

Confessions and observations of a water-patient, in a letter to the Editor of the "New Monthly Magazine."

Contributors

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THE NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

CONFESSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF A WATER-PATIENT,

IN A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE "NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE."

DEAR MR. EDITOR,

I am truly glad to see so worthily filled the presidency in one of the many chairs which our republic permits to criticism and letters—a dignity in which I had the honour to precede you, *sub consule Planco*, in the good days of William IV. I feel as if there were something ghost-like in my momentary return to my ancient haunts, no longer in the editorial robe and purple, but addressing a new chief, and in great part, a new assembly: For the reading public is a creature of rapid growth—every five years a fresh generation pours forth from our institutes, our colleges, our schools, demanding, and filled with fresh ideas, fresh principles and hopes. And the seas wash the place where Canute parleyed with the waves. All that interested the world, when to me (then Mr. Editor), now your humble servant, contributors addressed their articles—hot and seasoned for the month, and like all good articles to a periodical "warranted *not* to keep," have passed away into the lumber-room, where those old maids, History and Criticism, hoard their scraps and relics, and where, amidst dust and silence, things old-fashioned ripen into things antique. The roar of the Reform Bill is still, Fanny Kemble acts no more, the "Hunchback" awaits upon our shelves the resuscitation of a new *Julia*; poets of promise have become mute, Rubini sings no more, Macready is in the provinces; "Punch" frisks it on the jocund throne of Sydney Smith, and over a domain once parcelled amongst many, reigns "Boz." Scattered and voiceless the old contributors—a new hum betrays the changing Babel of a new multitude. Gliding thus, I say, ghostlike, amidst the present race, busy and sanguine as the past, I feel that it best suits with a ghost's dignity, to appear but for an admonitory purpose; not with the light and careless step of an ordinary visiter, but with meaning stride, and finger upon lip. Ghosts, we know, have appeared to predict death—more gentle I, my apparition would only promise healing, and beckon not to graves and charnels, but to the Hygeian spring.

And now that I am fairly on the ground, let us call to mind, Mr. Editor, the illustrious names which still overshadow it at once with melancholy and fame. Your post has been filled by men, whose fate precludes the envy which their genius might excite. By Campbell, the
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high-souled and silver-tongued, and by Hook from whom jest, and whim, and humour, flowed in so free and riotous a wave, that books confined and narrowed away the stream; to read Hook is to wrong him. Nor can we think of your predecessors without remembering your rival, Hood, who, as the tree puts forth the most exuberant blossoms the year before its decay, showed the bloom and promise of his genius most when the worm was at the trunk. To us behind the scenes, to us who knew the men, how melancholy the contrast between the fresh and youthful intellect, the worn out and broken frame; for, despite what I have seen written, Campbell when taken at the right moment, was Campbell ever. Not capable indeed, towards the last, of the same exertion, if manifested by those poor evidences of what is in us, that books parade, but still as powerful in his great and noble thoughts, in the oral poetry revealed by flashes and winged words, though unrounded into form. And Hook jested on the bed of death, as none but he could jest. And Hood! who remembers not the tender pathos, the exquisite humanity which spoke forth from his darkened room? Alas! what prolonged pangs, what heavy lassitude, what death in life did these men endure!

Here we are, Mr. Editor, in these days of cant and jargon, preaching up the education of the mind, forcing our children under melon-frames, and babbling to the labourer and mechanic, "Read, and read, and read," as if God had not given us muscles, and nerves, and bodies, subjected to exquisite pains as pleasures—as if the body were not to be cared for and cultivated as well as the mind; as if health were no blessing instead of that capital good, without which all other blessings—save the hope of health eternal—grow flat and joyless; as if the enjoyment of the world in which we are, was not far more closely linked with our physical than our mental selves; as if we were better than maimed and imperfect men; so long as our nerves are jaded and prostrate, our senses dim and heavy, our relationship with Nature abridged and thwarted by the jaundiced eye, and failing limb, and trembling hand—the apothecary's shop between us and the sun! For the mind, we admit, that to render it strong and clear, habit and discipline are required;—how deal we (especially we, Mr. Editor, of the London world—we of the literary craft—we of the restless, striving brotherhood)—how deal we with the body? We carry it on with us, as a post-horse, from stage to stage—does it flag? no rest! give it ale or the spur. We begin to feel the frame break under us;—we administer a drug, gain a temporary relief, shift the disorder from one part to another—forget our ailments in our excitements, and when we pause at last, thoroughly shattered, with complaints grown chronic, diseases fastening to the organs, send for the doctors in good earnest, and die as your predecessors and your rival died, under combinations of long-neglected maladies, which could never have been known had we done for the body what we do for the mind—made it strong by discipline, and maintained it firm by habit. Not alone calling to recollection our departed friends, but looking over the vast field of suffering which those acquainted with the lives of men who think and labour cannot fail to behold around them, I confess, though I have something of Canning's disdain of professed philanthropists, and do not love every knife-grinder as much as if he were my brother—I confess nevertheless that I am filled with an earnest pity; and an anxious desire seizes me to communicate to others that simple process of healing and well being which has passed under my own experience, and

to which I gratefully owe days no longer weary of the sun, and nights which no longer yearn for and yet dread the morrow.

And now, Mr. Editor, I may be pardoned, I trust, if I illustrate by my own case the system, I commend to others.

I have been a workman in my day. I began to write and to toil, and to win some kind of a name, which I had the ambition to improve, while yet little more than a boy. With strong love for study in books—with yet greater desire to accomplish myself in the knowledge of men, for sixteen years I can conceive no life to have been more filled by occupation than mine. What time was not given to the action was given to study; what time not given to study, to action—labour in both! To a constitution naturally far from strong, I allowed no pause or respite. The wear and tear went on without intermission—the whirl of the wheel never ceased. Sometimes, indeed, thoroughly overpowered and exhausted, I sought for escape. The physicians said “Travel,” and I travelled. “Go into the country,” and I went. But in such attempts at repose all my ailments gathered round me—made themselves far more palpable and felt. I had no resource but to fly from myself—to fly into the other world of books, or thought, or reverie—to live in some state of being less painful than my own. As long as I was always at work it seemed that I had no leisure to be ill. Quiet was my hell.

At length the frame thus long neglected—patched up for a while by drugs and doctors—put off and trifled with as an intrusive dun—like a dun who is in his rights—brought in its arrears—crushing and terrible, accumulated through long years. Worn out and wasted, the constitution seemed wholly inadequate to meet the demand. The exhaustion of toil and study had been completed by great anxiety and grief. I had watched with alternate hope and fear the lingering and mournful death-bed of my nearest relation and dearest friend—of the person around whom was entwined the strongest affection my life had known—and when all was over, I seemed scarcely to live myself.

At this time, about the January of 1844, I was thoroughly shattered. The least attempt at exercise exhausted me. The nerves gave way at the most ordinary excitement—a chronic irritation of that vast surface we call the mucous membrane which had defied for years all medical skill, rendered me continually liable to acute attacks, which from their repetition, and the increased feebleness of my frame, might at any time be fatal. Though free from any organic disease of the heart, its action was morbidly restless and painful. My sleep was without refreshment. At morning I rose more weary than I laid down to rest.

Without fatiguing you and your readers further with the *longa cohors* of my complaints, I pass on to record my struggle to resist them. I have always had a great belief in the power of WILL. What a man determines to do—that in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred I hold that he succeeds in doing. I determined to have some insight into a knowledge I had never attained since manhood—the knowledge of health.

I resolutely put away books and study, sought the airs which the physicians esteemed most healthful, and adopted the strict regimen on which all the children of *Æsculapius* so wisely insist. In short, I maintained the same general habits as to hours, diet (with the exception of wine, which in moderate quantities seemed to me indispensable), and, so far as my strength would allow, of exercise, as I found afterwards instituted at hydropathic establishments. I dwell on this to forestall in some manner the common

remark of persons not well acquainted with the medical agencies of water—that it is to the regular life which water-patients lead, and not to the element itself that they owe their recovery. Nevertheless I found that these changes, however salutary in theory, produced little if any practical amelioration in my health. All invalids know, perhaps, how difficult, under ordinary circumstances, is the alteration of habits from bad to good. The early rising, the walk before breakfast, so delicious in the feelings of freshness and vigour which they bestow upon the strong, often become punishments to the valetudinarian. Headache, languor, a sense of weariness over the eyes, a sinking of the whole system towards noon, which seemed imperiously to demand the dangerous aid of stimulants, were all that I obtained by the morning breeze and the languid stroll by the sea-shore. The suspension from study only afflicted me with intolerable *ennui*, and added to the profound dejection of the spirits. The brain, so long accustomed to morbid activity, was but withdrawn from its usual occupations to invent horrors and chimeras. Over the pillow, vainly sought two hours before midnight, hovered no golden sleep. The absence of excitement, however unhealthy, only aggravated the symptoms of ill-health.

It was at this time that I met by chance, in the library at St. Leonard's, with Captain Claridge's work on the "Water Cure," as practised by Preisnitz, at Graafenberg. Making allowance for certain exaggerations therein, which appeared evident to my common sense, enough still remained not only to captivate the imagination and flatter the hopes of an invalid, but to appeal with favour to his sober judgment. Till then, perfectly ignorant of the subject and the system, except by some such vague stories and good jests as had reached my ears in Germany, I resolved at least to read what more could be said in favour of the *aristocrudor*, and examine dispassionately into its merits as a medicament. I was then under the advice of one of the first physicians of our age. I had consulted half the faculty. I had every reason to be grateful for the attention, and to be confident in the skill, of those whose prescriptions had, from time to time, flattered my hopes and enriched the chemist. But the truth must be spoken—far from being better, I was sinking fast. Little remained to me to try in the great volume of the herbal. Seek what I would next, even if a quackery, it certainly might expedite my grave, but it could scarcely render life—at least the external life—more unjoyous. Accordingly I examined, with such grave thought as a sick man brings to bear upon his case, all the grounds upon which to justify to myself—an excursion to the snows of Silesia. But I own that in proportion as I found my faith in the system strengthen, I shrunk from the terrors of this long journey to the rugged region in which the probable lodging would be a labourer's cottage,* and in which the Babel of a hundred languages (so agreeable to the healthful delight in novelty—so appalling to the sickly despondency of a hypochondriac), would murmur and growl over a public table spread with no tempting condiments. Could I hope to find healing in my own land, and not too far from my own doctors in case of failure, I might indeed solicit the watery gods—but the journey! I who scarcely lived through a day without leech or

* Let me not disparage the fountain head of the water-cure, the parent institution of the great Preisnitz. I believe many of the earlier hardships complained of at Graafenberg have been removed or amended; and such as remain, are no doubt well compensated by the vast experience and extraordinary tact of a man who will rank hereafter amongst the most illustrious discoverers who have ever benefited the human race.

potion!—the long—gelid journey to Graafenberg—I should be sure to fall ill by the way—to be clutched and mismanaged by some German doctor—to deposit my bones in some dismal church-yard on the banks of the Father Rhine.

While thus perplexed, I fell in with one of the pamphlets written by Doctor Wilson, of Malvern, and my doubts were solved. Here was an English doctor, who had himself known more than my own sufferings, who, like myself, had found the pharmacopeia in vain—who had spent ten months at Graafenberg, and left all his complaints behind him—who, fraught with the experience he had acquired, not only in his own person, but from scientific examination of the cases under his eye, had transported the system to our native shores, and who proffered the proverbial salubrity of Malvern air and its holy springs, to those who, like me, had ranged in vain, from simple to mineral, and who had become bold by despair—bold enough to try if health, like truth, lay at the bottom of a well.

I was not then aware that other institutions had been established in England of more or less fame. I saw in Doctor Wilson the first transporter—at least as a physician—of the Silesian system, and did not pause to look out for other and later pupils of this innovating German school.

I resolved then to betake myself to Malvern. On my way through town I paused, in the innocence of my heart, to inquire of some of the faculty if they thought the water-cure would suit my case. With one exception, they were unanimous in the vehemence of their denunciations. Granting even that in some cases, especially of rheumatism, hydropathy had produced a cure—to my complaints it was worse than inapplicable—it was highly dangerous—it would probably be fatal. I had not stamina for the treatment—it would fix chronic ailments into organic disease—surely it would be much better to try what I had not yet tried. What had I not yet tried? A course of prussic acid! Nothing was better for gastrite irritation, which was no doubt the main cause of my suffering! If, however, I were obstinately bent upon so mad an experiment, Doctor Wilson was the last person I should go to. I was not deterred by all these intimidations, nor seduced by the salubrious allurements of the prussic acid under its scientific appellation of hydiocamic. A little reflection taught me that the members of a learned profession are naturally the very persons least disposed to favour innovation upon the practices which custom and prescription have rendered sacred in their eyes. A lawyer is not the person to consult upon bold reforms in jurisprudence. A physician can scarcely be expected to own that a Silesian peasant will cure with water the diseases which resist an armament of phials. And with regard to the peculiar objections to Doctor Wilson, I had read in his own pamphlet attacks upon the orthodox practice sufficient to account for—perhaps to justify—the disposition to depreciate him in return.

Still my friends were anxious and fearful; to please them I continued to inquire, though not of physicians, but of patients. I sought out some of those who had gone through the process. I sifted some of the cases of cure cited by Doctor Wilson. I found the account of the patients so encouraging, the cases quoted so authentic, that I grew impatient of delay. I threw physic to the dogs, and went to Malvern.

It is not my intention, Mr. Editor, to detail the course I underwent.

The different resources of water as a medicament, are to be found in many works easily to be obtained, and well worth the study. In this letter I suppose myself to be addressing those as thoroughly unacquainted with the system as I myself was at the first, and I deal therefore only in generals.

The first point which impressed and struck me was the extreme and utter innocence of the water-cure in skilful hands—in any hands indeed not thoroughly new to the system. Certainly when I went, I believed it to be a kill or cure system. I fancied it must be a very violent remedy—that it doubtless might effect great and magical cures—but that if it failed it might be fatal. Now, I speak not alone of my own case, but of the immense number of cases I have seen—patients of all ages—all species and genera of disease—all kinds and conditions of constitution, when I declare, upon my honour, that I never witnessed one dangerous symptom produced by the water-cure, whether at Doctor Wilson's or the other Hydropathic Institutions which I afterwards visited. And though unquestionably fatal consequences might occur from gross mismanagement, and as unquestionably have so occurred at various establishments, I am yet convinced that water in itself is so friendly to the human body, that it requires a very extraordinary degree of bungling, of ignorance, and presumption, to produce results really dangerous; that a regular practitioner does more frequent mischief from the misapplication of even the simplest drugs, than a water doctor of very moderate experience does, or can do, by the misapplication of his baths and friction. And here I must observe, that those portions of the treatment which appear to the uninitiated as the most perilous, are really the safest,* and can be applied with the most impunity to the weakest constitutions; whereas those which appear, from our greater familiarity with them, the least startling and most innocuous,† are those which require the greatest knowledge of general pathology and the individual constitution. I shall revert to this part of my subject before I conclude.

The next thing that struck me was the extraordinary ease with which, under this system, good habits are acquired and bad habits relinquished. The difficulty with which, under orthodox medical treatment, stimulants are abandoned is here not witnessed. Patients accustomed for half a century to live hard and high, wine drinkers, spirit-bibbers, whom the regular physician has sought in vain to reduce to a daily pint of sherry, here voluntarily resign all strong potations, after a day or two cease to feel the want of them, and reconcile themselves to water as if they had drank nothing else all their lives. Others, who have had recourse for years and years to medicine,—their potion in the morning, their cordial at noon, their pill before dinner, their narcotic at bed-time, cease to require these aids to life, as if by a charm. Nor this alone. Men to whom mental labour has been a necessary—who have existed on the excitement of the passions and the stir of the intellect—who have felt, these withdrawn, the prostration of the whole system—the lock to the wheel of the entire machine—return at once to the careless spirits of the boy in his first holiday.

Here lies a great secret; water thus skilfully administered is in itself a wonderful excitement, it supplies the place of all others—it operates powerfully and rapidly upon the nerves, sometimes to calm them, some-

* Such as the wet-sheet packing.

† The plunge-bath—the Douche.

times to irritate, but always to occupy. Hence follows a consequence which all patients have remarked—the complete repose of the passions during the early stages of the cure; they seem laid asleep as if by enchantment. The intellect shares the same rest; after a short time, mental exertion becomes impossible; even the memory grows far less tenacious of its painful impressions, cares and griefs are forgotten; the sense of the present absorbs the past and future; there is a certain freshness and youth which pervade the spirits, and live upon the enjoyment of the actual hour. Thus the great agents of our mortal wear and tear—the passions and the mind—calmed into strange rest,—Nature seems to leave the body to its instinctive tendency, which is always towards recovery. All that interests and amuses is of a healthful character; exercise, instead of being an unwilling drudgery, becomes the inevitable impulse of the frame braced and invigorated by the element. A series of reactions is always going on—the willing exercise produces refreshing rest, the refreshing rest willing exercise. The extraordinary effect which water taken early in the morning produces on the appetite is well known amongst those who have tried it, even before the water-cure was thought of; an appetite it should be the care of the skilful doctor to check into moderate gratification; the powers of nutrition become singularly strengthened, the blood grows rich and pure—the constitution is not only amended—it undergoes a change.*

The safety of the system then, struck me first;—its power of replacing by healthful stimulants the morbid ones it withdrew, whether physical or moral, surprised me next;—that which thirdly impressed me was no less contrary to all my preconceived notions. I had fancied that whether good or bad, the system must be one of great hardship, extremely repugnant and disagreeable. I wondered at myself to find how soon it became so associated with pleasurable and grateful feelings as to dwell upon the mind amongst the happiest passages of existence. For my own part, despite all my ailments, or whatever may have been my cares, I have ever found exquisite pleasure in that sense of *being* which is as it were the conscience, the mirror, of the soul. I have known hours of as much and as vivid happiness as perhaps can fall to the lot of man; but amongst all my most brilliant recollections I can recall no periods of enjoyment at once more hilarious and serene than the hours spent on the lonely hills of Malvern—none in which nature was so thoroughly possessed and appreciated. The rise from a sleep sound as childhood's—the impatient rush into the open air, while the sun was fresh, and the birds first sang—the sense of an unwonted strength in every limb and nerve, which made so light of the steep ascent to the holy spring—the delicious sparkle of that morning draught—the green terrace on the brow of the mountain, with the rich landscape wide and far below—the breeze that once would have been so keen and biting, now but exhilarating the blood, and lifting the spirits into religious joy; and this keen sentiment of present pleasure rounded by a hope sanctioned by all I felt in myself, and nearly all that I witnessed in others—that that very present was but the step—the threshold—into an unknown and delightful region of health and vigour;—a disease and a care dropping from the frame and the heart at every stride.

But here I must pause to own that if on the one hand the danger and

* Doctor Wilson observed to me once, very truly I think, that many regular physicians are beginning to own the effect of water as a stimulant who yet do not perceive its far more complicated and beneficial effects as an alterative.

discomforts of the cure are greatly exaggerated (exaggerated is too weak a word)—so on the other hand, as far as my own experience, which is perhaps not inconsiderable, extends, the enthusiastic advocates of the system have greatly misrepresented the duration of the curative process. I have read and heard of chronic diseases of long standing cured permanently in a very few weeks. I candidly confess that I have seen none such. I have, it is true, witnessed many chronic diseases perfectly cured—diseases which had been pronounced incurable by the first physicians, but the cure has been long and fluctuating. Persons so afflicted who try this system must arm themselves with patience. The first effects of the system are indeed usually bracing, and inspire such feelings of general well-being, that some think they have only to return home, and carry out the cure partially to recover. A great mistake—the alterative effects begin long after the bracing—a disturbance in the constitution takes place, prolonged more or less, and not till that ceases does the cure really begin. Not that the peculiar “crisis,” sought for so vehemently by the German water-doctors, and usually under their hands manifested by boils and eruptions, is at all a necessary part of the cure—it is, indeed, as far as I have seen, of rare occurrence—but a critical action, not single, not confined to one period, or one series of phenomena, is at work, often undetected by the patient himself, during a considerable (and that the later) portion of the cure in most patients where the malady has been grave, and where the recovery becomes permanent. During this time the patient should be under the eye of his water-doctor.

To conclude my own case: I staid some nine or ten weeks at Malvern, and business, from which I could not escape, obliging me then to be in the neighbourhood of town, I continued the system seven weeks longer under Doctor Weiss, at Petersham; during this latter period the agreeable phenomena which had characterised the former, the cheerfulness, the *bien aise*, the consciousness of returning health vanished; and were succeeded by great irritation of the nerves, extreme fretfulness, and the usual characteristics of the constitutional disturbance to which I have referred. I had every reason, however, to be satisfied with the care and skill of Doctor Weiss, who fully deserves the reputation he has acquired, and the attachment entertained for him by his patients; nor did my judgment ever despond or doubt of the ultimate benefits of the process. I emerged at last from these operations in no very portly condition. I was blanched and emaciated—washed out like a thrifty housewife’s gown—but neither the bleaching nor the loss of weight had in the least impaired my strength; on the contrary, all the muscles had grown as hard as iron, and I was become capable of great exercise without fatigue; my cure was not effected, but I was compelled to go into Germany. On my return homewards I was seized with a severe cold which rapidly passed into high fever. Fortunately I was within reach of Doctor Schmidt’s magnificent hydropathic establishment at Boppard; thither I caused myself to be conveyed; and now I had occasion to experience the wonderful effect of the water-cure in acute cases; slow in chronic disease, its beneficial operation in acute is immediate. In twenty-four hours all fever had subsided, and on the third day I resumed my journey, relieved from every symptom that had before prognosticated a tedious and perhaps alarming illness.

And now came gradually, yet perceptibly, the good effects of the system I had undergone; flesh and weight returned; the sense of health

became conscious and steady; I had every reason to bless the hour when I first sought the springs of Malvern. And here, I must observe, that it often happens that the patient makes but slight apparent improvement, when under the cure, compared with that which occurs subsequently. A water-doctor of repute at Brussels, indeed, said frankly to a grumbling patient, "I do not expect you to be well while here—it is only on leaving me that you will know if I have cured you."

It is as the frame recovers from the agitation it undergoes, that it gathers round it power utterly unknown to it before—as the plant watered by the rains of one season, betrays in the next the effect of the grateful dews.

I had always suffered so severely in winter, that the severity of our last one gave me apprehensions, and I resolved to seek shelter from my fears at my beloved Malvern. I here passed the most inclement period of the winter, not only perfectly free from the colds, rheums, and catarrhs, which had hitherto visited me with the snows, but in the enjoyment of excellent health; and I am persuaded that for those who are delicate, and who suffer much during the winter, there is no place where the cold is so little felt as at a water-cure establishment. I am persuaded also, and in this I am borne out by the experience of most water doctors, that the cure is most rapid and effectual during the cold season—from autumn through the winter. I am thoroughly convinced that consumption in its earlier stages can be more easily cured, and the predisposition more permanently eradicated by a winter spent at Malvern, under the care of Doctor Wilson, than by the timorous flight to Pisa or Madeira. It is by hardening rather than defending the tissues that we best secure them from disease.

And now, to sum up, and to dismiss my egotistical revelations, I desire in no way to overcolour my own case; I do not say that when I first went to the water-cure I was affected with any disease immediately menacing to life—I say only that I was in that prolonged and chronic state of ill health, which made life at the best extremely precarious—I do not say that I had any malady which the faculty could pronounce incurable—I say only that the most eminent men of the faculty had failed to cure me. I do not even now affect to boast of a perfect and complete deliverance from all my ailments—I cannot declare that a constitution naturally delicate has been rendered Herculean, or that the wear and tear of a whole manhood have been thoroughly repaired. What might have been the case had I not taken the cure at intervals, had I remained at it steadily for six or eight months without interruption, I cannot do more than conjecture, but so strong is my belief that the result would have been completely successful, that I promise myself, whenever I can spare the leisure, a long renewal of the system. These admissions made, what have I gained meanwhile to justify my eulogies and my gratitude?—an immense accumulation of the *capital of health*. Formerly it was my favourite and querulous question to those who saw much of me, "Did you ever know me twelve hours without pain or illness?" Now, instead of these being my constant companions, they are but my occasional visitors. I compare my old state and my present to the poverty of a man who has a shilling in his pocket, and whose poverty is therefore a struggle for life, with the occasional distresses of a man of 5000*l.* a year, who sees but an appendage endangered, or a luxury abridged. All the good that I have gained, is wholly unlike what I have ever derived either from medicine or the German

mineral baths: in the first place, it does not relieve a single malady alone, it pervades the whole frame; in the second place, far from subsiding, it seems to increase by time, so that I may reasonably hope that the latter part of my life, instead of being more infirm than the former, will become—so far as freedom from suffering, and the calm enjoyment of external life are concerned—my real, my younger, youth. And it is this profound conviction which has induced me to volunteer these details, in the hope (I trust a pure and kindly one) to induce those, who more or less have suffered as I have done, to fly to the same rich and bountiful resources. We ransack the ends of the earth for drugs and minerals—we extract our potions from the deadliest poisons—but around us and about us, Nature, the great mother, proffers the Hygeian fount, unsealed and accessible to all. Wherever the stream glides pure, wherever the spring sparkles fresh, there, for the vast proportion of the maladies which Art produces, Nature yields the benignant healing.

It remains for me to say, merely as an observer, and solely with such authority as an observer altogether disinterested, but without the least pretence to professional science, may fairly claim, what class of diseases I have seen least and most tractable to the operations of the water cure, and how far enthusiasts appear to me to have over-estimated, how far sceptics have under-valued, the effects of water as a medicament. There are those (most of the water doctors especially) who contend that all medicine by drugs is unnecessary—that water internally and outwardly applied suffices in skilful management for all complaints—that the time will come when the drug doctor will cease to receive a fee, when the apothecary will close his shop, and the water cure be adopted in every hospital and by every family. Dreams and absurdities! Even granting that the water cure were capable of all the wonders ascribed to it, its process is so slow in most chronic cases—it requires such complete abstraction from care and business—it takes the active man so thoroughly out of his course of life, that a vast proportion of those engaged in worldly pursuits cannot hope to find the requisite leisure. There are also a large number of complaints (perhaps the majority) which yield so easily to a sparing use of drugs under a moderately competent practitioner that the convenient plan of sending to the next chemist for your pill or potion can never be superseded, nor is it perhaps desirable that it should be. Moreover, as far as I have seen, there are complaints curable by medicine which the water cure utterly fails to reach.

The disorders wherein hydropathy appears to me to be least effectual are, first neuralgic pains, especially the monster pain of the *Tic Dolo-reux*. Not one instance of a cure in the latter by hydropathy has come under my own observation, and I have only heard of one authentic case of recovery from it by that process. Secondly, paralysis of a grave character in persons of an advanced age. Thirdly, in tubercular consumption. As may be expected, in this stage of that melancholy disease, the water cure utterly fails to restore, but I have known it even here prolong life, beyond all reasonable calculation, and astonishingly relieve the more oppressive symptoms. In all cases where the nervous exhaustion is great and of long standing, and is accompanied with obstinate hypochondria, hydropathy, if successful at all, is very slow in its benefits, and the patience of the sufferer is too often worn out before the favourable turn takes place. I have also noticed that obstinate and deep-rooted maladies in persons otherwise of very athletic frames, seem to yield much more

tardily to the water cure than similar complaints in more delicate constitutions; so that you will often see of two persons afflicted by the same genera of complaints, the feeble and fragile one recover before the stout man with Atlantic shoulders evinces one symptom of amelioration.

Those cases, on the other hand, in which the water cure seems an absolute panacea, and in which the patient may commence with the most sanguine hopes, are, First, rheumatism, however prolonged, however complicated. In this the cure is usually rapid—nearly always permanent. Secondly, gout. Here its efficacy is little less startling to appearance than in the former case; it seems to take up the disease by the roots; it extracts the peculiar acid, which often appears in discolorations upon the sheets used in the application, or is ejected in other modes. But here, judging always from cases subjected to my personal knowledge, I have not seen instances to justify the assertion of some water doctors, that returns of the disease do not occur. The predisposition—the tendency, has appeared to me to remain. The patient is liable to relapses—but I have invariably found them *far* less frequent, less lengthened; and readily susceptible of simple and speedy cure, especially if the habits remain temperate.

Thirdly, that wide and grisly family of affliction classed under the common name of *dyspepsia*. All derangements of the digestive organs, imperfect powers of nutrition—the *malaise* of an injured stomach, appear precisely the complaints on which the system takes firmest hold, and in which it effects those cures that convert existence from a burden into a blessing. Hence it follows that many nameless and countless complaints proceeding from derangement of the stomach, cease as that great machine is restored to order. I have seen disorders of the heart which have been pronounced organic by the learned authorities of the profession, disappear in an incredibly short time—cases of incipient consumption, in which the seat is in the nutritious powers, hæmorrhages, and various congestions, shortness of breath, habitual fainting fits, many of what are called improperly, nervous complaints, but which, in reality, are indications from the main ganglionic spring; the disorders produced by the abuse of powerful medicines, *especially mercury* and iodine, the lost of appetite, the dulled sense, and the shaking hand of intemperance, skin complaints, and the dire scourge of scrofula—all these seem to obtain from hydropathy relief—nay, absolute and unqualified cure, beyond not only the means of the most skilful drug doctor, but the hopes of the most sanguine patient.*

The cure may be divided into two branches—the process for acute complaints—that for chronic; I have just referred to the last. And great as are there its benefits, they seem commonplace beside the effect the system produces in acute complaints. Fever, including the scarlet and the typhus, influenza, measles, small-pox, the sudden and rapid disorders of children, are cured with a simplicity and precision which must, I am persuaded, sooner or later, render the resources of the hydropathist the ordinary treatment for such acute complaints in the hospitals. The principal remedy here employed by the water doctor is, the wet-sheet packing, which excites such terror amongst the uninitiated, and which, of all the

* Amongst other complaints, I may add dropsy, which in its simple state, and not as the crowning symptom of a worn out constitution, I have known most successfully treated; cases of slight paralysis; and I have witnessed two instances of partial blindness, in which the sight was restored.

curatives adopted by hydropathy, is unquestionably the safest—the one that can be applied without danger to the greatest variety of cases, and which I do not hesitate to aver, can rarely, if ever, be misapplied in any cases where the pulse is hard and high, and the skin dry and burning. I have found in conversation so much misapprehension of this very easy and very luxurious remedy, that I may be pardoned for re-explaining what has been explained so often. It is not, as people persist in supposing, that patients are put into wet sheets and there left to shiver. The sheets, after being saturated, are well wrung out—the patient quickly wrapped in them—several blankets tightly bandaged round, and a feather-bed placed at top; thus, especially where there is the least fever, the first momentary chill is promptly succeeded by a gradual and vivifying warmth, perfectly free from the irritation of *dry* heat—a delicious sense of ease is usually followed by a sleep more agreeable than anodynes ever produced. It seems a positive cruelty to be relieved from this magic girdle in which pain is lulled, and fever cooled, and watchfulness lapped in slumber. The bath which succeeds, refreshes and braces the skin, which the operation relaxed and softened; they only who have tried this, after fatigue or in fever, can form the least notion of its pleasurable sensations, or of its extraordinary efficacy; nor is there any thing startling or novel in its theory. In hospitals now water-dressings are found the best poultice to an inflamed member; this expansion of the wet dressing is a poultice to the whole inflamed surface of the body. It does not differ greatly, except in its cleanliness and simplicity, from the old remedy of the ancients—the wrapping the body in the skins of animals newly slain, or placing it on dunghills, or immersing it, as now in Germany, in the soft slough of mud-baths.* Its theory is that of warmth and moisture, those friendliest agents to inflammatory disorders. In fact, I think it the duty of every man, on whom the lives of others depend, to make himself acquainted with at least this part of the water cure:—the wet sheet is the true life preserver. In the large majority of sudden inflammatory complaints, the doctor at a distance, prompt measures indispensable, it will at the least arrest the disease, check the fever, till, if you prefer the drugs, the drugs can come—the remedy is at hand, wherever you can find a bed and a jug of water; and whatever else you may apprehend after a short visit to a hydropathic establishment, your fear of that bug-bear—the wet sheet—is the first you banish. The only cases, I believe, where it can be positively mischievous is where the pulse scarcely beats—where the vital sense is extremely low—where the inanition of the frame forbids the necessary reaction in cholera, and certain disorders of the chest and bronchia; otherwise at all ages, from the infant to the octogenarian, it is equally applicable, and in most acute cases, equally innocent.

Hydropathy being thus rapidly beneficial in acute disorders, it follows naturally that it will be quick as a cure in chronic complaints in proportion as acute symptoms are mixed with them, and slowest where such complaints are dull and lethargic—it will be slowest also where the nervous exhaustion is the greatest. With children, its effects, really and

* A very eminent London physician, opposed generally to the water-cure, told me that he had effected a perfect cure in a case of inveterate leprosy, by swathing the patient in wet lint covered with oil skin. This is the wet sheet packing, but there are patients who would take kindly to wet lint, and shudder at the idea of a wet sheet!

genuinely can scarcely be exaggerated; in them, the nervous system, not weakened by toil, grief, anxiety, and intemperance, lends itself to the gracious element as a young plant to the rains. When I see now some tender mother coddling, and physicking, and preserving from every breath of air, and swaddling in flannels, her pallid little ones, I long to pounce upon the callow brood, and bear them to the hills of Malvern, and the diamond fountain of St. Anne's—with what rosy faces and robust limbs I will promise they shall return—alas! I promise and preach in vain—the family apothecary is against me, and the progeny are doomed to rhubarb and the rickets.

The water-cure as yet has had this evident injustice,—the patients resorting to it have mostly been desperate cases. So strong a notion prevails that it is a desperate remedy, that they only who have found all else fail have dragged themselves to the Bethesda Pools. That all thus not only abandoned by hope and the College, but weakened and poisoned by the violent medicines absorbed into their system for a score or so of years,—that all should not recover is not surprising! The wonder is that the number of recoveries should be so great;—that every now and then we should be surprised by the man whose untimely grave we predicted when we last saw him, meeting us in the streets ruddy and stalwart, fresh from the springs of Graafenberg, Boppard, Petersham, or Malvern.

The remedy is *not* desperate; it is simpler, I do not say than any *dose*, but than any *course* of medicine—it is infinitely more agreeable—it admits no remedies for the complaint which are inimical to the constitution. It bequeathes none of the maladies consequent on blue pill and mercury—on purgatives and drastics—on iodine and aconite—on leeches and the lancet. If it cures your complaint, it will assuredly strengthen your whole frame; if it fails to cure your complaint it can scarcely fail to improve your general system. As it acts, or ought, scientifically treated, to act, first on the system, lastly on the complaint, placing nature herself in the way to throw off the disease, so it constantly happens that the patients at a hydropathic establishment will tell you that the disorder for which they came is not removed, but that in all other respects their health is better than they ever remember it to have been. Thus, I would not only recommend it to those who are sufferers from some grave disease; but to those who require merely the fillip, the alterative, or the bracing which they now often seek in vain in country air or a watering-place. For such, three weeks at Malvern will do more than three months at Brighton or Boulogne; for at the water-cure the whole life is one remedy; the hours, the habits, the discipline—not incompatible with gaiety and cheerfulness (the spirits of hydropathists are astounding, and in high spirits all things are amusement) tend perforce to train the body to the highest state of health of which it is capable. Compare this life, O merchant, O trader, O man of business, escaping to the sea-shore, with that which you there lead—with your shrimps and your shell-fish, and your wine and your brown stout—with all which counteracts in the evening, the good of your morning dip and your noonday stroll. What, I own, I should envy most is the robust, healthy man, only a little knocked down by his city cares or his town pleasures, after his second week at Dr. Wilson's establishment—yea, how I should envy the exquisite pleasure which he would derive from that robustness made clear and sensible to him. The pure taste, the iron muscles, the exuberant spirits, the overflowing sense of life. If even to the weak and languid the

water-cure gives hours of physical happiness which the pleasures of the grosser senses can never bestow, what would it give to the strong man, from whose eye it has but to lift the light film—in whose mechanism, attuned to joy, it but brushes away the grain of dust, or oils the solid wheel.

I must bring my letter to a close. I meant to address it through you, Mr. Editor, chiefly to our brethren—the over-jaded sons of toil and letters—behind whom I see the warning shades of departed martyrs. But it is applicable to all who ail—to all who would not only cure a complaint, but strengthen a system and prolong a life. To such, who will so far attach value to my authority, that they will acknowledge, at least, I am no interested witness—for I have no institution to establish—no profession to build up—I have no eye to fees, my calling is but that of an observer—as an observer only do I speak, it may be with enthusiasm—but enthusiasm built on experience and prompted by sympathy;—to such then as may listen to me, I give this recommendation: pause if you please—inquire if you will—but do not consult your doctor. I have no doubt he is a most honest, excellent man—but you cannot expect a doctor of drugs to say other than that doctors of water are but quacks. Do not consult your doctor whether you shall try hydropathy, but find out some intelligent persons in whose shrewdness you can confide—who have been patients themselves at a hydropathic establishment. Better still, go for a few days—the cost is not much—into some such institution yourself, look round, talk to the patients, examine with your own eyes, hear with your own ears, before you adventure the experiment. Become a witness before you are a patient; if the evidence does not satisfy you, turn and flee. But if you venture, venture with a good heart and a stout faith. Hope, but not with presumption. Do not fancy that the disorder which has afflicted you for ten years ought to be cured in ten days. Beware, above all, lest, alarmed by some phenomena which the searching element produces, you have recourse immediately to drugs to disperse them. The water-boils, for instance, which are sometimes, as I have before said, but by no means frequently, a critical symptom of the cure, are, in all cases that I have seen, cured easily by water, but may become extremely dangerous in the hands of your apothecary. Most of the few solitary instances that have terminated fatally, to the prejudice of the water-cure, have been those in which the patient has gone from water to drugs. It is the axiom of the system that water only cures what water produces. Do not leave a hydropathic establishment in the time of any “crisis,” however much you may be panic stricken. Hold the doctor responsible for getting you out of what he gets you into; and if your doctor be discreetly chosen, take my word he will do it.

Do not *begin* to carry on the system at home, and under any eye but that of an experienced hydropathist. After you know the system, and the doctor knows you, the curative process may *probably* be continued at your own house with ease—but the commencement must be watched, and if a critical action ensues when you are at home, return to the only care that can conduct it safely to a happy issue. When at the institution, do not let the example of other patients tempt you to overdo—to drink more water, or take more baths than are prescribed to you. Above all, never let the eulogies which many will pass upon the *douche* (the popular bath), tempt you to take it on the sly, unknown to your adviser. The

douche is dangerous when the body is unprepared—when the heart is affected—when apoplexy may be feared.

For your choice of an establishment you have a wide range. Institutions in England are now plentiful, and planted in some of the loveliest spots of our island. But as I only speak from personal knowledge, I can but here depose as to such as I have visited. I hear, indeed, a high character of Doctor Johnson, of Stansted-Bury, and his books show great ability. Much is said in praise of Doctor Freeman, of Cheltenham, though his system, in some measure, is at variance with the received notions of hydropathists. But of these and many others, perhaps no less worthy of confidence, I have no experience of my own. I have sojourned with advantage at Doctor Weiss's, at Petersham; and for those whose business and avocations oblige them to be near London, his very agreeable house proffers many advantages, besides his own long practice and great skill.

To those who wish to try the system abroad, and shrink from the long journey to Graafenberg, Dr. Schmidt at Boppard, proffers a princely house, comprising every English comfort, amidst the noble scenery of the Rhine, and I can bear ready witness to his skill; but it is natural that the place which has for me the most grateful recollections, should be that where I received the earliest and the greatest benefit, viz., Doctor Wilson's at Malvern; there even the distance from the capital has its advantages.* The cure imperatively demands, at least in a large proportion of cases, abstraction from all the habitual cares of life, and in some the very neighbourhood of London suffices to produce restlessness and anxiety. For certain complaints, especially those of children, and such as are attended with debility, the air of Malvern is in itself Hygeian. The water is immemorially celebrated for its purity—the landscape is a perpetual pleasure to the eye—the mountains furnish the exercise most suited to the cure—“*Man muss Geberge haben*,” “one must have mountains,” is the saying of Preisnitz. All these are powerful auxiliaries, and yet all these are subordinate to the diligent, patient care—the minute, unwearied attention—the anxious, unaffected interest, which Doctor Wilson manifests to every patient, from the humblest to the highest, who may be submitted to his care. The vast majority of difficult cures which I have witnessed, have emanated from his skill. A pupil of the celebrated Broussais, his anatomical knowledge is considerable, and his tact in diseases seems intuitive; he has that pure pleasure in his profession that the profits of it seem to be almost lost sight of, and having an independence of his own, his enthusiasm for the system he pursues is at least not based upon any mercenary speculation. I have seen him devote the same time and care to those whom his liberal heart has led him to treat gratuitously as to the wealthiest of his patients, and I mention this less to praise him for generosity than to show that he has that earnest faith in his own system, which begets an earnest faith in those to whom he administers. In all new experiments, it is a great thing to have confidence, not only in the skill, but the sincerity, of your adviser—his treatment is less violent and energetic than that in fashion on the continent. If he errs, it is on the side of caution, and his theory leads him so much towards the restoration of the whole system, that the relief

* Dr. Gully, whose writings on medicinal subjects are well known, is also established at Malvern, and I believe rather as a partner or associate than a rival to Dr. Wilson. As I was not under his treatment, I cannot speak farther of his skill than that he seemed to have the entire confidence of such of his patients as I became acquainted with.

of the particular malady will sometimes seem tedious in order to prove complete. Hence he inspires in those who have had a prolonged experience of his treatment a great sense of safety and security. For your impatient self, you might sometimes prefer the venture of a brisker process—for those in whom you are interested, and for whom you are fearful—you would not risk a step more hurried. And since there is no small responsibility in recommending any practitioner of a novel school, so it is a comfort to know that whoever resorts to Doctor Wilson, will at least be in hands not only practised and skilful, but wary and safe. He may fail in doing good, but I never met with a single patient who accused him of doing harm. And I may add, that as in all establishments much of comfort must depend on the lady at the head, so, for female patients especially, it is no small addition to the *agrémens* of Malvern, to find in Mrs. Wilson the manners of a perfect gentlewoman, and the noiseless solicitude of a heart genuinely kind and good!

Here then, O brothers, O afflicted ones, I bid you farewell. I wish you one of the most blessed friendships man ever made—the familiar intimacy with Water. Not Undine in her virgin existence more sportive and bewitching, not Undine in her wedded state more tender and faithful than the Element of which she is the type. In health may you find it the joyous playmate, in sickness the genial restorer and soft assuager. Round the healing spring still literally dwell the jocund nymphs in whom the Greek poetry personified Mirth and Ease. No drink, whether compounded of the gums and rosin of the old Falernian, or the alcohol and acid of modern wine, gives the animal spirits which rejoice the water-drinker. Let him who has to go through severe bodily fatigue try first whatever—wine, spirits, porter, beer—he may conceive most generous and supporting; let him then go through the same toil with no draughts but from the chrystal lymph, and if he does not acknowledge that there is no beverage which man concocts so strengthening and animating as that which God pours forth to all the children of nature, I throw up my brief. Finally, as health depends upon healthful habits, let those who desire easily and luxuriously to glide into the courses most agreeable to the human frame, to enjoy the morning breeze, to grow epicures in the simple regimen, to become cased in armour against the vicissitudes of our changeful skies—to feel, and to shake off, light sleep as a blessed dew, let them, while the organs are yet sound, and the nerves yet unshattered, devote an autumn to the water-cure.

And you, O parents! who, too indolent, too much slaves to custom, to endure change for yourselves, to renounce for awhile your artificial natures, but who still covet for your children hardy constitutions, pure tastes, and abstemious habits—who wish to see them grow up with a manly disdain to luxury—with a vigorous indifference to climate—with a full sense of the value of health, not alone for itself, but for the powers it elicits, and the virtues with which it is intimately connected—the serene unfretful temper—the pleasure in innocent delights—the well-being that, content with self, expands in benevolence to others—you I adjure not to scorn the facile process of which I solicit the experiment. Dip your young heroes in the spring, and hold them not back by the heel. May my exhortations find believing listeners, and may some, now unknown to me, write me word from the green hills of Malvern, or the groves of Petersham, “We have hearkened to you—not in vain.”

Adieu, Mr. Editor, the ghost returns to silence.

E. BULWER LYTTON.