of medical education. For this reason, we cannot but feel some surprise at the protest against Mr. Warburton's bill, lately put forth by the Professor of Anatomy at Edinburgh. That the bill is objectionable, we grant; but the grounds on which our objections rest differ very materially from those stated in the memorial to which we allude. The tendency of this production, it has been insinuated, is but too obvious; it betrays too much anxiety about the emoluments of an individual teacher, and too little ardour in the cause of science generally. Whether or not the document was prompted by self-aggrandizing views and interests, we cannot pretend to determine; yet, at the same time, we must honestly confess, that it seems to savour of a spirit of monopoly, than which nothing is more to be deprecated in science. The professor who at present fills the anatomical chair, is too wealthy, we are assured, to think of increasing his income, by rendering the college an exclusive place for dissection. According to the protest, however, he wishes to restrict the number of dissecting rooms in Edinburgh to three at most.



But this is not all; still further privileges are coveted by himself in particular, with the view, it would seem, of securing a numerous attendance of pupils.

On the other hand, we maintain, that the real interests of society, the due advancement of medical knowledge, can be properly promoted only by permitting every legal member of the profession to prosecute anatomy on his own premises; and further, that every one ought to be allowed to teach such as may choose to put themselves under his care. We repeat, the college is not, therefore, bound to admit the validity of every man's instruction. Indeed, it is notorious, that no certificates of attendance on courses relating to any branch of medicine, are admitted at Edinburgh, except such as have been obtained *at a university*. We do not argue, therefore, for any thing which would injure the interests or pecuniary emoluments of any class of men; we are merely pleading for an important and unalienable right. Even the very protesters, who wish to limit the number of teachers, bestow on *every graduate* in their university, *full, free, and complete power to teach*, as well as to practise, medicine:—"Eique amplissimam potestatem medicinam ubique gentium *legendi, docendi, faciendi* concessam," (subaudi *testatum volumus*,) are the words employed on the occasion. If the teaching here mentioned do not extend to anatomy, as well as to other branches of the profession, then the phraseology is pretty much upon a par with that which immediately precedes it, than which nothing can be more ridiculous. We allude to the "*ubique gentium*," which resolves its meaning into anywhere in *Scotland*, somewhere in *England* or *Ireland*, and nowhere abroad without *previous permission*! It is high time, surely, to banish such antiquated and grandiloquent nonsense; at least, it is somewhat inconsistent in those who annually invest a number of persons with the powers and privileges of teaching, to endeavour at the same time to prevent them from engaging in that office, even in the *only metropolis*, the "*ubique gentium*," where they have full permission to do so without molesta-



tion. The reasons, moreover, adduced to show the necessity for limiting the number of schools in Edinburgh, are not a little curious; in appearance plausible and specious, but in reality of infinite inanity. "Paris," it is stated, "has risen to the highest eminence as a school for dissection, and there two dissecting rooms only are permitted." That is to say, two public dissecting *establishments* sanctioned by government! But is it really meant to be affirmed, that there neither exist, nor have existed, other teachers of anatomy, besides those at the Ecole de Medicine, and the Hopital de la Pitié, where are the two *rooms*, we presume, to which allusion is made? And again, granting, for a moment, that there never existed more than two dissecting rooms in Paris, is it on *this account* that its reputation stands so high as an anatomical school? Does the Edinburgh Professor seriously believe in the truth of such a position, or does he wish to palm it upon the public as true? Every tyro knows full well, that the excellency of an anatomical school arises principally from two circumstances,—the *merits of the teacher*, and a *plentiful supply of subjects*. These two points include the grand secret, the "arcanum duplicatum" for acquiring anatomical celebrity. The sole cause of superiority in the Parisian schools arises from the abundance of subjects, with which they are supplied at a trifling expense. It is on this account, that students resort thither to study anatomy, which scarcely costs them one-twentieth part of the sum to which it amounts in this country.

That we possess plenty of men every way competent to the task of teaching anatomy, there cannot be much doubt we imagine; nor should we have any occasion to fear that our schools would be less flourishing than those of our neighbours, provided they enjoyed equal facilities of study. A bill on the principles already detailed, and which should include the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, making express provision for the transfer of bodies from one place to another, would, we are persuaded, meet every demand. If, then, the Edinburgh Professor merely wish



for a limitation of schools, in order that his *own establishment* may always have an *adequate supply of materials*, he need suffer no further alarm; the number of his pupils will measure the extent of his exertions; and these, no doubt, he will then redouble.

No place, be it remembered, ever rose in anatomical celebrity *simply because its schools were limited*; but because the teachers possessed superiour merits, and the supply of subjects was plentiful. Will the Scotch anatomist inform us, why London so far outstrips the northern metropolis in this respect, and why Dublin excels them both? It is not on account of *fewer* schools existing in these cities, for the *contrary* is the case; it is owing, as every student knows, to the greater facility of procuring bodies; and, for this very reason, an increasing number of pupils annually resort to Dublin in search of anatomical knowledge.

But the Scotch memorial proceeds to state that, from eight hundred to nine hundred medical students visit Edinburgh, yearly, in order to receive their medical education; and hence without direct permission for the transfer of bodies (which most indubitably ought to be granted) a sufficient supply of subjects could not be obtained under the provisions of Mr. Warburton's bill. It would, however, savour too much of rodomontade to advance that all these pupils *actually* dissected, or *wished to dissect* at Edinburgh. Of the students who graduate in this place (say from one hundred to one hundred and twenty yearly) numbers obtain their anatomical information in the Irish University, and of those who do not graduate, the majority do not prosecute the study of anatomy in Edinburgh. It may be replied that this arises from the scarcity and high price of subjects. But if the prejudices of the Scotch will not suffer them to allow their precious carcases to be dissected, and if the demand for subjects is to be satisfied by transportation from distant places, dissection will always continue more expensive and difficult at Edinburgh than elsewhere; a circumstance which will *infallibly* diminish the number of dissectors there,



and consequently the demand for subjects. Besides, we are not to suppose the number of medical students resorting to the northern metropolis will continue as great as heretofore; the activity and talents displayed by the Professors of the London University will very soon evince this to the world. For these reasons we do not think it will be at all requisite to introduce into a legal enactment on this subject, any particular clause to secure the privilege of preference to a University Professor, should there ever be a dearth of bodies. This we apprehend will not occur. The superstitious prejudices of the country may be great, but we cannot see on what ground they are more entitled to indulgence in Scotland than in England or Ireland.

An additional reason why anatomical schools should be limited, consists, according to the document before us, in the pretended advantages accruing from the pursuit of anatomy on a large scale. In this manner, for example, it is maintained that anatomy "can be taught more *rapidly* and completely; the different operations in surgery can be more frequently performed and exhibited; and where there are many students with various degrees of knowledge, every part of the body is available and no part lost." All this appears very plausible and grandisonous, but not very compatible with sober truth. Anatomy *cannot* be taught *properly*, nor is it *advisable to attempt to teach it with rapidity*. It constitutes the most important groundwork of medical education, and ought to be particularly and carefully dwelt upon. That which is rapidly acquired is commonly as rapidly lost. Any desire or endeavour to abridge the length of time consumed in anatomical studies, which is already too brief, deserves the utmost reprobation. Rapid dissectors are even now too numerous. We deny, moreover, that anatomy can be more completely taught in large than in smaller establishments. In the latter the pupil is better attended to, and naturally shares a greater portion of his teacher's personal instructions. A pupil cannot learn how to dissect by simply *looking* at others performing this operation;



neither can he acquire anatomy properly by inspecting what others have dissected. He must go through the operation itself, carefully, slowly, and repeatedly, with his own hands; this is the sure mode of *completely* mastering his subject, though not the most *rapid*. The scalpel cannot be used with rapidity by a mere student, nor indeed by any one advantageously; and after the parts have been exposed by the knife, they must be *studied*. And considering that a pupil can only devote a certain number of hours daily to dissection, he cannot possibly have many spare moments to inspect the labours of others. If there be two or three students dissecting parts similar to those on which he is occupied, an occasional attention to their progress is all that can be profitable to him; for if he aim at more he neglects his own work, acquires probably a confused and superficial notion of several parts, but a correct and precise idea of none. Every advantage, therefore, which a multiplicity of subjects may seem capable of yielding, can be obtained where there are three or four dissecting tables, as effectually as if there were fifteen or twenty. In the former case, too, there is not one-tenth part of the distraction which prevails in the latter, arising from garrulity, idleness and folly, which of themselves would counterbalance the advantages before mentioned, even supposing them to exist. And, then, as to surgical operations, they certainly may be performed as often in a small dissecting room as in a large one; for since parts that have been operated on become utterly useless to the dissector, no student would willingly give up his portion of a subject for surgical purposes. Hence, as most people are aware, bodies are procured *expressly* for this end; and, of course, this can be done quite as frequently in a small, as in a large establishment. Parts that have been dissected cannot be appropriated to the performance of operations; and those on which operations have been performed are useless for dissection; so that in regard to surgical operations it would make little difference whether the student were occupied in a room where there was one or a dozen bodies undergoing dissection.



Such are the grounds on which a "*belief*" in the necessity for limiting the number of anatomical schools is founded; such the premises whence it is inferred that a limitation of the number of dissecting rooms "*is under all circumstances useful and necessary in Scotland*, where the proportion of the population dying in hospitals is very small!" No doubt a limitation of the number of dissecting rooms in Edinburgh would, *under all circumstances, be useful to the professor*, but flagrantly unjust to the rest of the profession, and injurious to the interests of science.

It should, moreover, be steadily borne in mind, that the document in question confines its views to *mere school education*, to the course of study requisite preparatory to undergoing an examination. Yet this is the first step only in the career of medicine. A person may possess a very decent knowledge of the classics, or of the elements of mathematical science, on quitting the university, but he is then only *just beginning to think*; to discover how to avail himself of his powers and acquisitions. Suppose, now, that he sits down quietly, and closes his books; that he never looks into a Greek or Latin author; never solves a problem in geometry, nor troubles his brains about an algebraical calculation;—Will he become an erudite critic, a profound geometrician, or an expert algebraist? Certainly not. Whence, then, do people seem to imagine, that a moderate degree of anatomical knowledge is to serve the professional man during the rest of his life? That he is to enrich science with important observations and discoveries, instruct himself, and benefit mankind without ever taking a scalpel in hand, after once quitting the seminary of his youth? No one ever excelled as a skilful botanist by simply consulting books and plates; but by resorting to nature,—by ocular inspection, and actual handling of the plants which he attempts to study or describe. The most sedulous student cannot possibly acquire a minute knowledge of anatomy during his academical course; it must be subsequently attained if it ever be attained; and until this be the case we cannot arrive at that certainty in medicine which is so



generally desired. The greater part of what a youth is taught during his pupilage, he must necessarily receive upon the bare authority of his teacher ; and when in after life he finds the necessity of trying the doctrines which he has imbibed by the touch-stone of experimental investigation, in what manner must he proceed ? Suppose that the structure or functions of a part have been unfolded to him, and he subsequently wishes to make researches for himself upon these matters, can he, by the most protracted speculation, arrive at truth ? by discussing the most conflicting opinions, or by contenting himself with pasteboard and paper ? No ! he must handle and see the parts ; he must make nature herself his guide, and not the opinions of men. He must, in short, use every faculty and sense with which God has endowed him for the purpose. We have, however, already insisted at some length on this topic ; and surely there is no one, how prejudiced soever he may in other respects be, who does not perceive the absolute necessity of permitting every member of the profession to prosecute practical anatomy under his own roof. In this way he may employ his leisure moments, in unfolding the mysteries of the human structure, in studying and making himself acquainted with the machinery of life ; in the same manner as the mechanist investigates the construction and laws of any other machine.

Practical researches require to be conducted leisurely and with care ; they cannot be profitably carried on where the attention is liable to be interrupted and distracted by a thousand circumstances. Hence, however much some may vaunt the advantages which arise from teaching anatomy on a large scale, it is pretty well known, that professors and teachers have *private* apartments, in which, without distraction or annoyance, they can prosecute their labours. If no dissections, no anatomical researches are to be pursued, except in some large public institution, then, to be sure, pupils may be taught the elements of anatomy, but no one will enjoy the opportunity of becoming thoroughly versed



in a knowledge of the human frame, except a few privileged teachers. Would, now, such a system promote the interests of science, or the general good of mankind? Again we deprecate any such attempt to monopolize knowledge. It would be just as rational to forbid the chemist to conduct any further analyses of bodies, after he has gone through a course of instruction in chemistry, as it would be to prohibit the cultivation of anatomy after having studied it at a university. The substances on which the chemist operates, bear to his science similar relations to those which the human frame bears to the science of medicine. Any person may, in his own laboratory, institute what researches he pleases, on the nature of bodies and their mutual relations and actions. And if medicine be a necessary and legal calling, those who follow that calling have a positive and unalienable right to investigate, as diligently as possible, the structure and actions of that natural being, the human body; because it is a knowledge of this which constitutes the foundation of all rational medical practice. We repeat the position, they have a right to do this; otherwise, the public has no right to expect from them any thing but blundering and quackery. And if dissection be not allowable, if it be of that disgraceful, shocking, and evil nature, that some appear to imagine it is, then physic, as a legal profession, ought at once to be banished from the state, and branded as unworthy of liberally educated men; and to act consistently, the cure of disease, as in days of yore, ought to be committed to evil or good spirits, as men may feel inclined to patronize the one or the other.

Were it not that we witness daily proof of the fact, it would be difficult to conceive that *rational* creatures should wish to deprive themselves of the light of nature; that they should wilfully desire to extinguish the torch of truth held up to them by the Divinity himself! It is a Christian maxim that men ought to resort to all known natural means for the remedy of their distresses before trusting the event to Providence. With what degree of confidence, then,



can men anticipate a favourable issue to their bodily afflictions, when they are conscious of having been instrumental in preventing the exploration of all those natural means of aid which God has conferred upon them?

The prejudices and superstitions of mankind commonly originate in what are termed the feelings; so that reason is merely rendered subservient to the dictates of the latter. It is feeling which prompts the unworthy subterfuges and tortuous declinations from truth that men resort to in order to colour their deeds. People constitute reason, in fact, a sort of advocate-general of feeling. Hence the lowest sensual indulgences, as well as the more refined impulses of our animal nature, equally claim and share the gloss of rationality; and thus it is that men frequently mistake acts and thoughts, originating in simple bodily sensations, for the decorous and honourable workings of reason! In themselves, the feelings are doubtless excellent; it is against their undue influence that we ought to guard. So far, however, is this from being the case in respect to the subject before us, that one might be led to suppose the majority of mankind had no reason whatever, to restrain this influence. We have lately been witnesses to ample proof of this even in the senate house. One of its members, in particular, told his brethren that they really did not know what they were doing in legislating respecting the disposal of the dead; over the condition and property of the living they possessed authority, but with the dead they had no right to interfere. Now if the legislature possess no power over a dead body, by what authority is that of a criminal given to the surgeons? And if they have no right to enact that dead bodies *shall* be dissected, they clearly possess none to make laws *prohibiting their dissection*. Neither have they any right whatever to punish the resurrectionist. But the truth is, that in all ages, under every sort of government, and every species of religion, Pagan, Jewish, Mahomedan, and Christian, states have never hesitated to regulate the disposal of the dead whenever



the public good demanded interference. On many occasions, indeed, this is so urgently called for, that nothing but prompt attention to it, can save the living from destruction. Utility of the dead to the living is the end which is aimed at, and if legislators are permitted to act on this principle in one case, they may be in another. Christianity so manifestly discourages a superstitious regard for the dead, that we wonder to behold it conspicuous in our senators, more particularly in those of the Upper House. Is it not sufficient for us to know that at death the soul can immediately wing its way to the mansions of bliss? \* Must we also be childishly anxious about the fate of the corruptible tenement in which it dwelt imprisoned; that frail fabric which has been the cause of so much woe, and misery, and distress to us? We are not, however, without hope of witnessing the prejudices now prevalent against anatomy, one day vanish. People merely want enlightening as to the real nature of anatomical pursuits; by this means alone can their imaginary fears be dispelled. In order to decide whether the ordinary mode of disposing of the dead, or that made use of by the anatomist, is the preferable, they need simply to be informed, that, in the former case the body is destroyed by putrefaction and vermin, whilst in the latter it is carefully and elegantly preserved as an instructive specimen of Nature's nice and curious workmanship!

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\* Verily I say unto thee, *this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise,*" was the language of Christ to the penitent thief. "Then (at death) shall the *dust return to the earth as it was*; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes.)



## ADDENDA.

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### CHAPLAINS TO HOSPITALS.

IN speaking of the remuneration of those who attend public charities in a clerical capacity, (page 29,) we ought by no means, to omit mentioning the excellent example which is given by the clergymen of Sheffield, in this respect. These gentlemen attend the Infirmary *gratuitously*, and in rotation; this, we conceive, is as it should be.

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### DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD.

THE various nations of the earth dispose of their dead in very different manners. Some, by way of testifying a *superlative* degree of respect, are said to have *eaten* their deceased friends, "esteeming theyre bellies to be the most precious place for the burial of theyre parents." (Sir W. Dethick, in Hearne's Curious Discourses, Vol. I. p. 201.) This story is also related by Heylin in pretty similar lan-



guage. (Cosmography, 2nd edit., 1657, p. 921.) The whole, however, is nothing, we apprehend, but a marvelously exaggerated account of the practice adopted by the Hyrcanians, a people to the south-east of the Caspian sea. They, it is well known, *publicly maintained a fine race of dogs for the purpose of devouring their dead*. Every one, according to his means, contributed to the support of these animals, which are styled by Cicero, "Optimates," and "nobile genus canum." He observes, at the same time, that the Hyrcanians esteemed being devoured in this manner, the *best kind of burial*;—"eamque optumam illi esse censent sepulturam," (Tuscul. Disput, lib. I. 45.) The bodies of the Magi, and probably those of several other classes in Persia, were likewise thrown to wild beasts. Hence, possibly, arose the idle story, before mentioned, of *people eating their dead*; and hence, too, we may satisfactorily account for the message of Darius Hystaspes to the Greeks, to whom he sent word, according to Herodotus, that it was his *pleasure* they should *eat their dead*.

The Mongols, at the present day, usually carry the dead out into a steppe, and there leave them to beasts of prey. (Timkowski's Mission to China, 1820, 1821.) We are informed by Denham and Clapperton, that in the interior of Africa, they either bury the dead in their own dwellings, a practice anciently pursued both by Greeks and Romans; or they cast them into a noisome pool situated in the middle of the town, whither the wild beasts resort to seek them in the night. From the former of these usages sprang the worshipful company of household gods, spectres, hobgoblins, and so forth;—the *good and bad demons* of the Greeks; the *larvæ and lares* of the Latins.

The Puharrees (Indian mountaineers) in the case of their Damauns, or interpreters of dreams, seem to follow the custom adopted by the Persians in regard to their Magi; for Bishop Heber informs us that the bodies of the former are placed, without burial, in a jungle. Such, too, among the Puharrees as die of the small-pox, are thrown



into the woods; and those who die of dropsy, into the water. The latter is, in reality, the *most common mode* of disposing of the dead in India. For, although the Hindoos are said to *burn* their dead, combustion is, in truth, only half effected, "*the dead, half roasted over a scanty fire,*" being thrown into the waters of the sacred river. (Heber's Journal, Vol. I., p. 280, and Vol. III., p. 225.) At Benares, where fuel is scarce, the bodies of the dead are at once cast into the Ganges without any burning whatever in most cases. The Parsees (Bombay) expose the corpse to vultures in an open building constructed for the purpose.

On the other hand, the Egyptians, as every one knows, embalmed their dead; and many of the Persians imitated this practice, in some measure, by smearing the body over with wax, previous to burial. Thus, some people burn their dead; others give them to the beasts of the forest, or the monsters of the deep; and others, again, like ourselves, to animals of a smaller, but not less predatory description.

Nature, in fact, compels us, in some way or other, to get rid of the dead; and Seneca justly conceives, we imagine, that burial arose from *necessity*, rather than from any natural instinct. Hence we find Abraham burying Sarah "*out of his sight,*" in a *cave* of the field which he purchased of Ephron. This was the simplest and readiest of all modes of getting quit of the corpse. The Jews, however, seem to have adopted, indiscriminately, the practice of other nations, according as they thought proper. Joseph, for example, commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father, and after this process had been performed in the customary way, the body was deposited in the cave previously mentioned. Sometimes, the Jews burnt their dead; on other occasions, they simply made great burnings of perfumes and other odoriferous substances, whilst the bodies themselves were buried.

But of all customs, that of interring the dead in the *midst* of populous towns, is the most filthy and abominable. It is a practice which directly tends to counteract the very end



of interment altogether. In no *civilized* country, except our own, is this usage tolerated; and even with us, it is a piece of modern refinement, not having been *permitted* prior to the year 740 A.D. It owes its origin to religious abuses, and the system of granting privileges.







