

Observations on homoeopathy and animal magnetism ... a lecture ... / by James Lomax Bardsley.

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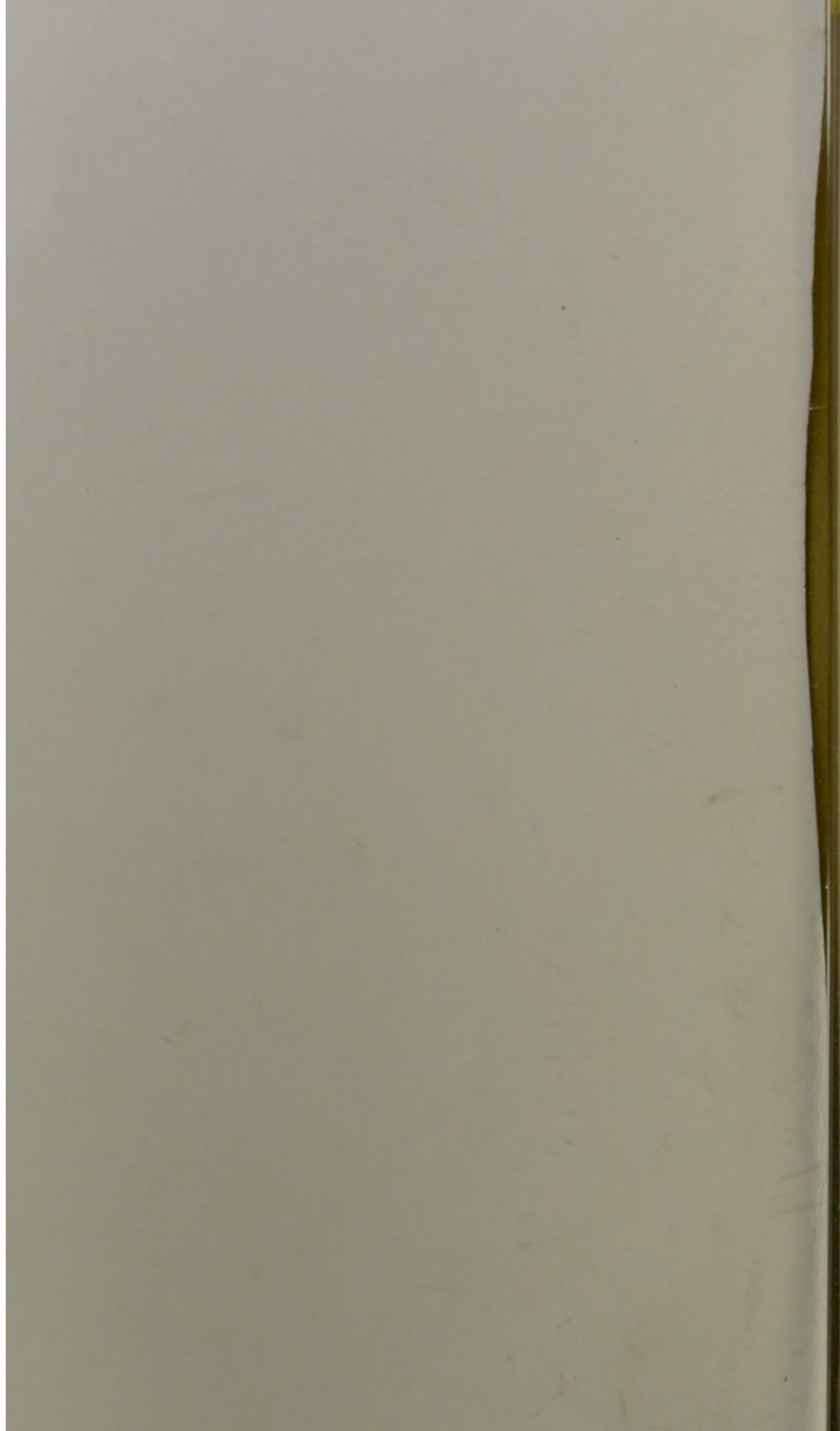
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OBSERVATIONS
ON
HOMŒOPATHY
AND
ANIMAL MAGNETISM,

AS ILLUSTRATING THE NECESSITY FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF CAUTION
IN PRONOUNCING A JUDGMENT UPON ASSUMED DISCOVERIES
IN MEDICAL SCIENCE;

FORMING
A LECTURE,

INTRODUCTORY TO
A COURSE ON THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE,

DELIVERED
AT THE ROYAL SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND SURGERY,

PINE-STREET, MANCHESTER, OCTOBER 3RD, 1838,

BY JAMES LOMAX BARDSLEY, M.D., F.L.S.

MANCHESTER:
J. HAYWARD, (SUCCESSOR TO CLARKE AND CO.,)
MARKET-PLACE.

—
1838.

OBSERVATIONS

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

In presenting myself before you, upon this occasion, I derive unqualified satisfaction from the assurance, that the interest and zeal, which is so generally manifested, will render the commencement of another session, will not disappear with the excitement of novelty, but will continue to afford me that cheering encouragement throughout the whole of this winter's duties, which forms the best incentive to exertion on the part of the lecturer, and to diligence and assiduity on that of the student.

The special objects of the medical instruction, all those, with which it is customary to open a new session, are to indicate the principles which ought to constitute the basis of the medical character, to direct the attention of the student to the various branches of inquiry upon which his diligence must be exercised, and to explain the particular objects and advantages of the system of instruction which this institution affords.

It has, however, been agreed with me to extend your extended view of the more remarkable improvements in the practice of medicine, which have been effected

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

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GENTLEMEN,

In presenting myself before you, upon this occasion, I derive unqualified satisfaction from the assurance, that the interest and zeal, which you must naturally experience at the commencement of another session, will not disappear with the excitement of novelty, but will continue to afford me that cheering encouragement throughout the whole of this winter's duties, which forms the best incentive to exertion on the part of the lecturer, and to diligence and assiduity on that of the student.

The special objects of the general introductory address, with which it is customary to open a new session, are to indicate the principles which ought to constitute the basis of the medical character,—to direct the attention of the student to the various branches of inquiry upon which his diligence must be exercised, and to explain the particular objects and advantages of the system of instruction which this Institution affords.

It has, hitherto, been usual with me to afford you a condensed view of the more remarkable improvements in the practice of medicine which have been effected

within the last few years, but I shall here make a deviation from this plan, and devote the present lecture to the enforcement of *the necessity of caution in pronouncing a judgment upon assumed discoveries in medical science*—seeing, that we have almost constantly brought before us some new pretensions to improvement both in the practice and theory of our art.

But, indeed, this is not peculiar to our own age, for the history of medicine furnishes us with abundant examples of the promulgation and favorable reception of the most extravagant hypotheses, as well as of those sound and more just views, to which an ample experience has afforded satisfactory confirmation. Amongst other illustrations of what I now advance may be noticed, the almost universal belief, during many ages, in the existence of some unascertained agent in the constitution of nature, capable of indefinitely prolonging human life,—the philosopher's stone,—the universal medicine. This absurd and fanciful idea gave rise, however, to several improvements in pharmaceutical chemistry, whereby practical medicine received considerable advantage.

The greater attention that in this way became paid to the subject of Chemistry led to the diffusion of many premature and ill-conceived theories relative to its application to medical science. Thus the sanction afforded to the chemical doctrine of that prince of charlatans, Paracelsus, even by some individuals most distinguished for their learning and scientific acquirements, constitutes another instance of the ready credulity of the human mind, when operated upon by mar-

vellousness of statement, boldness of pretension, and obstinacy of assertion.

Indeed, throughout the whole of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one captivating theory or another seems usually to have been in the ascendant, influencing almost universally the character of each department of medical investigation, and directing the interpretation of almost every phenomenon resulting therefrom. Thus, at one time we find the mathematical school communicating its tinge to the pursuits of its disciples,—at another, the followers of Van Helmont and Stahl attempting to establish, by their mystical assumptions of an Archæus, or an Anima, a sure foundation for their peculiar physiological and pathological views. However, it is quite unnecessary to multiply instances, in illustration of the disposition manifested by mankind, in all ages, to place implicit credence in hypothetical systems, rather than in the slow and cautious inductions rightly deducible from progressively accumulating facts; otherwise I might detain you at some length in detailing the absurdities indulged in by the proposers of charms, amulets, weapon salves, and a farrago of other equally ridiculous pretensions, concerning which, it is difficult to determine whether knavery, credulity, or superstition, were most prominently displayed.

In watching the revolutions of our Profession down to the present day, Medicine, as a progressive science, may be observed to have constantly experienced obstruction and retardation, by the crude and ill-digested speculations of the enthusiasts in science, and the seekers after the wonderful, as well as by the less

dignified aberrations of the fanatic or the charlatan. Bronssais's premature generalizations from certain observations upon the mucous tissues, will furnish you with an illustration of the injury done to medical science by the enthusiast, however distinguished by natural genius or high attainments; and the lengths to which the Homœopathists, and the Animal Magnetisers, would carry their singular notions, exhibit admirably the result of yielding unduly to a love of the marvellous.

I propose, in the sequel of the present lecture, to enter at some length into the consideration of the history of the subjects to which I have last referred; because the questions of Homœopathy and Animal Magnetism have, in these latter days, operated both upon the professional mind, and upon popular credulity, much in the same way as various superstitious and wonder-exciting dogmas would appear to have wrought upon preceding generations. We shall hereby encounter an excellent exemplification of the mode in which the process of self-delusion occurs on the part of some individuals, and how, in other instances, the disposition to take advantage of the popular mania exerts its pernicious influence upon great and extensive masses of the community. The review of the history, and present condition also, of these assumed discoveries, will afford a favorable opportunity for directing your attention to the best means of testing their soundness, by carefully and philosophically sifting the evidence upon which their pretensions rest.

The term Homœopathy is derived from two Greek

words, ὁμοῖον, like, and παθoσ, suffering, “similar disease,” and is employed to designate a system of medicine whose fundamental principle is, that morbid symptoms are removable by the administration of medicaments capable of inducing the same in a normal condition of the system, *similia similibus curantur*.

The proposer of the Homœopathic system was a German physician, of the name of Hahnemann, who was led to consider, that all diseases might be excited by the action of particular medicines, as well as by their ordinarily recognized causes,—that every substance, having the property of originating a train of symptoms, might have also the power of combatting such systems when proceeding from a different source. It appears that Hahnemann had, for a long time, been dissatisfied with existing theories, and especially with the hypothesis by which the specific properties of medicines are commonly explained. In consequence, he was anxious to effect a reformation in the department of Therapeutics, and, as a preliminary step, instituted a series of experiments with the view of determining the action of various articles of the *Materia Medica* upon individuals in a state of health; and the principal fact, which seems to have suggested the first notions of homœopathy, dates from the year 1790, and relates to a supposed discovery of certain morbid properties of bark. Having administered this substance in certain cases where no appreciable disease was present, he affirms, that paroxysms of intermittent fever ensued, in no respect differing from those for the cure of which this agent is generally employed. He

continued to prosecute this train of inquiry, experimenting upon many other medicines, and, especially, on those, sometimes denominated *specifics*, such as mercury, sulphur, antimony, lead, gold, and so on.

Previously to the year 1800, he had recorded, in Hufeland's journal, a great number of cases confirmatory of the homœopathic principle; and from that date, up to the year 1828, he, from time to time, issued a variety of works, comprising the results of his further investigations. Amongst the most prominent of these publications, may be mentioned one on the "art of curing," wherein is contained a complete exposition of his mode of practice; another, specially on "Materia Medica," a work including all the facts relative to the action of medicines upon man in a state of health; and, also, a "Treatise on Chronic Diseases." The principles of the homœopathic system, and the main facts upon which they are declared to rest, are, in the above works, amply explained; whence it may be gathered, that the homœopaths attach no importance to anatomical, physiological, or pathological researches, but confine themselves, almost exclusively, to the observation of groups of symptoms, and to the discovery of their appropriate remedies. They admit no classification or denomination of diseases, beyond the division into acute and chronic; and as I have before stated, their only object, in practice, is to administer, in disease, medicines capable of inducing like symptoms in health; thus they propose to arrest vomiting by emetics, diarrhœa by purgatives, and perspirations by sudorifics. They affirm, moreover, that mercury only cures syphilis,

because it has the property of exciting a similar affection; that sulphur removes itch, only because it may give rise to a like form of cutaneous eruption, and, in a word, that every remedy obtains its curative from its morbid properties.

But the most extraordinary feature in this system is contained in its *Posology*. According to Hahnemann, the dose of every medicine, homœopathically considered, at all times exceeds in power the common causes of disease, and the efficacy of remedies progressively increases, as the dose is diminished; thus, for example, a grain of gold, though possessing in its ordinary state, no medicinal action, still, when so diluted, that the quadrillionth part of a grain of the metal only remains in one grain of the ultimate preparation, the sanative virtue of the gold becomes so developed, that if this be placed in a phial, and the very air from it be inspired, only for a few seconds, melancholy and disgust of life, are almost immediately replaced by cheerfulness, and a renewed relish for the good things of this world. Again, he says, “that if a grain of salt be reduced to the millionth degree of attenuation; this powder be dissolved in diluted alcohol, and the division extended to the decillionth degree;—carried to this degree of dilution, sea-salt is a powerful and heroical medicament, which can only be administered to patients with the greatest caution.” Silex, or common flint is also a powerful homœopathic agent, as appears from the language of Hahnemann, where he says, “This earth being reduced to a millionth degree of attenuation, a grain of the powder is reduced to the decillionth dilution. In

fact, dilutions to the billionth or trillionth degree produce effects much too violent; that of the sextillionth degree only may be commenced with, but this only suits robust persons;—in irritable subjects, it is prudent to use only the decillionth dilution.”

Here, Gentlemen, you have a summary of the celebrated *homœopathic system*, and in the absence of all records of its actual history, you would infer, that such an assemblage of gratuitous assumption, inaccuracy of demonstration, and fallacy of induction, never could have obtained one solitary promoter, except in the person of its extraordinarily constituted author;—and, yet, even in the nineteenth century, the human mind would not appear to have emancipated itself from the disposition to sacrifice every sober conclusion of experience, to the wildest extravagancies of a heated imagination. Indeed, not only has this doctrine numbered amongst its supporters, eminent and ingenious individuals, in almost every country in Europe, but in Germany, Russia, France, and Italy, it seems to have been thought worthy of being made the subject of public experiment.

I have said, Gentlemen, that it was my design to call your attention to the necessity of caution in pronouncing a judgment upon assumed discoveries in medical science, and the proposal of the system, of which I have just offered a slight review, furnishes an excellent illustration of such necessity.

Medicine, like every other science, is one that advances always progressively, and, consequently, useful and striking improvements do ever and anon occur;

and when any of these happen to comprise notions which seem to be much in advance of the existing state of knowledge, they are constantly assailed with violent opposition ; and thus, it appears, that whatever is new, be it sound or be it fallacious, is almost sure at first to encounter general disapprobation. Homœopathy, therefore, must not be rejected because the views which it embraces are not explicable by past experience, but its pretensions must be tested by the application of principles of investigation recognized by true philosophy ; and these principles have for their basis, rational and unprejudiced observation, and the institution of a series of judicious and impartially conducted experiments. It may now be shewn, that homœopathy, when so tried, has by no means established its bold assumptions.

Thus, a German advocate of this system, practising in Russia, received, from the Grand Duke Michael, ample opportunities of proving, if he were able, by a comparison of facts, the benefit of the homœopathic over the ordinary modes of treatment ; and a certain number of patients in the wards of a military hospital were intrusted to his care. At the expiration of two months, he was restrained from proceeding farther, for, in comparing results, it was found, that, within this period, of four hundred and fifty-seven patients treated by the ordinary means, three hundred and sixty-four, or three-fourths, were cured, and none died ; whereas, by the new method, tried on one hundred and twenty-eight patients, one half only were cured, and five had died. From this striking and satisfactory mode of experiment, it would appear, that the system of Hahnemann, when

reduced to practice, is ultimately destructive of life and health ; inasmuch as it implies the omission of those plans of treatment which have received the sanction of long and accumulated experience.

By the selection of another example, furnished by the proceedings of the Russian Government, with respect to this matter, it is, I think, placed beyond all doubt, that the absolute effect of the homœopathic remedies is just nothing at all. A certain number of patients, in one hospital, were treated homœopathically ; and in another, merely subjected to dietetic regulations and suitable regimen. The results presented no material variation ; and the medical council, appointed to superintend the experiments, thus reports :—“ The medical council, after having attentively weighed the results of the experiments made according to the homœopathic method, and compared them with those made according to the principles of the *medicine expectante*, finds that they greatly resemble the latter, and are probably based only on the *vis medicatrix naturæ* ; for the infinitely minute doses can produce no effect on the human body. The medical council is, therefore, of opinion, that the homœopathic practice should be prohibited in sanatory establishments dependent on government, for the following reasons.

- ‘ 1. Acute diseases require energetic means of treatment, which are not to be expected from homœopathy.’
- ‘ 2. The homœopathic treatment of external lesions and surgical diseases is altogether out of the question.’
- ‘ 3. Some slight affections get well while under the homœopathic treatment, but similar affections disappear

equally well, without any medical treatment, by the adoption of an appropriate regimen, good air, and cleanliness.' ”

It is a known truth, that a number of diseases, in their milder forms, will gradually disappear upon the mere abstraction of all injurious stimulants, and without the employment of any pharmaceutical agents whatsoever. And here we have a sufficient explanation of the vaunted cures of the homœopathists.

Experiments, also, are not wanting to demonstrate the utter fallacy of the assertions of the founder of this system, that medicines curative of particular diseases may induce the same, if administered in a state of health ; and, without fatiguing your attention by any unnecessary detail, I shall state that Quinine was taken by that distinguished pathologist M. Andral, and by ten other persons, at first in homœopathic doses, without the production of any effect ; then, in ordinary doses, which were gradually increased from six to twenty-four grains during the day. In not a single instance did the slightest symptom of intermittent fever supervene ; in some, whose stomachs were somewhat sensitive, the larger doses occasioned slight indisposition and headache. Sulphur was also tried upon several persons, without the occurrence of any cutaneous eruption.

From all these circumstances, Gentlemen, I consider that you will be fully justified in pronouncing, without hesitation, the whole doctrine of Hahnemann to be as unfounded in fact, as it is delusive in theory.

I shall now pass on to the consideration of a subject, which, owing to several circumstances, possesses an

especial interest at the present day. I allude, Gentlemen, to *Animal Magnetism*. This question has, for the first time, within the last twelve months, engaged the serious attention of British Physiologists. What, then, is meant by the term Animal Magnetism? It would be difficult to determine, from the various writings of the leading supporters of this doctrine, what we are hereby precisely to understand. In fact, the definitions offered by two of its most distinguished advocates, Laplace and Rostan, leave us in the same obscurity as if they had never been offered; thus, the former speaks of "certain phenomena which result from the extreme sensibility of the nerves, leading to opinions regarding the existence of a new agent called Animal Magnetism;" and the latter says, "we must understand by Animal Magnetism a peculiar, unwonted, abnormal condition of the nervous system, presenting a series of physiological phenomena, hitherto imperfectly appreciated; phenomena ordinarily determined in certain individuals by the influence of another individual, exercising particular acts, with the intention of producing this condition."

Hence, you will perceive that Laplace, in describing Animal Magnetism as consisting in *certain phenomena*, and Rostan, in characterising the same, as dependent upon a *peculiar, unwonted, and abnormal condition*, convey no information whatsoever as to any assumed fundamental principle. Therefore, we must attempt to gather from the general tenor of the works upon this subject, what is meant by the phenomena of Animal Magnetism.

It seems, then, that the most simple conditions in-

duced by magnetic operations are various modifications of the nervous sensibility, such as yawning, slight prickings, convulsive movements, sleep, somnambulism, suspension of common sensation, various hysteric symptoms, &c. A higher order of phenomena, *clairvoyancé* and *prevision*, consist in the manifestation of vision without the aid of the eyes, sight by the epigastrium, the ends of the fingers, the occiput, or the forehead, and nobody knows where besides,—the gift of prophecy, the determination of the seat, nature, and treatment of diseases by individuals who have not studied medicine,—the communication of the thoughts from one person to another, by the mere effort of volition, and so on.

That you may not suppose that I have here given an exaggerated account of the lofty pretensions of the professors of this sublime art, I have translated the following passage, being an extract from a thesis defended before the Faculty of Medicine, at Paris, in August, 1832, by M. Alfred Fillassier, and intended to illustrate the prodigious advantages of Animal Magnetism in practical medicine.

“ Although our philosophy and the actual state of medical science have, in modern times especially, brought to a high degree of certainty the diagnosis of diseases of the solids, still, it cannot be denied, that, in many cases, this diagnosis is obscure, difficult, impossible, even with our present data. The art of diagnosis, notwithstanding the aids recently afforded by chemistry, is yet in its infancy with respect to alterations in the fluids, more particularly the imponderables ; well, I believe myself entitled to think, that the instinctive faculties of somnam-

bulists might serve to rectify, enlighten, or confirm our judgment upon the alterations of the solids in obscure circumstances, and put us in the way of discovery relative to alterations in the fluids. These faculties (magnetic, I presume, Gentlemen,) might be useful to us most especially in clearing up the history of nervous and *cutaneous* affections, and of many chronic ailments; they (the said faculties,) might probably explain such of their causes as are yet concealed from us. A disease is often detected by the physician; but he often doubts, or is mistaken as to its nature: he judges it to be inflammatory, it is nervous; a good somnambulist may then remove his doubts and rectify his errors.

“The therapeutical part of medicine has made immense progress by modern investigations, but we must avow, and this is the suitable moment for being modest, how little is its power in the treatment of many diseases. It is my opinion that new aids would be discovered in the lights which somnambulists would furnish, engaged in the search after remedies, and in the treatment of certain affections, acute or chronic, the most serious and the most incurable. What characterizes the great physician is that peculiar tact which science adorns, but which it gives not; a faculty half instinctive, half rational, by which he ascertains the various particularities of disease, and determines the indications proper to each of them.

“This felicitous combination of instinct and of intelligence, which is genius, may yet be deceived; besides it is very rare. Most medical men are reduced to the ne-

cessity of relying upon the assistance furnished by a plain understanding, which enables them to know many general rules ; but, in the attempt to apply these to particular cases, they move constantly in the dark. Now, in somnambulism is especially displayed the instinct of man, a faculty remarkable in some persons, and eminently adapted to divine the individual wants. Why should not the instinct of tried somnambulists be associated with the intelligence of medical men in the treatment of severe and doubtful diseases? Their instinct would feel, would discover, what the intelligence of the latter would judge and rectify. This intelligence would propose, in its turn, means of which the former would determine the suitable employment. What is the legitimate ambition of the physician? To cure. He ought, then, if he be consistent with himself, to be encompassed with all the agencies capable of conducting him to his object, provided, however, that they offend not morality. I, a physician, shall apply magnetism to such affections as demand it, as I shall do in regard of opium, of bark, of ipecacuanha, and other remedies. I will draw every possible advantage from somnambulism, as I would from auscultation and percussion. Physicians without shame, and traffickers in their art, will, doubtless, treat me as a charlatan ; I shall be a credulous fanatic in the eyes of more than one medical organ ; a fool, a dolt, an ambitious one will probably see their image in me ; I know all that, for I have learnt to know mankind ; but what matter ? The absolute power of the magnetiser, and the passive obedience of the somnambulist, open a vast field for curative effects in the diseases

of the latter ; and at first, the somnambulist obtains this magnetic sleep so salutary by itself ; he is susceptible, besides, of seeing his own ills and their remedies ; you, his magnetiser, approve or disapprove. But afterwards, you are all-powerful in respect of this being who there sleeps before you ; you will, and he is removed from every thing that is injurious to him, and placed where every thing is beneficial to him ! Is he cold, you warm him ; is he hot, you cool him. You blow upon all his pains, whatsoever they may be, and they disappear ; you change his tears into smiles, his sorrow into joy. Is he absent from his country and his mother, you cause him to see them without having seen them yourself ; does he receive morbid symptoms from another, you drive them from his body ; you paralyze his sensibility if he have a painful operation to undergo ; you metamorphose water into a liquid which he desires, or which you judge useful to him, and the water acts like this liquid ; you cause that it should remain as water for his stomach and inflamed intestines, and that it should become bark for his blood and his nervous system. I have done more, I have offered to a somnambulist an empty glass, she has drunk, the movements of deglutition have taken place in the usual manner, and her thirst has been appeased ; with nothing, I have calmed her hunger ; with nothing, I have served her splendid dinners. (Medical men will conceive the necessity of such experiments in certain cases.) What cannot we do for the cure of a being over whom we are all-powerful. Behold, for a truth, a new medicine, a medicine from man to man,—a firm and upright intention, abounding in tenderness and charity,

associated with a sound and vigorous body,—behold the greatest of all agents in the treatment of diseases.”

Let me assure you, Gentlemen, that this is only an average specimen of what you will discover in works upon Animal Magnetism. Wonder of wonders constitutes the magnetic somnambulist!! In his, or her individuality, are comprehended qualities infinitely more marvellous than any thing of which we read in ancient or in modern history,—in the records of fiction, or in those of reality,—in prose, or in rhyme. Extraordinary, indeed, were the events of old, rendering famous the oracles of Delphi and the Pythian Apollo. Exceeding every capacity of the human understanding are the incredible narratives contained in the far renowned pages of the Arabian Nights. All, all, however, shrink into insignificance when contrasted with the astounding details of the Animal Magnetisers.

You may, now, naturally have some inclination to be informed by what process the miracles of sonambulism are produced,—by what visible agency the transposition of the senses is accomplished, and the mysterious gift of prophecy communicated.

It would seem, then, that the art has varied at different periods. *Mesmer*, the accredited discoverer of Animal Magnetism, adopted a practice at variance with that of his modern disciples. In the midst of a large room was placed a wooden vessel, known in the annals of Animal Magnetism by the term *baquet*; this vessel was supplied with a lid perforated with a number of holes, whence issued small bars of iron jointed and flexible. The patients were arranged about the said

baquet, and each had his own particular bar, which, by means of its joints could be applied directly to the diseased part. The patients were united by means of a cord placed around their bodies, constituting thereby a magnetic chain, the influence of which was sometimes increased by a junction of hands. A piano-forte was placed in a corner of the room, upon which different musical airs were performed, and, in some instances, vocal accompaniments still further heightened the effect. Mesmer's agents in the performance, had each one, in his hand, a small iron rod, ten or twelve inches in length, which was regarded as the conductor of the magnetic fluid; and its point was considered to have the property of concentrating the same, and of rendering the emanations more powerful.

Sound was also a magnetic conductor, and in order to communicate the fluid to the piano, it was only necessary to bring one of the rods of iron into contact with it. The interior of the *baquet* constituted a sort of magnetic reservoir, though it included nothing of an electrical character. The influence was communicated to the patients in various ways, by means of the bars issuing from the wooden vessel, by the cord which tied them together, by the union of hands, and by the charms of music. Some were magnetised by the finger and iron rod of the Mesmerian agents, some by a fixed look, others by various manipulations made upon the abdominal region, and by a number of other practices too tedious to enumerate.

Many inanimate objects, such as trees, glass, earthenware, &c., were capable of receiving magnetic qualities,

so that, on being approached in a certain manner, the specific results were obtained. The effects of this extraordinary and variously conducted ceremonial were different in different individuals, seeming, however, from various accounts that have been afforded, to have consisted almost entirely in hysterical, cataleptic, and other anomalous nervous symptoms. The discovery of the specialities of Animal Magnetism, of the wonders of somnambulism, was reserved for the Marquis de Puysegur, whose mode of practice appears to have greatly resembled that employed by professors of the present day.

This method, according to M. Rostan, consists in placing the patient upon a chair, the operator seating himself opposite, in such a manner that their knees and the extremities of their feet may touch,—the magnetiser then takes the thumbs of the subject, and holds them until their temperature equals that of his own hands. He then places his hands on the shoulders of the patient, and after a few minutes, draws them down the arms, directing the extremities of the fingers along the tract of the nerves there spread.

This manipulation must be several times repeated, after which the epigastrium must be gently pressed for a few seconds, and the hands then drawn along the lower extremities. A variety of modifications of this process have been adopted by different magnetisers, and many, at the present day, employ nothing more than certain waving movements of the hands, called *passes*, near the person of the patient, done with the intention of producing the suitable result. Hereunto is said to

succeed somnambulism, and all its attendant magnetic phenomena.

I have thus attempted to furnish you with a succinct account of the assumed discovery in physiology, to which the especial regard of certain leading members of our profession has been directed within a very recent period. And, I feel no doubt, that if any of you be listening, for the first time, to a statement of what is meant by Animal Magnetism, you must feel, that nothing so absurd, nothing half so ridiculous, could ever, surely, in the present age, be submitted, by any one of character, to the serious acceptance of scientific men; and you might be inclined to suppose, moreover, that the whole affair might at once be set aside as unworthy of one moment's attention. Under common circumstances, this might be done with perfect safety; but, for a great many years, the testimony on which the apparent extravagancies, just detailed, have rested their claims to credibility, is of too distinguished and respectable a character to authorise such a proceeding, consistently with the employment of the necessary caution by which all assumed discoveries in medical science should be tested.

Men, celebrated for their talents and their probity, and for their eminence in various departments of inquiry, have offered the guarantee of their character for the soundness of almost every one, even of the most outrageous pretensions of the Mesmerian School.

When you are informed that persons of such unquestionable acuteness, penetration, and actual attainments, as Treviranus and Hufeland in Germany,

Georget and Rostan in France, and, more recently, Elliotson and Mayo in this country, have publicly declared that, after examination of the subject, they are convinced of its actual foundation in nature; when, moreover, you are made aware that a Committee of the French Academy of Medicine, after a six years' investigation, reported in favor of magnetism, even of the occasional manifestation of *clairvoyance* and *prevision*, so called; and, when the high authority of Cuvier and Laplace is referred to, as testimony of the correctness of its fundamental principles, I think you will agree with me, Gentlemen, in considering that, however disposed we might be, in the first instance, to turn from the subject of Animal Magnetism with contempt, it would hardly be philosophical to maintain that we are in a condition, *a priori*, to decide this question with greater accuracy and certainty than the distinguished parties whom I have just named, as having reported in its favor, after what they have deemed to be a satisfactory investigation of the matter.

As then, in the case of Homœopathy, the ultimate decision regarding the claims of Animal Magnetism must rest upon the character of the facts alleged in its behalf, and not upon either their assumed incredibility, or upon the weight and importance of the names enrolled amongst its advocates. It will not be possible for me, upon this occasion, to enter at full length into the discussion of the value of all the evidence adduced in support of this question, but I may select illustrations of the same, quite adequate to give you a general notion of the character of the whole.

It is sufficiently obvious to every one conversant with the phenomena of certain nervous affections, that most of the facts brought forward by the magnetisers are perfectly explicable, without the supposition of any newly discovered agent. All the minor phenomena of which I have spoken, such as yawning, slight prickings, convulsive movements, sleep, great diminution or exaltation of the cutaneous sensibility, and various hysterical symptoms, may frequently be induced artificially in many nervous subjects by some striking influence exercised upon the imagination. Imitation and habit, too, are found to operate very powerfully upon the animal economy, both in the states of health and disease. How often is the action of yawning transmitted from one to another by mere sympathy. Muscular twitchings of parts, squinting, and stammering, are often acquired by imitation. Chorea, or St. Vitus's dance, is sometimes contracted by children by associating with others affected with the complaint. The same remark also applies to epilepsy, and to several other nervous diseases. If one female experience an hysterical attack in the wards of an hospital, or in any public assembly, others will not unfrequently be similarly seized.

A circumstance that happened in the experience of the celebrated Boerhaave is often quoted by medical writers, as shewing the powerful effects of imitation, and of moral impression. This anecdote, which I am in the habit of repeating in my lecture on epilepsy, is to the following effect. "A boy was admitted into the orphan hospital, at Haarlem, who was subject to epileptic fits; shortly afterwards, some of the other juvenile inmates

became similarly affected, apparently in consequence of witnessing his paroxysms. At length, almost all the boys experienced epileptic seizures, notwithstanding the employment of various means to prevent such a result. Boerhaave, having made every proper enquiry, adopted the following expedient, with a view of ascertaining how far a deep and sudden mental impression might be efficacious in arresting the epileptic attacks, inasmuch as their origin seemed to depend on some such cause. Entering, one morning, the large hall where the boys were assembled, and, after asking a number of questions, he, with great gravity of manner, ordered the governor, in a loud and firm tone of voice, to have a number of cauterizing irons put into the fire and kept constantly red hot, so that, at the moment when any of them should be seized with a fit, one of the irons should be applied, and the patient be burnt to the very bone." This stratagem completely accomplished its object, for the terror of so alarming a remedy prevailed over the sympathetic influence, and no return of the fits occurred.

Amongst other illustrations of such phenomena may be enumerated the omnicurative tar water of Bishop Berkeley, the famous metallic tractors of Perkins, and the celebrated stone solvent of Mrs. Stephens, for the promulgation of a knowledge of which latter the British Parliament actually voted the sum of five thousand pounds. With such facts before us, of constant occurrence in the whole history of our profession, an ample explanation is afforded of all the minor phenomena of Animal Magnetism.

Who, then, can feel surprise that the epileptic and hysterical patients (and these, even by the avowal of the magnetisers themselves, are almost the only individuals susceptible of this influence), who can feel surprise, I say, that unusual nervous symptoms should have displayed themselves as the result of the operations of Mesmer, or of Puysegur, or of the less imposing practises of Elliotson and others in this country. But what shall we say of the higher phenomena of Animal Magnetism, of the transposition of the senses, of the super-human exaltation of the faculties, of prophetic inspiration, how, in two words, shall we dispose of *clairvoyance* and *prevision*? The plain matter of fact, Gentlemen, is, that the evidence of the production of such phenomena becomes deplorably weak, when it is thoroughly sifted; and yet it is a rule of evidence that, for the establishment of any extraordinary position, the proofs in its support must be correspondingly strong. After the employment of some little research, in the attempt to ascertain the actual value of the evidence upon which the credibility of such phenomena rests, I consider that the strongest testimony has been supplied by the French Academicians, who, in 1831, reported in favor of their occasional occurrence, also by the truly philosophical-minded Georget, and, within the last few months, by Dr. Elliotson and Mr. Mayo. It is true that, in addition, the advocates of Magnetism adduce an immense amount of statement tending to establish this point; but nothing which they bring forward rests upon better grounds than the above, and nothing is appealed to by them with greater confidence. If then, upon close

examination of this testimony, we detect the strongest reasons for supposing that fallacy is at the foundation of all, is it not right that we should, in the present state of the question, infer as much of the whole, especially, when consideration is made of the monstrous character of the propositions to which we are required to give assent. Much stress, naturally enough, is laid upon the circumstance of the commission of the French Academy, after an investigation of six years, having reported, to some extent, in confirmation of the more extravagant pretensions of the disciples of Mesmer.

But it is important to be acquainted with certain facts, which very considerably tend to reduce the value of the report in this respect. Well, then, in the first place, three most influential members of the commission, M. M. Laennec, Double, and Magendie, refused their assent to this report, and did not sign it. Again, it was announced by the commissioners, that in a very large proportion of instances where effects ensued from the magnetic operations, these were obviously produced by ennui, monotony, and the power of the imagination; and it appeared moreover, upon analysis of the report, that the cases which had induced them to vouch for the occasional manifestation of *clairvoyance* and *prevision*, reduce themselves to some three or four, in the space of six years, though their enquiries were prosecuted under circumstances that should, one would have thought, have furnished them with abundant instances, had they had any existence in fact: and further, it seems that they, far from taking any precaution against imposition, trusted very largely to the honesty and good

faith of the magnetisers and the magnetised, between whom, there was reason to entertain suspicion of deceptive collusion. M. Dubois, who was present at several of the experiments, observes, in a critical examination of the report, "there is no doubt the commissioners saw the phenomena they have described, but there is an enormous difference between the facts observed, and the conclusions drawn from them. They believed the absurd, the miraculous, the wonderful; yet the circumstances as they occurred explain themselves rationally, either by very ordinary physiological phenomena, or by well known pathological laws, and sometimes by fraud."

It is not necessary, nor will time allow, that I should go into a detailed analysis of the three or four cases adduced by the commissioners as illustrative of the higher phenomena, for, in my own opinion, the critique of M. Dubois sufficiently characterises them. I have mentioned that M. Georget (whose conversion to a belief in Animal Magnetism, after having been its contemptuous opponent, was a great triumph to its advocates,) had attested the truth of even the somnambulic miracles, but, after his premature decease, his associate in the experiments, M. Londe, ascertained, and publicly announced, that he and M. Georget had been duped by some miserable creatures who had afterwards boasted of the circumstance. One of these was a female of the name of Petronilla, whose famous exploits Mr. Colquhoun, in his "*Isis Revelata*," relates as fact; this person died of phthisis in the Salpetriere, in 1833, and repeatedly declared, in the latter part of her life, to the *internes* of the hospital, that she used to laugh in her

sleeve at Georget and others who were present at the experiments. She stated that herself and another somnambulist named Brouillard had spent many a delightful evening in recounting the mystifications of the day, and in preparing others for the following one. But, then, we have still to dispose of the cases of Elizabeth and Jane Okey, of the North London Hospital, who have recently been operated upon by Dr. Elliotson, and whose exhibitions of *clairvoyance* and prophetic power have been vouched for by Mr. Mayo, Dr. Lardner, and others.

This, in our own steady thinking Isle,—this, from British practitioners of medicine and philosophers,—was certainly most confounding. But, like the rest, when properly examined with requisite precaution, the whole bubble would seem to have burst; for at Dr. Elliotson's request, Mr. Wakely, as many of you are no doubt aware, instituted at his own house a set of experiments upon the two girls whose deeds had excited the admiration and surprise of Dukes, Lords, and Honourable Commoners, within the preceding few weeks; and the result was the strongest possible presumption of the practice of matchless artifice, on the part of Dr. Elliotson's patients. Some weeks have now elapsed since Mr. Wakeley's exposure was published, and not a word in contravention has proceeded from any of the distinguished parties who appear to have been duped by the clever acting of the Okeys. In a few words, Gentlemen, I sincerely believe, that if all the facts and experiments of the Mesmerists be fairly enquired into, the wonderful, and even the new, will invariably disappear.

What, then, is the verdict which the present state of evidence should lead us to pronounce upon this Animal Magnetism? For my own part, I will not venture to assert that no such agent exists in nature, nor that phenomena proper to it have not in some way or other been developed ; but I certainly think myself entitled to express an honest conviction that, hitherto, we have had no clear proof of the same ; and, further, I consider that the pretensions of the Mesmerists come before us under such circumstances that time would be lost by any attempt to determine their validity by self-examination.

Having thus, Gentlemen, furnished you with a brief account of the subjects recently occupying so much of popular attention, it remains for me now, in conclusion, to deduce a practical lesson from what I have just recounted, as exemplifying, in a striking manner, the necessity of caution in pronouncing a judgment upon assumed discoveries in medical science.

It is in accordance with every principle of sound philosophy that in no case is the human mind in a condition for the impartial investigation of any subject, except a riddance be first obtained of all prejudices, resulting either from early education, from mental occupations, or from any enthusiasm or waywardness of constitutional temperament. It is for the enquirer, so prepared, to enter upon a careful and analytical examination of all the facts upon which any proposed novelty is said to depend. He must not, in such investigation, be content with vague or general assertions, but must seek for an acquaintance with each particular incident relating to the subject, and be ready to appreciate every possible

source of fallacy. In arriving at a conclusion, it is eminently important that the proper dependance of one event upon another, in regard of causation, be not misinterpreted; that a mere sequence be not mistaken for a consequence, or a precedent coincidence for a cause. The "*post*" must not be confounded with the "*propter hoc*." When phenomena seem, for the first time, to present themselves to notice, they must not receive forced explanations; new causes must never be assumed when known laws are adequate to account for their appearance. "*Leges philosophandi vetant plures causas fingere vel quærere quam quæ ad rem explicandam sufficient.*"

From the neglect of these principles has resulted that mass of error, absurdities, and ill-constructed systems of doctrine with which the whole history of medicine, as well as that of the other sciences, has abounded; and, assuredly our own era is not free from similar delusions. But you, Gentlemen, attempt cautiously to adhere to the rigid rules of sound inductive philosophy, whereby you may hope to go steadily onward in the true path of improvement, and avoid the subtle and illusive lures of empirical imposition on the one hand, and on the other, the foolish extravagancies of unrestrained enthusiasm.



