

**An introductory lecture, intended as a recommendation to a more careful investigation of the constitutional origin of local diseases, on principles deduced from the opinions of Hunter and Abernethy : delivered at the Finsbury Dispensary / by George Macilwain.**

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### **Publication/Creation**

London : Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1834.

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*From the Author*

AN  
INTRODUCTORY LECTURE,  
INTENDED  
AS A RECOMMENDATION TO A MORE CAREFUL INVESTIGATION  
OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL  
ORIGIN OF LOCAL DISEASES,  
ON  
PRINCIPLES DEDUCED FROM THE OPINIONS OF  
HUNTER AND ABERNETHY.

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DELIVERED AT THE FINSBURY DISPENSARY,

BY  
GEORGE MACILWAIN,  
SURGEON TO THAT INSTITUTION,  
FELLOW OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY, ETC. ETC.

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"Hujus enim facta, illius dicta laudantur."  
*Cic. de Amicit.*

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LONDON :  
LONGMAN, REES, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMAN.  
1834.

# INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

INTENDING  
AS A RECOMMENDATION TO A MORE CAREFUL INVESTIGATION  
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## ORIGIN OF LOCAL DISEASES.

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HUNTER AND ABBRETT.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY MANNING AND SMITHSON,  
12, IVY-LANE, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

BY

GEORGE MACLEWAIN.

LECTURED TO THAT INSTITUTION.

LECTURE OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL AND CHIRURGICAL SOCIETY, 1831.

LONDON :

MANNING, REES, GREEN, AND LONGMAN.

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R35906

## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN,

### ADVERTISEMENT.

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SHOULD a perusal of the following Lecture, induce a single individual to investigate more carefully than he may have hitherto done, the Principles it would advocate, the Author will not regret having allowed its publication—which (as the style will probably suggest) was not his original intention.



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## INTRODUCTORY LECTURE.

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GENTLEMEN,

THE subjects most appropriate for the introduction of Surgical Lectures, whether Clinical or Systematic, have been so frequently and so ably discussed, that an introductory lecture has become a task at least somewhat embarrassing. Truths, however important, when often repeated, appear trite and uninteresting, unless invested with some novelty of colouring or position; if this be not impracticable, it is certainly difficult, as there seem scarcely any which tortured ingenuity has not already forestalled.

The history and progress of our art, in all its interesting detail; the commanding usefulness, which justly places it so high in the scale of human knowledge; the exalting nature of its various studies, in the impressive recognition which they constantly afford, of boundless wisdom, goodness, and power; the dignified and deep responsibility of its several duties, and the moral beauty of the kindly affections which they are calculated to engender, have been repeatedly described and largely expatiated on, with all the interest and ornament which learning and eloquence could command. If a Lecturer would view the sub-



jects usually selected on such occasions as common property, and treat them in his own manner, he must be vain indeed if he fear not the disparagement consequent on a busy comparison with some more distinguished predecessor. Introductory Lectures, however, if not required by necessity, are at least strongly suggested by custom; I shall therefore preface the Clinical Lectures which I am about to deliver at this Dispensary, by a few preliminary observations. For the reasons implied in the foregoing remarks, I shall, as much as possible, avoid the path so frequently trodden on such occasions, and make the present address, subservient to the general business of the Course. About to be fellow travellers, as it were, I would unfold to you at least a portion, of the map of our intended journey,—point out to you the general bearings of the course I propose to take,—and offer such suggestions on the mode of proceeding, and the guides we should chiefly regard, as seem best calculated to prevent your passing unnoticed, anything which is really worthy of observation. Leaving metaphor, I would present you with at least a general view of the kind of surgery which it is my object to teach; the principles on which it is based, and the individuals to whom we are mainly indebted for them.

If, Gentlemen, we take a retrospect of the history of Surgery, we scarcely recognise it as a science previous to the time of the Hunters and Baron Haller. Before their time, it was an useful art certainly; and



although it might have aggravated some of the maladies which it was intended to relieve, still, on the whole, it effected a considerable diminution of human misery; but it scarcely deserved the name of a science. I will not say that there were no obscure evidences of a dawning existence; but it was chaotic; without form; and void of any order, which could afford a resting place for the eye of Reason, whence she could contemplate the various masses which surrounded her; much less was there any light to facilitate the arrangement of the several objects, so as to render them available portions of human knowledge. It appears to me, to have been reserved for the genius of JOHN HUNTER, to supply the light desired—to penetrate the dark void—and to elicit those splendid results, which, whilst they have perpetuated his name in the recollections of an enlightened and grateful posterity, have rendered medical science of all others, the most useful in diminishing the sum of human calamity, and have stamped it as such, with the impress of his own immortality.

We cannot, indeed, be insensible of the merits of his highly gifted contemporary, Baron Haller. We cannot be unmindful of the extraordinary example which he afforded, of that mass of information which may be accumulated by a single individual,—of his voluminous writings, nor of his acquirements in almost every branch of human knowledge—which severally claim our respect, admiration and gratitude. Dr. William Hunter, also, is entitled to no small



share of our regard ; for, to him we are, doubtless, indebted for first fostering his brother's rising genius ; for supplying him with the means for its cultivation, and not improbably with those necessary for his support,—anxiety concerning which, will too often obtrude itself on the aspirations of genius ; and under whose withering influences it has not unfrequently perished or decayed. The magnificent Museum of Dr. William Hunter,\* whilst it constitutes his best eulogium, shews how invaluable an assistant he must have been to the early efforts of his distinguished brother, to whom we are mainly indebted for first broaching those principles on which our present Surgery is based.

Before the time of John Hunter (notwithstanding the important discovery of the circulation), a knowledge of Surgery might be said to have consisted in the recollection of a vast number of facts, of which neither the real importance nor true connexion was at all understood. No idea seems to have been entertained of that comprehensive generalization of the multitude of dissimilar occurrences, constituting the phenomena of disease, which now refers them, for the most part, to a few known laws, or to a few physiological principles, legitimately deducible from them. The qualifications which were thought chiefly essential in the Surgeon, appear to have been little more than a good eye, a steady hand, a retentive memory,—with some opportunities for exercising them. We find a great deal said with regard to the physical

\* Now at Glasgow.



qualities; of the manus, strenua, stabilis, nec unquam intremiscens; but when the head was to be consulted, when any thing beyond the reach of the external senses was to be considered, we are reminded of the necessity for a physician. It had not been discovered, that a knowledge of the animal economy was equally necessary to the physician and surgeon; still less had it been conceived, that the study of surgery not only affords the clearest evidences, but is almost the only mode, by which we can approach any thing like demonstration of the laws of vital action, or by which we can apply them to the explanation or removal of diseases.

The character of John Hunter has been so often drawn, that it has become familiar to most of us; hence only a few remarks will here be necessary. He seems to have been born with a number of extraordinary qualities, which, if they combined not every qualification for scientific investigation, constituted as near an approach to this order of perfection, as we can reasonably expect in man. To a mind characterized by a love of truth, only equalled by his ardour in the pursuit of it, was joined a most clear and penetrating perceptive power; and to crown the whole, the most enduring industry. There seems to have been scarcely any process in animal or vegetable life, to which his attention had not been directed: and although it is probable, that the Museum which he left, stupendous as it is, contains but the records of the more important subjects which



he had investigated; yet probably it is the most remarkable work ever achieved by a single individual. To say nothing of subjects which it is almost certain must have occupied his attention, but of which we have no positive proofs,—not reckoning the multiform considerations and reflections, leading to, and arising out of, the preparations which he has left us; not taking into the account the various unpublished volumes, which were so unfortunately destroyed; but contemplating the Museum as we see it;—whether we consider it, with reference to the investigations of the various processes in animal or vegetable life, of which it affords proofs; the infinitely varied manner in which these are unfolded and exemplified in health or disease, or even the mere mechanical occupation, we at once recognize it as a wonderful example of human talent and industry. When, however, we recollect that the labour was accomplished in the busy hum of a metropolis, amidst various unavoidable interruptions from other important avocations, with the occasional embarrassments of indisposition; and when, lastly, we reflect that the whole was the effort of an individual, whose pecuniary means were often painfully restricted, during a comparatively short life; language supplies no symbol which can adequately designate the depth or variety of our sensations, and we gaze on the vast fabric with silent admiration.

Mr. Hunter, however, shewed, that we are not to expect perfection. I would not undertake to say,



that the vigilant caution which so constantly presided over his labours, and which, examined with such scrutinizing accuracy the legitimacy of his conclusions, might never have slumbered\* during a life of such exertion: but the point to which I wish especially to direct your attention, was, the limited power which John Hunter possessed, of conveying his ideas into the minds of others, so as to produce a correct translation of his own impressions. His power in this way was indisputably restricted; and many of the circumstances which exemplify this deficiency, at the same time convey its explanation.

A circumstance which adds not a little to our admiration of John Hunter's genius, is, that he was comparatively an uneducated man; and with but little variety of language at command, stood more in need of enlarged powers of expression, than most other individuals. His ideas were not only remarkable in number, as arising out of a great multiplicity of subjects; but many of them were altogether new: so that what I have ventured to represent as an original defect, was thus painfully increased by the very talents which accompanied it. John Hunter's works illustrate these remarks. Although we are so impressed with the value of the principles and precepts which they contain,—as to recognize in

\* It has been thought, that Mr. Hunter's reasonings on Syphilis, are not characterised by his usual caution. The progress of science has changed the grounds on which he rested them, certainly; but they were regarded as determined facts at that time.



them the very grammar of medical science ; as conveying that which, therefore, cannot be learnt too soon ; yet they are scarcely adapted to the early studies of the medical pupil. It is expedient, before the student read the works of John Hunter, that he have some idea, from other sources, what it is that he is to expect ; he should know his teacher a little in theory, before he sits down to converse with him in the closet. If then the abstract truth and importance of Mr. Hunter's physiological and pathological opinions, were sufficient to secure their establishment as such ; still a practical application of them, co-extensive with their merits, required the operations of a mind of a different order. A mind which, to coincidence of opinion with John Hunter, should join a perception, no less clear and penetrating than his ; a mind which should be amply stored with enlarged powers of expression, and a ready facility of adapting them to original ideas ;—which, to assist intellects of ordinary or even subordinate capacity, should have also the property of simplifying difficult subjects, of placing them in striking and interesting points of view, and of elucidating them by ingenious varieties of illustration. A mind which, with this sympathy with intellects of common calibre, should combine sufficient grasp, to take enlarged views of subjects, and a rapid perception of those points, which might be wrought into practical usefulness,—whose genius should enable it to build on these, harmonious structures the offspring of a creative induction ; and finally, to display the whole



fabric, so as to convey, even to the student, correct ideas of its relation and bearing on the practice of surgery.

For the fulfilment of such desirable objects, an individual, especially qualified, arose; and, Gentlemen, I am willing to believe, that before I mention it, you will have anticipated the illustrious name of ABERNETHY. But lest enthusiasm should have wandered from its only safe conductor, truth, let us examine the foregoing sketch, and see if it be overcharged. Could any thing surpass Mr. Abernethy's power of simplifying difficult subjects, if we except the pleasing and happy manner in which he was wont to illustrate them? Where shall we look for that rapidity and clearness with which he seized the difficult points of a question; or for that ingenuity which enabled him to invest every thing with colours, which so often rendered the most dry and uninteresting subjects, at once instructive and inviting? and, with regard to his powers of expression, where shall we find a style which, though not perhaps critically faultless, combined elegance and perspicuity in more successful proportions?

Is it not deeply interesting to reflect, that those powers, the deficiency of which we cannot but lament in Mr. Hunter, should have constituted the *distinguishing* attributes of Mr. Abernethy? Could any thing have been more fortunate for the interests of science, than that chain of events, which determined



that the individual thus so expressly qualified, should become, at once, the eloquent expounder, and zealous advocate of Mr. Hunter's opinions? Mr. Abernethy, however, was far from confining himself to a simple exposition of Mr. Hunter's doctrines. He found that the truths discovered by Mr. Hunter, not only coincided with, but often too explained those which he himself had remarked, if not with the same labour, still with equal accuracy of observation.

To analyse and connect the various opinions of these great men; to shew where they arose out of each other, or where, though of independent creation, analagous truths illustrate the identity of their views, would be an employment highly interesting, and not uninstractive; but the limits of a lecture preclude any attempt of the kind; wherefore I shall confine myself to those more immediately connected with my present objects.

I need scarcely observe, that Mr. Hunter and Mr. Abernethy were men of deep reflection. They were engaged in a profession, which, had they not been sufficiently stimulated by other, and perhaps, higher motives, of itself, would have occupied them in the daily study and application of the *laws* of life: hence it was only what might have been expected, that they should direct some portion of their considerations to its *nature*. Mr. Abernethy held the same opinion on this subject as he believed to have been entertained by Mr. Hunter, and he advocated its probability.



To state this briefly: it was, that life did not arise out of organization, or any mechanical arrangement of parts; but that it was some very mobile and subtle substance, superadded *to* organization. The manner in which Mr. Abernethy introduces his advocacy of such a view, is truly admirable: it is at once simple, modest, and philosophical: terms which were also distinguishingly characteristic of Mr. Hunter's mode of promulgating an opinion. "Since "thinking is inevitable," says Mr. Abernethy, "our "chief inquiry should be, how we ought to think "or theorize; and on this point, Newton himself has "condescended to instruct us. Our theories, hypo- "theses, or opinions—for to me all these words seem "to refer to one and the same act of the mind— "should be verifiable or probable, and should ra- "tionally account for all the known phenomena of "the subjects they pretend to explain: under which "circumstances, it is allowable to maintain them as "good, until others more satisfactory be discovered. "No man, who thus theorizes, need feel shame in "this employment of his intellectual powers; no "man need feel arrogance, for it is acknowledged "that his theory is but a probable and rational con- "jecture. Besides, we never can be sure that the "series of facts belonging to any subject is full or "complete; new ones may be discovered, that would "overturn our best established theories. Upon the "foregoing terms alone, do I wish to uphold Mr. "Hunter's theory of life," &c.



I will not injure the foregoing quotation by further remarks on it. Amongst many other reasons which induced Mr. Abernethy to think in the manner to which I have alluded, you will find the following :—He saw that life was connected with an infinite *variety* of organization ; and hence he could not believe that it was the *consequence* of any one of them. If, therefore, life were not the consequence or result of the molecular arrangement or organization of matter with which it was connected, the conclusion that it was superadded, seemed inevitable. As its qualities were altogether inscrutable, by any power with which we are gifted ; impalpable, invisible ; but manifesting at the same time, uncommon celerity in its actions : so he thought that it was something very mobile and very subtle. Now, if there was anything unreasonable in this view, or any thing unprofitable in its promulgation,—and it is difficult to perceive either one or the other ;—still it constitutes “the very head and front of his offending.” But it has been asserted, and by many the impression is still retained, that Mr. Abernethy considered life to depend on electricity. He never maintained any such doctrine ; and it is quite extraordinary that he should have been so misrepresented.

It happened that once, during Mr. Abernethy's life, I had a dispute on this very subject with a gentleman, whose intimacy with Mr. Abernethy should



have taught him better : and the reference we made to Mr. Abernethy himself, drew from him a confirmation of that view of his meaning which I had entertained ; and which I contend is so clearly laid down in his Works, as to forbid any other conclusion.\* In the exercise of that talent which he possessed, of illustrating difficult subjects, he was accustomed to illustrate his views of life by shewing its *analogy* with electricity ; but he never meant to identify the two principles ; nor to apply the facts observed in the actions of electricity in any other way, than to explain his ideas of that which was altogether inscrutable, by that which was to a certain extent, known ; to explain, by reference to the superaddition of electricity to a wire, for example, his ideas of the relation of life, and the mode of its connexion, with matter.

It is not expedient here to speculate on the correctness or incorrectness of those views of life which were advocated by Mr. Abernethy ; still less would I say that they will ever be found to have been prophetic of the truth ; but when we consider that

\* “ It is not meant to be affirmed that electricity is life. I only mean to argue in favour of Mr. Hunter’s theory, by shewing that a subtle substance of a quickly and powerfully mobile nature seems to pervade everything, and is the life of the world ; and that therefore it is probable, that a similar substance pervades organized bodies, and is the life of those bodies. I am concerned, but obliged to detain you by this recapitulation, because my meaning has been misunderstood or misrepresented.”



electricity is now allowed to pervade all nature—that its identity with galvanism and magnetism may be regarded as proved,—when it is found, as Sir Humphrey Davy shewed long since, that electrical agency not only controls the laws of chemical affinity, but that chemical actions are in truth electrical,—when we recollect that, not content with admitting that electricity inhabits all bodies, we are beginning to think of its definite proportions,—when various phenomena powerfully suggest the idea, that light, heat, and electricity, if they be not identical, are some mysterious modifications of each other,—when a subtle agent, like polarized light, seems to have proved a difference in the molecular arrangement, of substances, which chemistry has hitherto believed to be identical; and when, lastly, we see an electric battery fairly the product of life, as in the *gymnotus electricus*, and torpedo,—may we not expect, without being very unreasonable, that at no distant period, we shall regard the phenomena of electricity as something more than a happy illustration of the actions of life; and be obliged to acknowledge, the probability at least, that electricity, so largely employed as an instrument of Omnipotence, either does exert some important influence on the laws of vital action, or that animal life is the only assemblage of phenomena, in the regulation of which it exerts no power.

To proceed, however, to the consideration of opinions more obviously connected with the practice of surgery, and to mention one other instance of



coincidence in the views of Hunter and Abernethy : I would observe, that Mr. Hunter, in lectures which are reported to have been laboriously delivered to an ungrateful, because too often, an inattentive audience, was elaborate in describing those important phenomena, which constitute the various sympathies of the body ; his object being to shew, as Mr. Abernethy used to express it, that the whole body sympathized with all its parts.

Mr. Abernethy laboured to demonstrate, if not to an inattentive audience, certainly amidst the suppressed sneers\* of many of his hearers, that diseases of parts of the body had constitutional origins, or connexions. Whether the two opinions were of independent formation, or whether the latter were an emanation of the former, here we see the universal sympathy of John Hunter linked with the “Constitutional Origin of Local Diseases” of John Abernethy.

The influence exerted by the chylopoietic viscera in various diseases, and on particular states of the nervous system, had been recognized from the earliest times ; nor would it be difficult to adduce evidence of this recognition from the writings of the Greek and Arabian physicians, or those of enlightened men at all periods. In some instances, this is so marked,

\* Mr. Abernethy used to observe, that some people said he was mad : perhaps now, they would be satisfied in considering him to have been original.



that as is the case with regard to many important discoveries (the circulation of the blood, for instance), we are surprised that men who evinced such power of observation should not have proceeded a little further, and have arrived at the important inductions so obviously arising out of the facts which they had observed. Mr. Abernethy, however, appears to have been the first person who fully appreciated such facts ; and by shewing how they were legitimately deducible from physio-pathological principles, at once unveiled, as it were, the universality of their application. Truth, has been said to lie near the surface. Mr. Abernethy's views appear to rest on a few simple propositions, which, separately considered, are so obvious as to appear little more than truisms ; but which, considered in connexion, constitute the basis of scientific surgery.

Thus, great local irritation will produce great constitutional disturbance ; a less degree of local irritation will produce a less degree of constitutional disturbance ; and these, reciprocally. The state of the nervous system, and of the chylopoietic viscera, will influence and maintain constitutional disturbance ; and, further, in the maintenance of a disordered state of nervous system, there is nothing which more powerfully contributes thereto, than disturbance of the digestive organs, nor anything which more effectually relieves it than producing a tranquil condition of them. I shall shew you, hereafter, how the whole practice arises out of these simple proposi-



tions. It may be well, however, even here, to consider Mr. Abernethy's opinions a little more in detail ; for although to some it may sound strangely, yet it is nevertheless true, that he continues to be much misunderstood and misrepresented. Facts which were the gradual accumulation of vigilant observation, as well as the principles which were carefully and legitimately deduced from them, are frequently considered as having been wrested to conclusions to aid a favourite theory, or, as the creations of an imagination fertile in resources for the support of preconceived opinions ; whilst views of disease eminently remarkable, for a comprehensive perception of all those agents which exert an injurious influence on the animal œconomy, have been represented as referring all disorders, if not to a single organ, at least to the chylopoietic viscera.

In order to examine whether these allegations be founded in truth, let us take a cursory view of those agents, which are acknowledged by all to be chiefly influential in the production of diseases, and also, of the organs on which they for the most part primarily operate ; and then, examine how far they were recognised by Mr. Abernethy. 1st. There is the influence of the kind of air we breath : 2dly. Our food (both fluid and solid) : 3dly. Changes of temperature : 4thly. Impressions primarily made, either of a physical or moral kind, on the nervous system : and, lastly, Substances, sometimes of a tangible nature, sometimes impalpably blended



with the atmosphere, at others, inextricably involved in the general phenomena of specific diseases, and which are included in the catalogue of poisons, using that term in the full extent of its technical application. As structures on which these influences primarily act, consideration suggests,—1st. The skin: 2dly. the viscera of the chest: 3dly. the chylopoietic viscera: and, again, the nervous system. If this sketch do not present you with a comprehensive view of the sources of diseased action; (for I say nothing of accidents in this place;) you will find difficulty, in suggesting any malady which the profession would hesitate to admit might be properly classed, under one or other of the divisions it implies. The question is then, were such divisions recognised by Mr. Abernethy? and the answer is, undoubtedly they were—and in a very marked manner. How largely did he expatiate on the influence of the nervous system,—how much on that of the air we breathe,—how much, on the importance, both generally and locally, of regulation of temperature,—how original and interesting was he on the subject of poisons,—and how clear and convincing, on the influence of diet, and the condition of the digestive organs. What, then, becomes of the charge of seeing all diseases through one medium? How is such a charge reconcileable for one moment, with an enlightened and enlarged physio-pathology,—(to use one of Mr. Abernethy's own words,) which professed to place its very foundation, on the sympathy of the whole body with all its parts. No, Gentlemen, I can assure you, from



ample opportunities of observation ; from many years' attendance on his lectures ; from private conversations on all subjects on which I had any doubt, as well as a careful perusal of his written compositions,—Mr. Abernethy entertained no such narrow views, as those which are sometimes imputed to him ; but he did believe, and strongly contend for this point ; that from whatever causes they might have originated, diseases were liable to considerable modifications, from the existing conditions of the chylopoietic viscera. That, in fact, disorders of these important organs, would aggravate the malady, whatever might be its nature ; and that disorders acting primarily on other parts of the body, or on the nervous system, would produce disturbance in the functions of the digestive organs,—which organs, re-acting on the causes which so disturbed them, would thus increase the general disorder. If, at this day, you would have proof of these propositions ; its production is easy. The difficulty is, to select that out of the vast multitude, with which the least reflection supplies us, best adapted to impress the conviction it conveys. Shall we look for the extended influence of the chylopoietic viscera, in the helplessness of the cradle, in the tottering commencement of early life, in the progress of adolescence, in the full vigour of manhood, in the varying conflict of life with declining years, or when its thread is nearly spun, and man is approaching the mysterious precincts of the tomb ? It is unimportant, Gentlemen, what period of life we select for our observation, since we



shall not fail to discover unequivocal proofs of this influence in all. We frequently recognise its agency in the variable severity of teething, and the cutaneous diseases which accompany this process, in the modifications of the exanthemata, as also in other less febrile eruptions. If we select a disease, whose strong specific characters would seem calculated, *a priori*, to confer on it an exemption from influences of a general nature, as small pox ; or one, the obtrusive character of whose local manifestations, seem to have occasioned a blindness, or inattention, to those links which connect it to a disordered system, like porrigo,—we, nevertheless, find disorders of the digestive organs, conferring a dangerous malignity on the one ; and, measures directed to restore and maintain a tranquil condition of these organs, the only certain source of relief in the other. In the middle periods of life, are not the various inflammatory diseases, as well as those dependent on specific poisons, modified in their effects by the condition of the digestive organs ? Of the former, the history of phlegmonous erysipelas alone affords abundant illustration ; and of the latter, I would select as examples with equal confidence, either syphilis, the Protean class which simulates it, or the disorders so often occasioned by the abused administration of mercury. Do we not see the proofs of the modifying power to which I am referring, in the varying consequences of the same degree of local injury, in the manner, duration, and facility of repair ? In the more advancing periods of middle aged, I need



scarcely observe how often those insidious beginnings of that, which in old age is to become disease, are mixed up with a teasing condition of the digestive organs, in which medical science is frequently so baffled, as almost to welcome a tangible disease as a substitute for an impalpable nervous disorder. In old age, when the efforts of science, can but smooth the road, and ease the journey which they can scarcely retard, it must be familiar to most of you, of how much consequence is the due regulation of the quantity, and quality of the food ;—how often the function of digestion requires those considerations, suggested by declining power : and even where the stomach seems still to retain a vigour, in but inconvenient keeping with an enfeebled frame, how frequently it happens that we dare not trust its exercise ; how important this limitation becomes, in guarding against those dangerous terminations, too commonly incidental to a declining and partial circulation ; and in warding off or abridging the insidious, but no less dangerous influences, of gout, rheumatism, and other well-known sources of structural disorganization. How beneficial in relieving sufferings of the various diseases of the urinary organs,—or, once more to speak of a disease apparently local, in mitigating the annoyances of the prurigo senilis. In short, the influence of which I have been speaking, prevails everywhere ; not only at the various stages as it were of life, but at all intermediate portions of the journey. Whether we regard diseases, usually considered, because apparently, local, or those of evidently constitutional origin,—whether we direct our attention



to those affections which are the results of more ordinary, or more cognizable causes, or contemplate those consequent on specific poisons,—whether we consider diseases of parts of the body, spontaneously occurring; or those, the results of accidents or injuries, we alike find that the condition of the chylopoietic viscera, subjects all, to important modifications. We know, too, that what is considered as perfect health, is not without its good and bad days,—its seasons of strong and weak nerve; and although it is perfectly true, that disorder of the digestive organs is neither at such times invariably the cause,—nor its correction, the cure; yet it must be admitted that even where the injurious impressions have been altogether directed primarily to the nervous system, that the condition of these functions is equally important in lending force to the cause, and facility to the cure. For present purposes of illustration, the facts to which I have adverted will be sufficient; hereafter, I shall bring the evidence to bear on individual diseases, in order to enforce the principles which it inculcates, as well as to shew you, *that however important the influences of which I have spoken, you must not look exclusively to them in the treatment of diseases.* I only here add, that when anatomy informs us of the vast bulk of the digestive organs,—of the extensive and highly organized surface of the alimentary canal, which, were it extended on a plane, would be found to be not less than several square feet. The enormous quantity of blood by which these parts are supplied,—the great bulk and complicated structure of those organs, part at least of whose office we



must believe, is, to assist in the function of assimilation;—when we reflect on the manner in which the chylopoietic viscera are connected with the cerebral, spinal, and ganglionic systems of nerves,—when physiology unfolds to us, that the materials of which our bodies are composed are undergoing a constant mutation, for which the digestive organs constitute the only source of renewed supply,—that the blood which they elaborate for this purpose, with the additional influence of atmospheric air, furnishes every variety of structure, the brain not excepted, with the required support;—when we observe, too, those important facts, which I have no time to consider at present, but which as a whole, constitute the phenomena of sympathy; and which, though they explain not the nature, yet demonstrate the existence, of a mysterious connexion of the digestive organs, with every important structure, as well as with each other; and when every disease, but moderately studied, serves but to illustrate that which anatomy, physiology, and common observation alike combine to teach. When we consider these things, I say, instead of being sceptical or restricted in our conviction of the influence of the chylopoietic viscera, should we not rather wonder, that the proper and extended bearing of these truths on the practice of surgery, should have been reserved for the eighteenth century, and John Abernethy.

Now it may be said, that Mr. Abernethy's opinions are established, that their influence in the treat-



ment of diseases is well understood and acknowledged, and that it is seen in the every-day practice of the profession. There is something of truth, but much more of error, in the foregoing assertions. That the regulation of the functions of the digestive organs is not wholly neglected, even by the least informed, is admitted; nor is the general principle of their influence in diseases denied. But how is this loose credence in Mr. Abernethy's views, much less the perception of the enlarged pathology by which they are characterized, evinced? I speak it not irreverently, when I say, that here, as in matters of still graver import, our faith must be judged of by our works. It is in vain that we profess a respect for the opinions of Mr. Abernethy, if we act in daily violation of the laws which it has been their object to establish. If, for example, in the treatment of diseases, our endeavours to adjust the quantity and quality of food to the digestive powers, consist in a few vague general directions, modifiable by the equivocal interpretation of caprice or inclination; if our internal remedies, presented first, to so important an organ as the stomach, be given at intervals, having no well considered reference to the condition of that organ; if, in the administration of remedies, we increase the difficulties inseparable from an inquiry into their effects, by unnecessary variety and complexity in their prescription; if local remedies be administered without due consideration of the state of the part, and of the constitution, gifted with an universal sympathy; and, lastly, if all these errors occur at one and the same



time, so that we are equally at a loss to know to what we are to attribute success, or to what to ascribe failure, what boots it that the perpetrator of such practice profess a belief in the opinions of Abernethy? For my part, I view such a practitioner (and, if you will only observe, you will find that I state no fictitious, nor even uncommon case) as more opposed to the diffusion of the principles which I would advocate, than he who proceeds on an avowed disbelief of them. The latter may now and then stumble on a fact, with which the disturbed functions of nature will sometimes awaken even the most obtuse and unobservant; but the former is in a voluntary darkness, in which the fact would altogether escape observation, or only serve to confirm him in error, by inducing him to ascribe it to the unsoundness of the very principles, of whose truth it might be an emphatic example. I now proceed to offer a few remarks on the practice of Mr. Abernethy; to shew how its great simplicity, and somewhat limited catalogue of ordinary therapeutic resources, is reconcileable with what I have termed an enlightened and enlarged pathology.

Mr. Abernethy was a surgeon, and educated at a period, when medical surgery, which he himself contributed so largely to establish, was but little known. He was accustomed for the most part to remedial agents, whose effects he could watch with something like accuracy; and was not in the habit of prescribing medicines in that variety, which is now so common. Mr. Abernethy was a close reasoner;



and nothing is more difficult, than to reason closely on the effects of remedies. That undefined peculiarity, which we call the idiosyncrasy of individuals; numberless varieties in the condition of the nervous system in general, as well as that of individual organs, many of which we have no means of discovering, and scarcely any of which we can be said really to understand; the influence of life, in forming chemical combinations, on which we may not have calculated, as well as in modifying or preventing those which we intend should take place; the varying qualities of drugs, rendered still greater by the unprincipled adulterations of commerce, and a number of other circumstances, render the science of medicine so fraught with difficulty, that we can hardly imagine anything more laborious or uninviting. No sooner does the mind, wearied with unfruitful attempts at some useful practical induction, grasp at what appears a legitimate conclusion, than some new or unexpected anomaly presents itself, which renders doubtful, or perhaps falsifies, the law we had hoped to have established. If, therefore, the branch of the profession practised by Mr. Abernethy, did not oblige him to investigate largely the effects of internal remedies, there seemed still less chance of his being induced to do it, from inclination. When, at length, Mr. Abernethy's great reputation led so large a number of persons to consult him on medical cases, he seems to have relied, and not unnaturally either, on the practice which he had so often seen successful, the cases, differing probably but little from



those with which surgical practice had previously furnished him, except in the absence of external manifestations of disorder. I think it is to be regretted, that Mr. Abernethy did not investigate the effects of medical remedies more extensively; for judging by the application he has made of those he did employ, we are justified in concluding, that his inquiries would have added some useful results to our therapeutical knowledge. Mr. Abernethy, however, employed but few remedies, and those chiefly of a kind, whose effects were, for the most part, well ascertained and admitted.\* In this respect he seems, with a characteristic rapidity of perception, to have begun where most of the profession finish; and, in early life, to have commenced with that simple sort of *Pharmacopæia*, which, even in such men as Sydenham, Baillie, and most other distinguished pathologists, appears to have been the slowly accumulated product of experience and disappointment; to have forestalled that state of things, which has been described as characteristic of the life of the phy-

\* Amongst the various misconstructions of Mr. Abernethy, it has been thought, that he disregarded local remedies, whereas he was fully acquainted with their just value. His treatment of susceptible surfaces, for example,—his mode of endeavouring to quiet local irritation, whilst he prosecuted his endeavours to tranquillize general disturbance, is another example of his attention to local matters, as it is of good surgery. In connexion with this, I may mention, that no one could be more particular than he was, in keeping diseased joints motionless, by splints: a practice of great importance, and recently recommended by Mr. Brodie; but apparently without being aware of the fact I have just stated—as Mr. Abernethy is not mentioned.



sician, who commences by having several remedies for every disease, and concludes by having many diseases for which he has no remedy. Although Mr. Abernethy employed but few medicines himself, he was far from being opposed to a more extended use of the Pharmacopæia, and always listened to a well-digested narrative of the effects of a particular remedy with respect and attention. In giving you, however, a faint outline of Mr. Abernethy's principles and practice, you will see, as we proceed, that I shall be far from recommending a servile imitation of him in points of detail. No one can, I trust, have a higher respect or veneration for his opinions ; but I would not blindly follow those of any man. The mode by which we best testify our respect for the opinions of an individual, is, by bringing our best energies to an unbiassed examination of them. If they be true, the more we examine, the more we shall admire ; whilst, perhaps, in the practical application of them, careful consideration may, even to very subordinate capacities, suggest useful modifications, which may have escaped the expansive generalizations of their author. Again, if a principle be true, the multitude of phenomena to which it may apply, are scarcely ever known at the time that the principle is first promulgated. In almost every example which the sciences afford, there are always accumulating facts, which are constantly awarding to it a wider range of application. I believe you will find these remarks apply to Mr. Abernethy's opinions, whilst they demonstrate their increasing value. I shall not hesitate in mentioning



to you, in their proper place, such modifications, or extended applications of them, as have occurred to myself. Where I think that the genius of Mr. Abernethy may have generalized too hastily, I shall not shrink from expressing my conviction. Although he seldom prescribed without seeing, or believing that he saw, the principle, or at least the organ, on which the remedy was to act, it will be right to tell you, that the state of medical science frequently denies us this gratifying condition ; but that, notwithstanding, we must not hesitate in employing that which experience may have proved useful. Speaking generally, when I may be considering the various ways in which medicines act on different individuals, and under different circumstances, I shall not scruple to recommend to you a more extended use of our Pharmacopæia ; not, perhaps, than Mr. Abernethy would have sanctioned, but than he would himself have employed. In examining his opinions freely, we shall, as I believe, make the best use of the splendid legacy which he has left us, in extending the practice of an improved surgery ; and in shewing the application of his principles under modified forms, to diseases in which they may have been hitherto deemed ineffectual ; and thus rest the perpetuity of his name, not on the monumental marble, nor even on a splendid museum, but on an increasing power in the prevention and cure of disorders, on a diminishing recourse to painful and dangerous operations, and on an extension of those colossal traces of his genius, already seen, in an improved medical surgery, throughout the civilized world.



Referring generally to his opinions, I would advise you to postpone the consideration of his views of life, and take subjects better adapted to your present objects; to study well his views of physiology and pathology; to inform yourselves thoroughly of the principles on which he would administer remedies, without limiting yourselves to his restricted Pharmacopæia; to regard diet as a thing of vast importance in the treatment of diseases, but to recollect that it is only one point in the management of them, and that different cases may require very considerable modifications, both in the manner and matter of its administration; to keep before you the bright example which Mr. Abernethy afforded of the honourable practice of an arduous profession, without imitating the uncourteous manner by which it might have been occasionally sullied; to emulate, each in his ability, that enlarged benevolence which disbursed such vast sums annually to distressed brethren, without exhibiting the rough exterior beneath which such a heart was concealed; and, let me add the hope, that in imitating such a godlike feature in his character, neither the absence of moral courage, nor the presence of flattery, may prevent you from shedding the lustre of a discriminating justice, over your beneficent dispensations.

The lectures, Gentlemen, which I propose to give, then, will, in the liberal sense of the term, be based on the principles which were taught by Mr. Abernethy; and the practice they recommend will, I trust, be exemplified and enforced by Clinical illustrations. I need scarcely observe, that this Institution affords a



large field for observation : here you may judge for yourselves whether those views promulgated by Mr. Abernethy were merely ingenious theories, or whether they were faithful transcripts from the book of nature. If they stand not the test of practical application, you will do right to reject them. If, on the contrary, this test should demonstrate their truth and value, I trust that you will spare no pains in rendering yourselves thoroughly acquainted with their application, not only in those diseases which may be comprised in an imperfect course of clinical instruction, but in the general practice of surgery as taught in systematic lectures.

In systematic Lectures, the student is taught what he is to look for—how he should endeavour to elicit the information which he seeks. The usual history, causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of disease, are methodically described, with such an arrangement of rule and exception, as the infinite varieties of morbid action render practicable, consistently with clearness : and most useful, certainly, such lectures are. The student is, however, here dependant on the teacher ; the correctness of whose views, he is, in some measure, compelled to admit, until he has opportunities of forming his own. In clinical instruction, the book of nature is alike unfolded to the student and his preceptor. No ingenuity or preconceived opinion, can materially colour or distort the facts, alike accessible to both. The reasoning of the teacher, as well as the practice



he deduces from it, are put to the test of experiment; and the various forms of disease, as they occur in nature,—so infinite, as to defy systematic classification, are seen under circumstances best calculated to impress them on the recollection. Whilst, therefore, systematic lectures are highly useful, they seem chiefly so, as preparing the student for clinical instruction: without this, whether he seek it in the practice of others, or wait until he slowly accumulates it amidst the absorbing anxieties of his own, he can scarcely pursue his profession with comfort or advantage. The lectures, then, will be chiefly clinical; and as the subjects of them will therefore necessarily be regulated by the cases which have recently been, or which are at the time, under treatment, they will be often little more than extemporaneous. I shall endeavour, however, not to lose sight of the practical points, whether they be all demonstrable or not in the cases in question. The importance of the surgical practice, offered by large dispensaries, has not been duly appreciated, because, perhaps, till recently, not known by our public bodies: for whilst too much can hardly be said, of the opportunities of information presented by our noble hospitals; still they shew nothing, more or less of which, is not to be seen in a dispensary: whilst, on some points, dispensaries have even the superiority.

Hospitals have an advantage over dispensaries, in the greater accommodations they afford to patients labouring under accidents, or requiring operations;



in the consequently greater number of such cases, and in the control which may be exercised over the habits of the patients, so material in the accurate investigation of the effects of remedies, and in enforcing the prescribed treatment ; advantages alike important to the interests of science, and in cases of contemplated insubordination, to those of the patients also. But again, the large number of pupils, consequent on the monopoly which hospitals enjoy, constitutes practically a material subtraction from some of these advantages. On the contrary side, it is to be observed, that many diseases are seen in dispensaries better than in hospitals. The following is a catalogue of diseases, some of which are scarcely seen at all in hospitals, and all of which are seen as well, and for the most part better, in dispensaries. Infantile diseases generally—such as disorders incidental to teething, *strophulus*, porrigo, small-pox, measles, scarlatina, whooping-cough ; constituting together so important a feature in the occupation of the general practitioner. To these may be subjoined, cutaneous diseases generally, ulcerations of the lower extremities, and diseases of the aged ; incipient affections of the joints and of the urinary organs, diseases of the eye, the various disorders connected with uterogestation and lactation, with fever of very variable type and severity. As the legislature is now informed on these points, let us hope that dispensaries will, ere long, be recognised as competent fields for instruction. This would increase their usefulness, and add to that of the hospitals, by encouraging competition, which is, as I



once heard Mr. Lawrence justly observe, “the surest source of excellence.” You will not, however, Gentlemen, in the practice of a dispensary, discover those powerful impulses which operate elsewhere. Dispensary practice, abstractedly considered, presents few of those rewards, either of fame or fortune, which are calculated to excite the zeal and animate the industry of the hospital surgeon—none of those comforts, which at least diminish labour, if they do not relieve responsibility. Your operations, instead of being performed in roomy, light, airy, and otherwise well adapted theatres, with “all appliances and means to boot,” must be frequently performed in the crowded, dark, ill-ventilated abode of filth, poverty, and wretchedness; and (your own instruments excepted) with such other conveniences as an extemporaneous ingenuity can often but imperfectly supply. But even here again there are some advantages. Dispensary practice will shew you many a page in the book of nature, unfolded nowhere besides. The localities of disease, and the habits of patients are nowhere so well seen as in their homes; and the same may be said of the influence of physical suffering in the development of moral character. The view presented to you of the misery of disease, with poverty and its afflicting complications, will awaken your sympathies with the wretched, and teach you thankfulness for the health which you may enjoy. Naturally, thus exalting your ideas of the usefulness of your profession, it will, I should hope, inspire you with additional zeal in its study. Dispensary practice may teach you



also other lessons, not without their value. The various difficulties which may beset your path or disgust your sensibility, nay, even the ingratitude with which your attentions may be occasionally received, may by reflection be turned to advantage.

The first, will inform you betimes, that the profession which you have embraced is no play work, and excite corresponding energy, whilst youth and health afford you a liberal supply; whilst an early drilling in the difficulties of public practice, will render those of private professional life comparatively trifling, and thus leave you less encumbered to support its somewhat increased anxiety. The ingratitude will teach you, that even in the administration of benefits, which the best part of your lives have been spent in obtaining the power of conferring, and which, when accomplished, constitute the best gift that man can confer on his brother—that even here you must be philosophers, superior to common motives, and look to the *mens sibi conscia recti* as your chief reward.

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LONDON:

PRINTED BY MANNING AND SMITHSON,  
12, IVY-LANE, PATERNOSTER-ROW.



*By the same Author, together or separately.*

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\* \* For Notices of these Works, see *Cooper's Surgical Dictionary*; *Med. Chir. Review*; *Foreign Quarterly Journal of Med. Science*; *Edinb. Med. and Surg. Journal*; *London Med. and Surg. Journal*; *Lancet*; and most other Medical Periodicals.



