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"Familiar in their Mouths as HOUSEHOLD WORDS."—SHAKESPEARE.

HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

N^o. 381.]

SATURDAY, JULY 11, 1857.

DOCTORS' BILLS.

WHEN a young gentleman who has no incapacity for the enjoyment of baked meats and pastry, being tried with beef can eat none, being tried with turkey turns against poultry, chokes in the struggle to get pudding down, and even lets a strawberry lie whole in his mouth because he cannot make up his mind to swallow it, there is a question that may reasonably occur to his friends,—Can he be hungry? We are good friends of the medical profession, and we have now at our elbow a pile of Parliamentary bills that have been introduced by one at a time or two at a time—just now trial is being made with two at a time—under the belief that each may be the bill beginning, "Whereas it is expedient to amend the laws relating to the medical profession," which the medical profession says it wants. The profession cries, or is said to cry, "Beef!" gets beef, and declares it too tough or too tender, too dry or too juicy. Away it goes. The profession cries—or is said to cry—"Pudding!" and is offered a great choice of puddings, but eats none. The profession only wants a bit of cheese, but there is no cheese that is *the* cheese. Yet the profession, though it can eat nothing, really seems to feel uneasy in the stomach. As friends, we suggest that, perhaps the sense is one, not of a void to be filled, but of a weight to be thrown off. The similitude is less agreeable than apt. We take another.

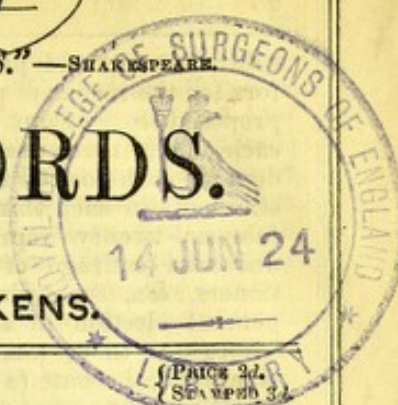
A young lady, tending to be buxom, feels a difficulty in getting on, complains of cold at the extremities, looks blue in the face, and calls in a variety of surgeons and physicians. The young lady's name is Miss Hygeia. One adviser prescribes blisters to the right leg, another prescribes blisters to the left leg; various cunning surgeons even suggest odd morsels of amputation here and there, and there is no potion that is not to be found in the prescriptions laid upon the table for her benefit,—upon the table of the House of Commons. The young lady is the medical profession. Some very ordinary persons, who are not cunning at all, don't see any use in blistering her legs—cauterising by law the medical corporations—or in shaving her head, and cupping her behind

the brain—taking the strength, by law, out of the universities; and think it a wise instinct that keeps her from the swallowing of any legal potion. It is, they say, a pure case of tight lacing. Cut her stays.

While we write, two rival dockets of opinion and advice upon her case—medical bills—are before the public. In each, the advice is to put her in some sort of irons, dose, and bandage her; in neither is it recommended that her chest be cut loose, and allowed to work as it can work if left to nature. A woman can live without being fixed in a machine that shall inflate her lungs for her, push up her diaphragm, and regulate the rise and fall of every rib. So can a profession; though the legislators for physician, surgeon, and apothecary don't appear to think so. Of the two courses of treatment proposed in the case of Hygeia (the one by Mr. Headlam, the other by Lord Elcho), one involves more cramping and dosing than the other, and is, therefore, by so much worse than the other. If either be adopted, we shall presently have reason to show why one should be taken and the other left. But we have, in the first place, our own counsel to give. Undoubtedly Hygeia is blue in the face; she does find some difficulty in getting on, she is very much starved at the extremities, and is weaker than she ought to be about the head. Something must be done for her; but what? We say, do not dose, bleed, blister, amputate, or bandage: simply, Cut her stays.

Setting aside metaphor, let us ask what is the main thing proposed by the law-makers?—or the bill-makers: they never get so far as to the making of a law. "For the good of the public," one bill declares itself to be. "For the good of the profession, I am," says another.

Here is one that was introduced by Mr. Warburton, Mr. Wakley, and Mr. Hawes, in the year eighteen hundred and forty,—whereas and because it was "expedient that all male persons practising medicine in the United Kingdom should be registered; and that all properly educated medical practitioners should be encouraged to exercise their profession, in all or any of its branches in whatsoever parts of the British,"—et cætera. The bill set up a machinery of registrars and



sub-registrars, and proposed taxing the doctors for the means of paying its expenses. It proposed to get up a medical council for each of the three parts of the United Kingdom; in each council there were to be thirty-six men; in each thirty-six there were to be four-and-twenty representatives chosen by universal suffrage of the registered practitioners, &c., &c.; also there was to be a general election of six every year, &c., &c. There was to be a medical senate, as there is a clerical senate (a senate among senates), and then there was to be a new college of medicine. We need not go into details. It is not at all surprising to us, that the medical profession could not make up its mind that this was the bill of bills.

In the year following, Mr. Hawes, Mr. Ewart, and Mr. Hutton introduced this bill again, with variations of detail; the chief variation being the extinction of the idea of another college. There was to be general registration. Bolus and Scalpel were to take out annual certificates, and pay for them. There was to be a Scotch council, an Irish council, and an English council, of twenty in each, the members elected by ballot. They were to form a lower house; and there was to be formed of its select men an upper house or medical senate. The profession naturally did not care greatly to be bothered with the addition of this new machinery to the clogs already tied about its body.

We jump to the years forty-four and forty-five, during which Sir James Graham was engaged in compounding a pill for the doctors. Forty-five was a great year for measures and amended measures. Sir James, in a second version of a former device of his own, proposed a new council of health, with one of Her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State for president, the medical Regius Professor, and certain other persons for the members. The council was to see that a register was kept, to see that examinations were of the right sort, and to protect as well as meddle with existing medical corporations, leaving them their monopolies to all intents and purposes intact. This bill was taken into a committee room, whence it emerged with a new royal college of general practitioners fastened to its tail. But the profession didn't really care about state councils and royal colleges. The bill was torn down; and, in the succeeding year, a new bill was pasted over it by Mr. Wakley and Mr. Warburton. This bill aimed simply at securing registration. It went into committee and came out an amended bill; of which the purport was that all qualified surgeons were to be compelled to take in, as a sort of annual, price five shillings, their marriage lines to the profession whereto they were joined, and be able to prove by them, and by them only, that they were wedded to it lawfully. The doctors didn't care very much about these marriage lines. They were proposed to them

again in the year following, with the addition of some machinery for enabling a "said Secretary of State" to secure uniformity of qualification among doctors. The profession didn't believe in this bill either. We break off the catalogue and come at once to the time present,—which begins last year.

Mr. Headlam introduced last year a new medical bill, which suffered metamorphosis in a committee of the House of Commons. This year the metamorphosed bill appears in the House under Lord Elcho's guardianship, and the unaltered bill also appears in the House, it being again brought forward by Mr. Headlam.

Before we describe the substance of the two new propositions, we must state one very essential fact; because, in the different modes of dealing with this fact, there lies the real difference between the spirit of the one bill and the spirit of the other. There are two sets of examining bodies in Great Britain, first, the corporations of physicians, of surgeons, and of apothecaries; second, the several universities. The universities can grant degrees, of which some do and some do not convey the right of practice, and some give the right of practising only within a given area. The general spirit of Mr. Headlam's bill is to protect the corporations and keep down the universities; the general spirit of the other bill is to protect the universities and keep down some, at least, of the corporations. Each, at the same time, sets up a medical council and a scheme of registration.

So we have in the new bills a strong family likeness to the whole gallery of their predecessors. Medical reform is still held to be the destroying of something that does exist and the creating of something that does not exist. As commonly proposed, it is the destruction of some bit of life and the creation of some bit of machinery in place of it.

But the thing really wanted is more fullness of life and less restriction. While the bandaging of the afflicted profession has been discussed year after year in Parliament the afflicted profession itself, restive or indifferent about every such proposal, has been developing fast, and working its way nobly forward to a higher life. Except the London College of Physicians, there is scarcely a medical examining body in the kingdom that has not made more or less rapid advance in its demands on the wit of candidates for its approval; and in the very front of this great forward movement there now stands the University of London. It is, we think simply absurd to propose the delivery of this young giant of a calling, tied and bound, into the hands of any single state council, or of any corporation. To deliver up the profession of physic in England as serf to the London College of Physicians—one consequence of Mr. Headlam's propositions—is of all conceivable mistakes the worst. That body includes many very able men; but, as

body, is so starved by the legal fiction that its F.R.C.P.s are the Few Really Competent Persons practising medicine in the metropolis, that there is not a more decrepit corporation to be found in the three kingdoms. Some little time ago, when a medical journal said that a certain physician of mark had applied for and obtained the fellowship of the London College, that physician thought it due to his credit to write to the medical journal and explain that he did not ask the college to give; but that on the part of the college he was asked to take. The college has nothing to rely upon but the prestige of an old name and a reputation bolstered up by law. It is as dead as the dead tongue in which it carries on the farce of an examination with its candidates. Nothing short of the abandoning of its monopolies will bring its blood again into free circulation. Corporations could work under the defence of monopolies in those old days when men worked under the defence of helmet, breast-plate, gauntlet, greaves, and buckler. Now-a-days, there are many fragments of old charter still in use, that are fit only to be exhibited at Manchester in the same cases with the old armour and firelocks of three centuries ago.

We are persuaded that what the medical profession really wants in this age of its most rapid progress, is a complete abandonment of the dead principle of protection, and the admission of free trade throughout its borders. The article to be produced—as all the bill-makers protest—is a well-educated practitioner of medicine. We are more likely to get this when there are fifty licensing bodies, all dependent for their life on their good reputation and competing for precedence of credit, than when there is one central council managing everything, and there are one or two fat corporations undertaking to do all the work in a sweet concord with the denizens of Downing Street.

It is said that we have here a special case to which it is not possible to apply the principle of competition. That licensing bodies have a tendency to underbid each other, and to pass incompetent men for the sake of pocketing their fees. The plan was tried by one or two bodies, and was found so ruinous—so perfectly analogous to the killing of the goose which laid the golden eggs—that the utmost pains were taken to give publicity to the fact of its utter abandonment.

London corporations sometimes sneer at the Scotch universities. A London practitioner is often heard to say that a St. Andrew's degree is good for nothing. But we find, on inquiry, that only last May, of fifty-seven candidates for the M.D. of St. Andrew's, fourteen were rejected; and that, of the fourteen, all but one had obtained licences and diplomas of other privileged corporations, chiefly in England. English general practitioners every year show in many cases that they are not up to the St. Andrew's mark,

whatever that may be. There is another fact. Public opinion in the profession does not regard a degree obtained at St. Andrew's University as, by itself, a complete title to practise physic. The consequence is that during the last eleven years, five hundred and seventy-three persons have obtained that degree at Aberdeen; and, in this number, there were only thirty-four who so much as applied for a diploma without being already furnished with another licence: while, even of the thirty-four, there can be no doubt that the greater number afterwards presented themselves elsewhere for examination. Does this look as if medical licensing bodies thought it worth while to underbid each other, or as if medical men found their account in getting a small licence to practise on the easiest terms and in the cheapest market?

Our belief is, that the thing really wanted by the medical profession, is permission to take freely its own manner of growth. Let no establishment,—whether an old guild or a new university,—claim any title to respect that it cannot make good, and let the lead be taken by whatever body can command it best. Let there be no licensing to practice within so many miles of Charing Cross, and not beyond. Within reasonable bounds let all licensing bodies have full play for their best energies, and let a man declared competent to physic his neighbour on one side of the Tweed, physic him also on the other side. Let no institution have about itself an atmosphere poisonous to men licensed by any rival body. Let every licence be a licence, full and frank; only, whenever a man practises, let it be known whence his licence comes, and how much it is worth. Experience of late years has clearly shown that the tendency of competition among licensing bodies is to increase the strictness of the test applied to candidates, it being felt that this determines, more than anything, the value of the licence and the degree of respect paid to the body giving it. Now, what do the manufacturers of parliamentary bills for the doctors usually want?

They want a public registration of all qualified practitioners, and a uniform standard of qualification, generally determined by some sort of professional Privy Council, Parliament, or House of Convocation.

There can be no harm in an official register. Private enterprise has indeed already furnished two medical directories, published annually, and containing the names and qualifications of all legal practitioners of medicine. Jealousy and self-interest keep watch over the accuracy of these volumes; they are cheap, and a patient who may happen to know so little about his medical adviser as to wish to look his name out in a dictionary, may as well, we think, turn to a cheap medical directory managed by private enterprise under the corrective influence of competition, as to a dear article of the same sort

compiled in an ostentatious, cumbrous way by the official medical council, and one of her Majesty's principal Secretaries of State. The register, we may be sure, will not be the more popular for being a blue book instead of a red book. But, we do not dwell upon that point. A trustworthy medical directory is a good thing, and such a work may need an Act of Parliament for its production—or it may not.

The next is the troublesome point—uniformity of test. That notion is, we are convinced, moonshine. To have uniformity of test in examinations, one must have uniformity of brains in all examiners, and uniformity of ready wit in all the candidates. On the whole, up to a certain point, the tougher the examination has been the more it is worth; but the best parts of a man's skill are those that cannot be brought out—except by one examiner out of a thousand—in the way of catechism. Comparative ignorance with tact, may find its use among the sick more surely than dull knowledge that does not give heed to the mere instincts of quick wit. There are not two practitioners in Britain uniformly qualified; and we believe that the differences between mind and mind, after examination has been passed, are so great, as to reduce to insignificance the value of a few questions, more or less, in the preliminary test. A physician who has obtained his degrees with honours recognised as honours by his own fraternity, may be content with the seal thus set on his preliminary studies, and thenceforward practise as if all the ends of study were achieved. His friend, who narrowly escaped rejection at the easiest examining board to which he could apply for a diploma, may have been admonished of his slender competence in knowledge, and impelled to study as he works on in the world. In five years the position of the two men is reversed. By the preliminary test in medicine, as in all other walks of life, the subsequent career can seldom be determined.

We do not believe, then, that it matters a jot to the profession or the public whether there be ten or a hundred licensing bodies in Great Britain to whom students may apply for leave to practise medicine, so long as it is made certain by the course of past experience, and by the increasing height of the ground taken by its practitioners on behalf of physic and surgery, that nobody will get a legal qualification who has not spent several years in a fixed course of training for his work, and who has not satisfied certain examiners. Of these examiners, the easiest we know, measure their candidates by as high a standard as a Secretary of State would find it prudent or just to assign as a minimum.

Thus far we have expressed our opinion of the bills usually framed relative to doctors. Of the two doctors' bills introduced during the present session we have sundry things to

say, and if they, or either of them, be proceeded with in Parliament, we shall proceed to the discussion of them in this journal also. But if they be dropped, we shall save our ink and paper.

GASTON, THE LITTLE WOLF.

In eighteen hundred and twenty-four an old lady named Madame de Sariae, living in Gascony, had one of those nursery fights with her grandson aged seven, which at the time are treated as eternal sins, and afterwards regarded as prospective virtues. Young master had been required to kneel and demand pardon for some misdeed: young master refused. Backing into a corner, he doubled his little fists, and in a voice of infantine thunder exclaimed, "Touch me if you dare!" Old grandmamma Sariae was fain to leave her rebellious descendant to his own devices: which rebellious descendant was Gaston de Raousset-Boulbon, the Little Wolf of that Gascon household. On another occasion the Little Wolf, offended by Baptiste, ordered Baptiste out of the house. The old servant, not taking the dismissal of a baby much to heart, remained; and the next morning performs his services as usual. Little Wolf, furious, appeals to grandmamma. Grandmamma, indignant at this baby invasion of her authority, upholds Baptiste.

"Very well!" lisps Little Wolf in an agony of passion, "then you must choose between him and me! If he stays I go."

True to his word the young autocrat disappeared that very night, and was only recovered when he had wandered three good leagues away on the Toulouse road. Another time also he started off. This was when M. le Comte de Raousset-Boulbon, senior, came to take him to the Jesuits' College at Fribourg; and papa Boulbon was a man so cold, so stern, so severe, that even the Little Wolf was daunted, and preferred the woods and hunger to that iron face and icy heart. This time he was two nights in the forest; but the old count caught him at last, and hauled him off to Fribourg.

The Jesuits received him kindly, and educated him judiciously. He had been eight years at the college, and had never received a punishment in any shape, when, one day—he was seventeen now—the reverend father ordered him to kneel during the evening lesson, as expiation of some collegiate offence of which he had been guilty.

"I will only kneel before God," he said to the father Gralicé.

"You must obey, or leave the college:" answered the father.

"My choice is made;" replied Gaston, and he left the college that very evening.

A short time after this he came of age. His father called him into his study, and in the presence of a notary, gave him up all the accounts of his minority, putting