

**A letter on the medicinal efficacy of mineral waters : in which especial notice is taken of the late publications of Messieurs Chinks and Pickax, on the same subject : addressed to G. Switch-Her, Esq., director of the Bubble and Spring Manufactory, Brighton / by Germanicus Chironides.**

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A LETTER  
ON  
THE MEDICINAL EFFICACY  
OF  
MINERAL WATERS;

IN WHICH ESPECIAL NOTICE IS TAKEN OF THE LATE  
PUBLICATIONS OF MESSIEURS CHINKS AND PICKAX,  
ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

ADDRESSED TO

G. SWITCH-HER, Esq.

DIRECTOR OF THE BUBBLE AND SPRING MANUFACTORY, BRIGHTON.

BY

GERMANICUS CHIRONIDES,

PHYSICIAN TO THE GRAND LAMA OF THIBET; LATE SENIOR SURGEON TO  
THE HIGH COMMISSIONER LIN'S FIRST REGIMENT OF CELESTIAL  
FOOT GUARDS; AND SURGEON ACCOUCHEUR TO HER  
SABLE MAJESTY THE EMPRESS OF TIMBUCTOO!!

~~~~~  
"Oh that I were written down an ass!"—SHAKSPEARE.  
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GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY.

1840.



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# A LETTER,

&c. &c.

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DEAR SIR,

I SHOULD have been deterred, on any ordinary occasion, from presenting myself to the public in the character of an author, both by reason of the humble opinion I entertain of myself, and from certain misgivings as to whether my poor thoughts might be received favourably or otherwise; but forasmuch as the subject, whereof it is my purpose to treat, is one of general interest and deep importance, and has occupied much of my attention, I am prepared to enter upon it with some degree of confidence.

I look on it as a circumstance upon which I ought to congratulate myself, that I can appeal to you for the attestation of the disinterested motives which induce me to engage in the task; and as I

have no personal ends to answer, I doubt not that the observations I have to offer will be received with candour and consideration.

In the pursuance of my undertaking it will be my painful part occasionally to differ from those talented writers, Messieurs Chinks and Pickax; but I am far from desiring to derogate from their well-earned reputation, and I would hereby express the high sense I entertain of their scientific talent and literary taste.

It had been my original intention to lay down my views in the order in which they had presented themselves to my own mind, but I have been so struck with the perspicuity of arrangement displayed in Mr. Pickax's letter, that after mature deliberation, I have resolved to follow in his track; and in the unfolding of my own views, whilst I shall use his publication as my text-book, I think it will be found I have done ample justice both to his style and matter; at the same time, I shall not fail to give due attention to the elegant and recondite contents of Dr. Chinks' pamphlet.

It was a stigma, which long rested on the gentlemen of the medical profession, that their knowledge was for the most part confined to the tech-

nicalities of their calling, whilst those useful and elegant studies, which tend both to enlarge the mind and refine the taste, were commonly neglected. We believe that at no time was there much truth in the charge, but every day's experience proves that it is now without foundation. Some of the most elegant and learned writers of our age belong to the medical body; there is a charm of style, a force of argument, and a depth of learning, in the writings of men like Abercrombie, Combe, Chinks, and Pickax, which is wholly independent of their professional ability.

The two writers last named, in their pamphlets on the "Efficacy of Mineral Waters," astonish us by the profundity of their learning. With what an unconstrained step do they traverse the fields of classical antiquity! Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle, Horace and Antonius Musa, are quoted with that freedom and force which distinguishes the apt and ready scholar!

Oh charming Spas! which can reanimate the classic sages! Oh delightful mineral springs! by means of which we are introduced to the society of the mighty dead—Vitruvius, Seneca, Pliny, Oribasius, and others! Who would not awake

at early dawn, and hasten, (albeit the air be keen and frosty,) faint and fasting, to the Spa, to meet such goodly company? Ye groves of Academus! hide your heads ashamed! faded are your laurels! Ye pleasant fountains of Baiæ, where have your glories gone!—fallen is your fame!!!

Pardon me, Sir, if, smitten with the sacred love of learning, I have somewhat digressed from the main subject of my letter; but my temptation is my excuse. I have been in the fields of Elysium, and the magic spells of Chinks and Pickax were around me; but I shall now come to the proposed enquiry: “*Paulo majora canamus.*”

I shall venture so far to anticipate the work which Mr. Pickax is preparing for the press, as to say a few words respecting the nature and properties of mineral waters. It is an admirable and startling truth, for the discovery and establishment of which we are indebted to the science and researches of the medical men of continental Europe, and Messieurs Chinks and Pickax of Brighton, that there is no form of disease over which the use of mineral waters does not exercise a sanatory influence; a discovery so important has naturally been entertained with suspicion, or

boldly questioned ; and comparing the talents and æquirements of Messieurs Chinks and Pickax with the extent of their practice, it is in my mind a question whether these gentlemen are not in some measure the victims of a love of truth and science ; but it is thus that genius has ever been rewarded. The discoveries of Hunter and Harvey, and the dietary system of Abernethy, were in their day received as so many forms of quackery, and the authors were accordingly vilified and persecuted by the members of their own profession. Happily the times are altered. Since the invention of railroads, the discovery of the northern passage to the moon, and the application of steam to all the useful purposes of life, the public mind has undergone, so to speak, a course of mineral waters, and is now prepared to receive whatsoever Messieurs Chinks and Pickax are pleased to authenticate.

What these virtues are, from which results so desirable are to be derived, is a question which will now receive a brief, but we hope satisfactory consideration.

All water is to a certain extent *mineral* ; but that which we commonly understand by *mineral*



water, or to speak technically "*aqua mineralis*," differs from simple water in the circumstance, that it is more largely impregnated with mineral substances, such as are calculated to produce medicinal effects. Now, it is well established that the effect of simple water, like its taste, is negative. From this it of course follows that the efficacy of such waters depends on the proportion of mineral substances which enter into their composition. Yet, although at first sight it may seem paradoxical, it is nevertheless quite true, that to estimate their medicinal properties, it is by no means necessary to be acquainted with their chemical composition—in other words, the less you know of their nature, the more salutary their effects. This is a circumstance of deep interest and importance to many of the medical profession, and it is thus boldly stated by the talented Mr. Pickax. Reasoning "upon their action and therapeutical virtues from their chemical analysis alone is positively impracticable." "It is absurd," the same author adds, "to reason on the chemical composition of this or that particular water with reference to particular complaints, as though mineral waters were remedies of an ordinary character."

Such being the case, it is, as Mr. P. rightly observes, improper in a medical practitioner to prescribe particular waters for particular diseases. It is evident that the less either doctor or patient knows about them the better they are, and therefore we would humbly recommend that all persons wishing to make trial of the virtues of mineral waters, should at the earliest possible opportunity obtain Dr. Saunders' list of the several kinds of mineral waters, and having first invoked the goddess of memory to fix them firmly in their mind, afterwards receive into their stomach such quantities of Carlsbad, Vichy, Spa, Tunbridge, Bristol, &c., as Messrs. Chinks and Pickax may deem proper to prescribe.

It might at first sight seem an objection to the value of factitious waters in general, and those of Brighton in particular, that if the chemical analysis of mineral waters be not the test by which we are to determine their respective suitability to particular forms of disease,—then the converse of this proposition is likewise true, and no chemical composition can subserve a medicinal purpose; but if we examine the matter a little more closely, we shall see cause for attributing

to the Brighton factitious waters the very same virtues which the natural springs are known to possess. And in justice to the Establishment over which your skill and experience presides, I shall endeavour to be clear and explicit.

The efficacy of mineral waters is two-fold,—*inherent* and *communicative*. They possess an *inherent* efficacy, or “vis medicinalis,” by virtue of which certain results follow from their use. Now this essential power or efficacy must of course depend on the combination and amalgamation of the several substances which go to make up the whole, rather than on any of those particular substances taken separately, of which the whole is made up. Now, sir, I confess I am not able to discover by what course of experiment you are enabled so nicely to select and commingle the various minute ingredients, as to produce the happy combination; but of the *fact*, I cannot for a moment entertain a doubt, attested as it is by Messieurs Chinks and Pickax, and borne out by the numerous cases, perhaps eight or nine thousand, which have come under their observation.

Mineral waters further possess a *communicative*

efficacy, or, as it may be denominated, a “*vis medicatrix*.” The use of mineral waters is to stimulate and awaken the dormant energies of nature; and the disease is expelled, not by reason of the action of the waters on the part affected, but by the healthful effort of an invigorated system. Thus, says the learned Dr. Chinks, “an indirect remedy is effected by exciting the natural conservative efforts of the constitution.” Just (to use a simple illustration) as a wise parent or teacher will endeavour to eradicate a particular vice—suppose lying or indelicacy—by addressing himself to the child’s moral principle through the means of a course of moral training—the mineral waters, in fact, of the moral economy.

From these considerations we are led to distinguish the exact province of mineral waters in the cure of diseases, and therefore it can serve no good purpose, as the learned Dr. observes, to enquire into the “*modus operandi*,” if experience teaches that mineral waters, whether factitious, or otherwise, whether in Brighton or Schlangenbad, so affect the system as to eject disease by a summary wholesale process, it is superfluous to pry into the mysteries of iron,

mercury, or sulphur which lie hidden in the bowels of the earth, or in the no less profound depths, sir, of your scientific attainments: these are matters which lie far beyond our reach or control, and an adequate sense of the weakness of our powers ought to teach us to abstain from the attempt to estimate your waters by any chemical analysis, when we are already persuaded of the virtues of their chemical composition.

I think it is evident that a remedy such as this must be universal in the benefits to be derived from it. I do not mean by this that diseases in every *stage* are to be cured by them; but it is my firm conviction—a conviction founded on the views I entertain of their nature, and the experience I have had of their effects—that every *form* of disease is subject to their influence; and I am no little confirmed in these opinions, from observing that medical men, who know the value of mineral waters, both at Brighton and elsewhere, recommend them to almost every patient, whatever his complaint may be. Much, therefore, as I admire Dr. Chinks, and highly as I think of his pamphlet, I cannot but regret that in alluding to this subject, his tone should have be-

come deprecatory, and that he did not boldly state and stand by a truth, which it is clear his judgment has adopted, and which, indeed, follows of course from the premises he has laid down.

It will not, I hope, be considered out of place to offer a few concluding remarks on the style which adorns and dignifies those publications to which I have so frequently alluded. They possess many excellences in common, such as lucid arrangement, a remarkable correctness and nice adaptation of language, the most refined taste displayed both in sentiment and expression, and a perfect freedom from professional peculiarities; but each has also its distinguishing excellences, agreeably contrasting with one another. By the man of science, the Doctor's style will be preferred, from the close, clear, analytical reasoning which pervades it; the general reader will be more pleased with Mr. Pickax, because his style is more diffuse, and abounds in illustration: the former is weighty and dignified, the latter pointed and elegant: the style of the one is formed on the purest models of antiquity—that of the other is agreeable to the most graceful

English standard. The former is of the school of Johnson, ponderous in argument and expression—the latter of that of Addison, accurate and perspicuous. A striking example of the peculiar beauty of Mr. Pickax's style may be found in the 14th page of his pamphlet: here mineral waters are happily personified under the figure of a "foe," exceeding dark and fierce,—literally boiling with valour,—he is engaged in undermining the strong-holds of disease. Already the mine is sprung!—and the whole *caterva morborum* blown into the air!—we expect to hear no more of them; they have taken a trip to Jupiter, or the Georgium Sidus. But not so fast, good sir; diseases are stubborn things, and exceeding tenacious of life,—for lo! the next moment, we find them standing rank and file, and the "foe" (that is, you will observe, the "mineral waters") is seen driving at them furiously, bubbling away among their discomfited hosts, making huge havoc among them, and at last, having achieved a mighty victory, expelling them from the citadel of the constitution.

In conclusion, I shall merely observe, that the delicacy and judgment which both these writers

have displayed in the treatment of their subject, is worthy of the highest admiration.

Dr. Chinks' pamphlet more particularly cannot offend the most sensitive delicacy; and if we bear in mind the subject of which he had to treat, and the fact that "cases" were necessary to confirm his argument, we shall be led to acknowledge that he has performed a task more difficult, because more delicate, than when he undertook those *Herculean* labours, to which he so modestly alludes, and which will hand his name down to posterity as the benefactor of mankind, and the enemy of dirty stables.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

GERMANICUS CHIRONIDES.

To G. SWITCH-HER, Esq.,  
Director,  
Bubble and Spring Manufactory,  
Brighton.



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