

## **A dialogue between a bilious patient and a physician ... / [James Henry].**

### **Contributors**

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A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A

BILIOUS PATIENT

AND A

PHYSICIAN.

BY

JAMES HENRY, M.D.

FELLOW OF THE COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, DUBLIN.

SIXTH EDITION,

WITH ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON :

HENRY RENSHAW, 356, STRAND.

1843.

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## PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

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The author has been informed, that some readers of the *Dialogue between a Bilious Patient and a Physician* have ascribed to him the intention of depreciating medicines and the art of medicine. He therefore takes the opportunity afforded by the publication of a new edition, to state that nothing could be further from his mind than such an intention, and that in the *Dialogue between a Bilious Patient and a Physician*, he has no other object in view than to show that the habitual use of purgatives is injurious to health, and that the diseases commonly denominated nervous and bilious cannot be cured by those medicines, nor, indeed, by any medicines whatever, but solely by avoiding the causes from which those diseases spring. The author hopes that this object is not inconsistent with a high respect for medical science, and a full conviction of the usefulness of purgative medicines, when skilfully applied, in those cases of disease in which it is proper to apply them; and he feels assured that, in attempting to correct, as far as in his power, a great medical abuse, he is doing that which not only will not



diminish, but, on the contrary, will increase and promote a rational confidence in the healing art; that rational confidence, both in medicines and medical advice, which, so far as the author has observed, is always entertained by well informed persons, and which is equally remote from the blind faith which ascribes almost miraculous power to medicine, and from the suspicious scepticism which denies it all power whatever.

Another objection has been made to the *Dialogue between a Bilious Patient and a Physician*.—It has been said that the author should have used a less popular form of writing, and that he should have addressed himself to physicians, not to the public. To this objection the author replies that it was necessary to use popular language, and to address himself to the public, because the abuse which he sought to correct, although originating in the first instance with physicians, had spread from them to the public, and had become popular, and therefore could not be corrected through the medium of a treatise written in technical language and addressed to physicians.

*Fitzwilliam-square, Dublin,*

*October, 1838.*



# A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A

BILIOUS PATIENT AND A PHYSICIAN.

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## PART FIRST.

*Patient.* Good morning, Doctor. I have called upon you professionally, and if you are not otherwise engaged, would be glad to have a few minutes' conversation with you on the subject of my health.

*Physician.* I am quite at leisure. Be so good as to sit down, and tell me what is the matter.

*Patient.* The bile and the nerves, Doctor.

*Physician.* I think I understand you ; but may I beg of you to be more explicit ?

*Patient.* I am so bilious and nervous, that my life is a burthen to me ; and yet I cannot say that I have any particular pain or ache, or that I am ever confined to bed, or to the house, unless when I happen to catch cold.

*Physician.* Describe your symptoms as accurately as you can ; by so doing, you will enable me to form a more correct judgment of the nature of your case, and the proper method of cure.

*Patient.* Cure, Doctor ! I fear that is out of the question. My complaints are of too long standing, and have baffled the skill of too many eminent physicians, to leave me much reason



to expect a cure. Your kindness may perhaps alleviate my sufferings, and render my life less wretched; but as to my being cured, it is my settled conviction that such an event will never take place.

*Physician.* Well, we shall discuss that point by and by. In the mean time give me some account of your symptoms.

*Patient.* I have almost constantly an uneasy feeling here, at the pit of my stomach. At different times of the day this feeling is of different kinds: before eating, and particularly before dinner, it is a sense of gnawing, or sinking, or weakness; after eating, it is a most distressing sensation of fullness and distention; so that, whether my stomach be full or empty, I am never without more or less uneasiness in that situation. I attribute much of this uneasiness to flatulence and acidity; for I frequently bring up large quantities of wind, and sometimes even mouthfuls of half-digested food mixed with sour water. My appetite is bad; and my bowels so costive, that I am obliged to take opening medicine almost constantly. My nights are restless, and disturbed by startings and frightful dreams. In the morning I awake with a foul tongue and clammy mouth, and generally with a headache which does not go away until after breakfast. During the day I am languid, and ill disposed for any kind of active exertion, and after dinner I feel heavy and oppressed. If I take wine or spirits at or after dinner (as I generally do in order to relieve this heaviness and oppression), I am better while the excitement produced by those liquors continues; but then I am more feverish at night, and in the morning my mouth is drier, my head-ache more severe, and I have less appetite for breakfast. Distressing as this state of health is, it would be tolerable if it were not for the nervousness which accompanies it, and which is often so great as almost to unfit me for the discharge of my ordinary duties and engagements. Yet in the midst of all my sufferings, I have the consolation of thinking that I have not brought down these evils on my head by intemperance or dissipation, but, on the contrary, have taken care to preserve, by sober and regular habits of living, a constitution which is naturally sound and healthy.

*Physician.* I am happy to see that your case presents so favorable an aspect. Your habits of living being regular, and



your constitution naturally sound, there is every reason to suppose that your complaints are not incurable ; and that, by the use of judicious means, you may speedily be restored to the enjoyment of perfect health.

*Patient.* You speak so lightly of my case, that I almost think you take me for one of those unhappy persons, who, although there is scarcely any thing the matter with them, continually tease their friends with their complaints, and exaggerate every little ailment in order to obtain the balm of compassion. If such is the opinion which you have formed of me, believe me that it is erroneous. There is, unfortunately, but too much reality in my sufferings; and in the picture which I have drawn of them, I have been most careful to avoid all high colouring.

*Physician.* I am far from thinking that the picture you have drawn is too highly coloured. The misery, both mental and corporeal, which arises from that habitual disorder of the stomach and digestive organs, commonly known by the name of biliousness, can hardly be exaggerated. It is quite sufficient in ordinary cases to make life very uncomfortable; and in extreme cases, like yours, to make it absolutely wretched. But although biliousness, or a disordered state of the stomach and bowels, is productive of so much distress, it is by no means incurable; on the contrary, in cases like yours, where the constitution is naturally good, and not impaired by intemperance, it is very easily effected by remedial measures, and in most instances can be entirely cured by them. It is only necessary to take the proper method, and above all things to discover, if possible, the causes which have excited the diseased state, and scrupulously to avoid them in future.

*Patient.* What you say is reasonable, and gives me great encouragement. But you will excuse me, if, having been so frequently disappointed in the prospects of recovery held out to me by other physicians, I still feel some degree of doubt, and some want of confidence even in what *you* say.

*Physician.* It is but natural that you should. I am almost a stranger to you, and cannot expect you to repose any extraordinary confidence in me. Happily, however, on the present occasion, no extraordinary confidence in your physician is required, as he wishes to address himself to your reason, not



to draw upon your credulity, and will not ask you to take a single step which shall not have been previously approved of by your own understanding. Now show me your tongue.

*Patient.* [*Shows his tongue.*] It is pretty clean at present, but it was foul and clammy this morning. I scrape it every morning when I get up, and then it remains tolerably clean until the next morning, when it is as foul and clammy as ever; and I have observed that it is more than usually so when I have taken a blue pill or antibilious pill over night.

*Physician.* Which, I should suppose from what you just now said, you do pretty often.

*Patient.* Yes, very often. I am obliged once or twice in almost every week to take some such medicine at night; and in the morning either a Seidlitz powder, or a spoonful of Epsom salts dissolved in a cup of camomile tea, or one or two spoonfuls of Gregory's powder. If for a short time I neglect to take these, or some such opening medicines, I have no passage in my bowels for two or three days together, and what does come from me consists only of a few hard lumps of a dark green, or nearly black colour; then the bile accumulates, as there are no means of carrying it off; I feel a most disagreeable sense of distention and fullness, particularly after meals; my nights are restless, and in the morning I awake with a headache. At last I take some of the opening medicines which I have mentioned, and the relief is instantaneous; my bowels are well moved two or three times or oftener; the stools are copious, and of that bilious, yellow colour which shews that the medicine is carrying off the bile; my appetite is improved, and for several days I have neither acidity nor distention of stomach; my sleep is tranquil and refreshing, and I am free from morning headaches. If this state were to continue, I should be quite happy, and have but little occasion for medical advice; but, unfortunately, such is my bilious habit of body, that when the operation of the medicine is over, my bowels become even more costive than they had been previously, and all my disagreeable sensations return. If, in this situation, I have again recourse to the opening medicine, I find that it does not produce the same beneficial effects as before, and I am obliged in consequence either to increase the dose or to change the medicine. I thus succeed in obtaining



further relief ; but this relief also being but temporary, a new change of medicine, or a stronger dose of the old, becomes necessary ; and so I go on from month to month, and from year to year, almost always ailing and taking medicine, and rarely, if ever, knowing what it is to be quite well for ten days together.

*Physician.* You describe a case which is unfortunately but too common, and of which I have seen but too many sad examples ; a case, too, for the cure of which almost every medicine in the *Materia Medica* has been prescribed, and I am sorry to add almost uniformly without success.

*Patient.* With the one hand you raise the cup of hope to my lips, and with the other you dash it to the ground. It is but a few moments since you told me that my case presented a favorable aspect, and that there was every reasonable prospect of a cure ; and now you inform me, that cases like mine almost invariably baffle all the powers of medicine.

*Physician.* All the powers of medicine, but not the art of the physician. He possesses means infinitely more powerful than medicine for the cure of diseases—means which are often successful when medicines totally fail. In the greater number of diseases, the due regulation of the diet and of the general habits of living is of more efficacy than the medicines prescribed. This is particularly the case in bilious disorders, which originating, as bilious disorders almost always do, from erroneous habits of living, are to be corrected not by medicines, but by the substitution of wholesome habits for those which are injurious to health.

*Patient.* You deceive yourself if you expect that my health can be restored by diet and regimen. I have already paid the most scrupulous attention to those points, and yet I continue bilious notwithstanding. I am no doubt better when I live by rule, and worse when I do not, but still I am more or less bilious, let me live in what manner I may ; more bilious when I take but little exercise, or when I eat of two or three dishes at dinner, particularly if there are ragouts or other made dishes among them, and also when I eat pastry or drink porter ; less bilious when I take more exercise, and when I eat only of a single joint, abstain from pastry and made dishes, and drink only water.



*Physician.* As you have already experienced so much benefit from attending to regimen, might it not be worth your while to try whether you would not derive still further advantage from a regimen more judiciously regulated, and more steadily and strictly adhered to?

*Patient.* A strict adherence to regimen requires more resolution than I possess. I cannot resist the constantly occurring temptations to deviate from the strict rule. Besides, under any regimen, medicine is indispensable to me, for the purpose of opening the bowels and carrying away the bile when it accumulates. Nothing gives me such speedy relief, even when I am at the worst, as a dose of opening medicine. Unfortunately, however, all the opening medicines to which I have hitherto had recourse, whether quack medicines, or domestic remedies, or the prescriptions of physicians, have one common defect; they all lose their power by use. Give me an opening medicine free from this defect, and I shall be content. I shall then possess the best means which I expect ever to possess, of alleviating my sufferings; for as to a perfect cure, I entertain, as I have already said, no hopes of it. If your skill cannot supply me with such a medicine, I fear that notwithstanding all I have heard of you, you can do no more for my relief than has been already done by your brethren of the profession.

*Physician.* It is impossible for my skill to supply you with that which does not exist. All medicines, and particularly all opening medicines, lose their power by use. Your own experience has taught you this fact, as regards all the medicines which you have yourself tried: my more extended experience has satisfied me that this property is common to all medicines, particularly to all purgative medicines; it is indeed inseparable from the nature of medicines, and depends upon the general law, that all impressions become less strong by habit and repetition. But even if this law of the animal economy had no existence, and if the stomach and bowels did not become insensible to the stimulus of the same medicine, when frequently repeated; or if you contrive to evade this law by a continual change of the dose, or of the medicines, or of both, still the cure of biliousness cannot be effected by purgative medicines. You have yourself stated, that the relief obtained



from such medicines is but temporary ; I think it can be satisfactorily shown, that even that temporary relief is purchased at the high price of the aggravation and perpetuation of the disease. For, only reflect for a moment on the situation in which you are, when you take the opening medicine, and on the mode in which it produces relief. A lump gathers in your stomach within an hour or two after eating ; you swell up, and have a headache, which partially abates on your bringing up some wind, or sour water, or one or two mouthfuls of half-digested food ; there has been no passage in your bowels for perhaps two days ; you feel oppressed, and hot, and feverish ; in one word, you have a fit of the bile. You know by experience that a dose of opening medicine will relieve you, and that if you do not take it, you will pass a restless night, and have a headache in the morning. You take the dose, and immediate relief follows ; the bowels are unloaded ; the half-digested food, which was disagreeing with and irritating the stomach, the wind and the acid liquor are carried away at once, and a delightful calm succeeds ; the headache abates, or for a while ceases altogether ; the skin becomes cool, and a sensation of ease and comfort pervades the whole frame. Such are the beneficial, I might almost say the magical, effects of purgatives in bilious disorders ; effects, for the sake of which, physicians but too readily prescribe, and patients but too eagerly take, those medicines. Unhappily, however, the beneficial effects of purgatives are but of short duration, and are quickly superseded by their injurious effects, which I shall now describe to you. *First.* Inasmuch as a purgative operates by clearing out the stomach and the entire tract of the intestines at once, it removes not only the offending substances which the stomach is unable to digest, and which are therefore a source of irritation to it, but also that portion of the food which would be digested and assimilated, if allowed to remain, and not removed by the operation of the medicine. There is, therefore, a loss of nourishment to the system at each operation of a purgative ; a loss which may be but small on a single occasion, but which becomes very considerable when purgatives are used habitually. *Secondly.* This is not the only way in which a purgative debilitates ; it causes a flow of bile from the liver, of pancreatic juice from



the pancreas, and of intestinal juices from the whole of the vast tract of the intestinal canal ; it not only causes these fluids to flow in greatly increased quantity into the intestines, but also carries them out of the body along with what the intestines previously contained. This sudden flow of fluid into the intestinal canal from the stimulus of a purgative, resembles the sudden flow of fluid produced on the surface of the skin by the stimulus of a blister, and is, like it, debilitating. In proportion also, as the fluid produced by the stimulus of the purgative is infinitely greater in quantity than that produced by the stimulus of the blister, the debilitating effect of the former is infinitely greater than that of the latter. Purgatives therefore debilitate, not only by depriving the body of the nutriment which it has received from without, but also by draining it of its own fluids. On this account they are much employed by the physician for the express purpose of inducing debility, in diseases in which a reduction of the strength is desirable; and are, next to blood-letting, the most powerful means which he possesses for the attainment of that object. But let not the dyspeptic patient be misled, by a false analogy, to believe that because purgatives are beneficial in the cases just mentioned, they will also be beneficial to him. His frame is already but too much debilitated, and will not bear to be deprived of its necessary nourishment, and drained of its vivifying juices by the rude action of those medicines.

*Thirdly.* Purgatives disturb the nervous system, and lower the vital energy. These effects, which are of course less evident in strong healthy men, who are but little affected by depressing influences of any kind, are very evident in weak, and delicate, and particularly in dyspeptic persons. In such persons, the depressing influence of purgatives on the nervous system is shown by increased nervousness and irritability, both mental and corporeal, and sometimes even by spasms and hysterical convulsions.

*Fourthly.* Sickness, nausea, vomiting, griping, and even fainting, and passing of slime and blood from the bowels, some one or more of these are usual attendants on the operation of a purgative. These symptoms (which are, by the way, the common symptoms of poisoning) indicate, according to their number and intensity, the amount of the direct injury which the purgative has inflicted on the intestinal canal.



When all these symptoms together, and in a severe form, accompany the operation of a purgative, the injury done is very considerable ; so considerable as even to destroy life in some cases, in which the strength has been previously much reduced either by long-continued illness or by old age. Although in ordinary cases the symptoms are fewer and less severe, and indicate a much smaller degree of injury, yet even in such cases the amount of injury sustained by the constitution becomes at last considerable, inasmuch as the smallness of the injury on each particular occasion is usually compensated by the frequency of its repetition. *Fifthly.* Immediately after the operation of a purgative, a sense of want or emptiness is felt all over the frame ; a sensation occasioned in part by the sudden and forcible removal from the stomach and intestines of their ordinary contents, but principally by the draining away of the vital fluids under the operation of the purge. To relieve this sense of want or emptiness, which is not unfrequently mistaken for healthy appetite, food is taken in greater quantity than before. Hence a new source of trouble, and an aggravation of the original bilious symptoms ; which having arisen, in the first instance, and before the operation of the medicine, from the incapacity of the stomach to digest the food it had received, cannot but be aggravated when the stomach, weakened and disturbed by the medicine, is called upon to digest a quantity even greater than that which was too great for it when it was in a stronger condition. *Sixthly.* The unhappy sufferer never ascribes to its true cause the increase of suffering which is the invariable consequence of the operation of a purgative. He gives indeed to the purgative full credit for all the relief received, but never fails to ascribe the subsequent aggravation of the symptoms to the increased biliousness of his constitution, requiring, as he thinks, the further use of purgatives. Misled by this fatal delusion, he has again recourse to the opening medicine with the same result as before ; a temporary relief, which only confirms him in his opinion of the efficacy of his mode of treatment, and a subsequent aggravation of the symptoms, again attributed not to its true cause, his mal-practice, but to the fault of his constitution and the increasing severity of the disease : and so he proceeds in his round of error, founding his practice on his



false theory, and confirming his theory by an erroneous estimate of the results of his practice. *Lastly.* To all these evil consequences of the use of purgatives, there is yet to be added that inconvenience which you have just now so sensitively deplored, and in order to find a remedy for which you have this day sought my assistance; I mean the increased confinement of the bowels which always follows the operation of an opening medicine. This is nature's rest after the violent excitement into which the medicine had thrown her. In this rest of nature the bilious patient sees nothing but disease, and hastens to interrupt it by a repetition of the dose: but nature is wearied, and is not so easily excited as before; she is, besides, accustomed to the stimulus, and does not regard it; the purgative repeated has no effect, and the bowels remain shut up; the patient becomes alarmed, and doubles the dose; and that failing, has recourse to new and more powerful drugs; he succeeds at last, and the bowels are opened, only to relapse into still more obstinate costiveness, to be in its turn overcome by remedies more powerful still; until at length the delicate membrane of the intestinal tube becomes irritated, and the setting in of dysentery but too plainly indicates that inflammation or ulceration has taken place.

*Patient.* You draw a terrifying picture, Doctor; and I only wish that I had less experience of its close resemblance to nature. I have been injured by those strong, drastic, irritating purgatives, and am ready to join in your reprobation of them. But you will surely not pronounce the same sentence of condemnation against those mildly opening and alterative medicines, which neither sicken nor gripe, but merely give a gentle stimulus to the bowels, and assist their natural action; I mean such medicines as Gregory's powder, or the blue pill, which are so gentle and safe in their operation, that many persons keep them constantly at hand, and use them as occasion requires, without asking any medical opinion upon the subject.

*Physician.* The milder the purgative, the less dangerous of course it is. But as a mild purgative is apt to be ineffectual, unless it is given in a large dose, it comes to pretty much the same thing whether you use the large dose of the mild purgative, or the small dose of the strong one. Every medicine, strong or weak, which is strong enough to move the



bowels, and is used habitually for that purpose, comes within the scope of my objections. The evil is in the purging, not in the medicine; and it is the practice of purging which I condemn, not the agent by which it is effected. When you imagine that the evil of the practice can be obviated by a judicious selection of the agent, you fall into an error almost universal amongst bilious patients, who lay the blame of the inconvenience they experience from the practice of purging, upon the individual medicines employed, not upon their own false theory. This error is doubly dangerous, inasmuch as it not only prevents you from discovering by experience the falsehood of your theory, but at the same time leads you into the vain pursuit of a perfect purgative, that medical philosopher's stone, which exists no where except in the imagination of the dyspeptic patient, or the advertisement of the quack doctor. You go about from friend to friend, from physician to physician, and from quack to quack, in search of this purgative, to which you are to have recourse whenever you are either bilious, or nervous, or costive, or hippish, or have eaten too much, or have drunk too much, or when your skin is hot, or when you have a headache, or are feverish, or have caught cold; you go about in search of the perfect purgative which is to have the same effect under all these different circumstances; which is to be not only certain, but at the same time safe and mild in its operation; which is neither to gripe, nor to sicken, nor to lose its power by use; which is not to disappoint you by doing too little, nor weaken you by doing too much; you meet with nothing but disappointment, and yet you persist in the pursuit, and close your eyes against the obvious truth, that the operation of a medicine must be different at different times, according to the different states of the constitution on and by means of which it operates. On this principle, as a foundation, rests the whole science of medicine, the whole art of the physician. By this principle the physician is distinguished from the quack, and the science of medicine from quackery. The physician who, through ignorance or neglect of this principle, prescribes medicines solely with a view to the properties of the drugs, and either does not understand or does not attend to the particular constitution and state of health of his patient, is a quack, although



he may have graduated at an university, and his medicine is quack medicine, although it may have been compounded by the most expert apothecary and according to the rules of the College of Physicians.

*Patient.* I acknowledge that there is a great deal of truth in what you say, and now, for the first time, clearly perceive how wide is the difference between the scientific physician, who never prescribes until he has first made himself acquainted with the constitution of the patient and his particular condition at the time, and the quack, who prescribes the same medicine not only for the same person at different times and under different circumstances, but for all persons whatsoever, no matter how dissimilar in age, habits, strength, constitution, and circumstances of disease. I am convinced also that the idea of a perfect habitual purgative must be given up as an absurdity, and that purging will increase, rather than diminish, my bilious symptoms. I am willing to be guided by your opinion on these subjects, and shall therefore no longer use purgatives as a remedy for bile. But I fear that I cannot do without them altogether, and that I must occasionally have recourse to them, in order to obviate the natural costiveness of my bowels. I have no doubt that even for this purpose it would be better to take them under the advice of a physician, and would certainly do so if that mode were not both expensive and troublesome. It better suits my means and my indolent habits to have recourse to what I must acknowledge partakes of the nature of quackery, and to keep a little medicine beside me for the purpose of occasionally freeing my bowels, even although its use should be attended with some of the disadvantages which you have pointed out.

*Physician.* As I have succeeded so far, and have convinced you that your bilious symptoms will not be benefitted by the use of purgatives, I shall have less difficulty in advancing the next step, and satisfying you that purgatives are not rendered necessary even by the costive state of bowels of which you speak. Indeed, your use of them for the purpose of obviating costiveness seems rather inconsistent with the complaint which you just now made, that as soon as the operation of a purgative is over your bowels always become more costive than before.



*Patient.* Your objection is just; but the necessity for the purgative is sometimes so pressing, that I think only of present relief, and little, if at all, upon future consequences.

*Physician.* And pray what do you consider such a pressing necessity for a purgative, as should make you regardless of future consequences?

*Patient.* I think that it is indispensable to good health that there should be an evacuation of the bowels every day, and that this evacuation should be of a soft consistence, and of the colour which Mr. Abernethy has so well described as the colour of wet rhubarb. If my evacuations are, for several days together, hard and scanty, and of a dark olive or black colour, and more especially if I pass one entire day without an evacuation, my mind becomes uneasy; on the second day my uneasiness increases, and I think it quite necessary on that day, or at the very furthest on the third day, to take opening medicine, for fear of inflammation. I think you will hardly deny that, if the bowels remain quite shut up on the third day, there is an absolute necessity for taking some kind of opening medicine.

*Physician.* I cannot admit the paramount necessity for taking opening medicine on the third day, because I have never seen any very bad consequences result even from a much longer delay. If, as you apprehend, inflammation may result from mere costiveness, it must be an extremely rare occurrence, as I have never yet met with an instance of the kind. Has it never happened in your own person that the third, or even the fourth day has passed without an evacuation, and yet no inflammation ensued?

*Patient.* I remember that on one occasion I was very much engaged in business of a sedentary nature, and took but little exercise for several days together; during the whole time my mind was much occupied, and I quite neglected my bowels, which became so costive that I had no passage in them for five or six days; I recollect very well that at the end of that period a smart purging came on by itself, just as if I had taken medicine, and, when that stopped, my bowels went on pretty much as usual.

*Physician.* That was a result very different from inflammation; the spontaneous purging of which you speak was



not only without danger, but was of real utility, being the curative operation by which nature restored the balance of health, which had been deranged by the continued costiveness. But it is only when the costiveness is very long continued, that nature finds a spontaneous purging to be necessary. On ordinary occasions, the delay of one, two, or three days is fully compensated, by one or two motions a little larger than usual. If you only take care not to interrupt the process of nature by the officious interference of art, you will almost invariably find that the evil of a few days' costiveness is remedied in the manner which I have mentioned; either by one or two full motions, if the costiveness has been of short duration, or by spontaneous diarrhœa if the duration of the costiveness has been longer. This is the process of nature, and is effected, as all the processes of nature are, by a very simple arrangement; for the excrement itself being the stimulus which she has provided to cause the intestine to contract and expel its contents, every increase in the quantity of the excrement produces a corresponding increase in the strength of the stimulus; if therefore there happen to arise in the intestine any dulness or slowness in answering to the ordinary stimulus, the gradually increasing quantity of the excrement produces a gradual increase in the strength of the stimulus, until at last the torpid intestine is roused to the performance of its duty. This arrangement, by which the strength of the stimulus is increased in proportion, not only to the torpidity of the intestine, but to the necessity for the evacuation, is so perfect, that under all ordinary circumstances you may depend with entire confidence upon nature's performing her office within due time; and you will find, if you carefully inquire into those cases where inflammation of the bowels, or other serious injury has been supposed to arise from constipation, that the inflammation or other injury was the cause, and the constipation only the consequence; and that in such cases those remedies alone were effectual which removed the inflammation, or other cause of constipation, not those which were applied directly to the constipation itself. If it be unnecessary to take opening medicine, even although the bowels may have been shut up for two or three days together, it is still less necessary to force the bowels by



means of medicines of this kind to what is called a regular daily evacuation. The opinion that there should be an evacuation of the bowels every day is indeed very common, but it is not founded on the observation of nature, who has left the interval that may elapse between the evacuations subject to great variety, not only in different persons, but in the same person at different times. Of a number of persons all in perfect health, one may have a stool every day, another twice a day, another every second, or third, or fourth, or fifth day; and a healthy person may have a stool once or twice every day at one period of his life, and only every third or fourth day at another period. Every day's experience teaches medical men the fact, that there is naturally this great variety in the number of the stools. Even if this fact were not taught by experience, it might be expected *a priori*, because we know that the number of the stools depends on the quantity of the excrement formed, and on the natural excitability of the bowels; both of which vary not only in the different periods of life, but in different individuals at the same period. The quantity of the excrement varies, because the elements of which it consists vary—viz., the residue of the food after the nutritious matter has been extracted from it by the absorbents, and certain juices which require to be removed out of the body. The former of these elements—viz, the residue of the food, is greatest in youth, and gradually diminishes as age approaches, because the residue of the food is, *cæteris paribus*, proportioned to the quantity of food taken, and the quantity of food taken is greater in youth and less in age, more nourishment being required by a body growing and enlarging and much exercised, than by one which has ceased to grow and enlarge and is less exercised. The latter of the two elements constituting the excrement—viz., the juices which are to be eliminated from the body along with the residue of the food, follows the same law—i. e., is greatest in youth and diminishes as age advances, because, *first*, copious secretion belongs to youth, less copious to age; and *secondly*, because these juices performing an important part in the processes of digestion and nutrition, their quantity must be in proportion to the activity of those processes, which we have seen is greatest in youth and least



in old age. The excrement is, therefore, *cæteris paribus*, greatest in youth, and diminishes gradually towards old age, because each of the elements of which it consists is greatest at the former period, and diminishes gradually towards the latter. The number of the stools, therefore, so far as it depends on the quantity of the excrement, is not only variable, but varies according to a certain law, being greater in the earlier, and becoming less and less towards the later periods of life. But the number of the stools depends not merely on the quantity of the excrement, but on the excitability of the bowels, which again varies according to the same law as the quantity of the excrement, being greatest in infancy and youth, and gradually diminishing towards old age; the number of the stools, therefore, so far as it depends on the excitability of the bowels, gradually diminishes from infancy to old age. For both reasons, therefore, both because the quantity of the excrement is greater, and the excitability of the bowels greater also, the stools of young persons are more numerous than those of adults, and those of adults more numerous than those of elderly persons. It follows, that the opinion that there should be an every day motion, or any certain number of motions within a given time, is opposed not only to daily experience, but to the principles of physiology, by both of which we are taught that if a rule requiring a certain number of motions within a given time be applicable to one period of life, it will be totally inapplicable to another period, whether later or earlier.

*Patient.* You admit then the existence of a rule, and you differ from me only in assigning a separate rule to each different period in the life of the individual.

*Physician.* I beg your pardon; there is a much wider difference between us; I speak of generalities, you of particulars; the rule that numerous stools belong to infancy and youth, less numerous to middle age, and the least numerous to advanced age, is a rule only applicable generally to the periods of life, not to individual cases; inasmuch as causes, similar to those which produce a certain general frequency of stools at different periods of life, may operate on an individual, so as to make his stools differ in frequency from those of other individuals at the same period, and even to produce



a considerable difference in the frequency of his own stools during different portions of one and the same period. Thus, an individual at the middle period of life may have stools as numerous as those of an infant or a growing youth, if he happen naturally to have easily excitable bowels, or if by means of a fuller diet he forms a larger quantity of excrement than usual, while at the same time, by frequently varying his food and using active exercise, he supplies a more than ordinary stimulus for its expulsion. On the other hand, this very individual may have his stools as few and scanty as those of a person advanced in age, if he lead a very inactive life, and if his food be small in quantity, but little varied, and of a kind that but feebly stimulates the intestines. When, in any individual, there is a concurrence of all the causes which render the stools numerous—viz., youth, stimulating and varied food, active exercise, and excitable bowels, the number of stools consistent with good health is at a maximum: this maximum may be estimated at two, perhaps three, in the day. On the other hand, the number of stools is at a minimum, when all the causes which diminish their frequency occur together—viz., scanty, unvaried and slightly stimulating diet, old age, and bowels which are naturally but little excitable; this minimum may perhaps be estimated at one in a fortnight. Good health is compatible with any number of stools between these two extremes. Again, good health is compatible with stools of every shade of colour, from bright yellow or orange to dark green, dark olive, or even black, and with every degree of consistence, from that of custard pudding to that of the hard pellets of sheep's or goat's dung. The general principle is, that those persons in whom the processes of digestion and nutrition are active, and consequently the digestive juices abundant, and in whom the bowels, being easily excitable, retain the excrement but a short time, have stools of the lighter colours and less consistence; while those in whom the nutritive process is carried on more slowly, whose bowels are more indolent and retain the excrement longer, have stools of the darker colours and firmer consistence; and accordingly we find that those who have the lighter coloured and less consistent stools, are the very persons whom I have already described as having the more frequent



and copious stools—viz., the young, particularly infants and children, and among adults those who use active exercise and a copious and varied diet; whilst those whose stools are hard and dark coloured, are the very persons whom I have described as having the less frequent stools—viz., those who are considerably advanced in years, who live inactive, sedentary lives, and take but little nourishment, and that generally of one uniform kind; and in further illustration of the same principle, we find that whatever causes artificially a movement in the bowels, whether it be medicine, or exercise, or change of diet, causes the stools to become not only more numerous and copious, but at the same time lighter coloured and less consistent; and that whatever confines the bowels renders the stools not only fewer and less copious, but also harder and darker coloured. I have now shown you that your opinion, that it is necessary to good health that the stools should be brought by the aid of purgatives to agree with a certain assumed standard, either with respect to frequency, or colour, or consistence, is opposed—*First*, by your own experience of the utter futility of all attempts to render your bowels more regular by the aid of purgative medicines. *Secondly*, by my medical experience of the same fact with respect to other persons. *Thirdly*, by my medical experience that such attempts are not only futile but ruinous to the health. *Fourthly*, by my medical experience of the great variety that obtains in the stools of healthy persons, both with respect to their number, colour, and consistence; or if I may so say, by my medical experience of the non-existence of a fixed standard for the stools. *Fifthly*, by the principles of physiology, which show that the stools of healthy persons must of necessity vary, and cannot by possibility be reduced to a fixed standard.

*Patient.* There is yet one ground for my opinion which you have left untouched; you will excuse me; the opinion is so generally entertained, not only by well informed persons outside the pale of your profession, but by medical men themselves, that I can with difficulty bring myself to think that it has no foundation in truth.

*Physician.* The prevalence of an opinion cannot be admitted as an argument for its truth. On the contrary, in



matters, which, like the subject of the present discussion, are not susceptible of rigid mathematical demonstration, and on which, therefore, a difference of opinion may exist, the prevalent opinion is for several reasons likely to be incorrect. *First.* Because in this, as in other cases where there are several ways of going wrong, and only one way of going right, it is more probable that some one of the numerous wrong ways will be selected, than the single right one; and accordingly it is found by experience that the first generally adopted opinion, upon almost any subject which involves a little difficulty, is erroneous, and that it is only after a long time and much discussion, and the alternate adoption and rejection of several erroneous opinions, that Truth is at last discovered, where she lies concealed, or, as it is said, at the bottom of a well. *Secondly.* The public or prevalent opinion is apt to be erroneous, because Error being showy, forward, and plausible, attracts many followers, while Truth, on account of her unobtrusive simplicity, is neglected or despised. *Thirdly.* The public opinion is apt to be erroneous on account of the great number of persons of wealth, influence, and intelligence, many of them associated together and rendered powerful by charters and acts of parliament, who are continually and actively employed in opposing the progress of new opinions, and either ignorantly or designedly maintaining those ancient errors, from which, directly or indirectly, they derive their wealth and power, and in which, therefore, they may be said to have a vested interest. For all these reasons, it is in the highest degree unsafe, as well as unphilosophical, to admit the prevalence of an opinion as an argument for its truth, especially if it can be shown, as I think I have shown with respect to the opinion in question, that it is contradicted, not only by the principles of physiology, but by extensive medical experience.

*Patient.* I fear that I am in the position of the vanquished disputant, who, unable any longer to defend his opinion, takes shelter behind the protecting shield of those who hold the same opinion as himself; driven from this, my last refuge, I can contend with you no longer; I am conquered, and must yield.

*Physician.* I wish to convince, not to conquer; to instruct



and benefit a patient, not to gain an inglorious victory over an adversary, who meets me upon my own ground, and at great disadvantage.

*Patient.* I will not deny, then, that there is yet one point upon which I am not quite satisfied; although the prevalence of the purging system is not to be admitted as evidence of its truth, still I cannot but think that there must be some good reason for the great popularity of that system, some better reason than the mere plausibility of error.

*Physician.* There are, unfortunately, but too many reasons for the popularity of purgative medicines. The *first* and principal is the immediate, although, as we have already seen, temporary and deceitful, relief which they afford from the almost intolerable uneasiness attendant on disorders of the digestive organs; for the sake of this relief they are, and always will be, much used by those who either do not know, or do not care, at what expense to their health they purchase the delusive aid of those medicines. Further, as the disorders of the digestive organs, which derive temporary benefit from purging, always increase in proportion to the increase of luxury, the practice of purging must increase in nearly the same proportion; we need not, therefore, wonder that the British nation, which is now the richest and most luxurious, and therefore the most bilious, should be also, as it is well known to be, the most purging nation in the world. Still further, purgatives, themselves the offspring of luxurious habits, cherish and promote those habits in return, because persons, who are inclined to indulge themselves, can hardly fail to do so the more frequently and unreservedly, while they believe that they possess in purgatives a sure remedy for their excesses; there is even reason to fear that such persons not unfrequently use their favorite blue pill and Gregory's powder, as the luxurious Romans used emetics, not so much for the purpose of setting the stomach and bowels right after the excesses of last night, as for the purpose of preparing them for those of to-night. The *second* great cause of the frequent use made of purgative medicines, is the generally received, but, as I have already shown you, very erroneous and unfounded opinion, that inflammation of the bowels is a common result of costiveness. You may recollect



that you entertained this opinion yourself, and that even at times when your costiveness gave you no other inconvenience, you took opening medicines from your dread that it might induce inflammation.

*Patient.* Yes; that vain terror hanging over me kept me constantly in a state of alarm; should I derive no other advantage from this consultation, I shall always feel grateful to you for having entirely dispelled from my mind that painful and groundless apprehension.

*Physician.* The two causes I have mentioned might, perhaps, be considered sufficient to account for the favorable opinion which most persons entertain of an open state of the bowels and of the frequent use of opening medicines; there are, however, some additional circumstances which may serve still further to explain the extraordinary credit and popularity of this opinion. And *first*, the opinion being an old one, as evidenced by the ancient maxim, "feet warm, head cool, belly open," and being also supposed to be of great consequence not only to the health but to the very existence, was handed down as a golden rule, the truth of which was not to be questioned, from parents and nurses to the children of succeeding generations, and these increasing in a geometrical ratio, the adherents of the doctrine could hardly fail to increase in nearly the same proportion. *Next*, Mr. Locke, in his celebrated Essay on Education, laid it down as a fundamental rule for the preservation of health, that there should be a motion of the bowels every day; disapproving, as he did, of the frequent use of medicine, he recommended as a means of obtaining a daily motion, that a visit should be paid to the water-closet every day at a certain hour, whether nature called or not, thus endeavouring to bring the principle of habit to aid in establishing a regular daily evacuation. The great authority of Mr. Locke's name recommended his opinion on this subject to the numerous readers of his writings; or, in other words, to almost all well educated men, who the more readily adopted his opinion without investigation, because he had been educated and had even practised as a physician. But the means which Mr. Locke recommended for obtaining a daily evacuation of the bowels proving quite insufficient, those who thought, along with



him, that a daily evacuation was necessary, were compelled to have recourse to the ordinary means of obtaining it—the use of purgative medicines. Thus did Mr. Locke, indirectly and contrary to his own intention, contribute to extend the purging system, not only among the well educated, but by necessary consequence among the other classes of society, amongst whom the opinions and practice of the well educated always spread in continually enlarging circles—circles which continue to enlarge and spread long after the opinions and practice have been abandoned by those with whom they originated; just as in a sheet of water, the circles formed by a pebble thrown into it continue to enlarge and spread long after the point at the centre has returned to a state of rest, or has originated a new motion.

*Patient.* I can bear witness to the inefficacy of the expedient recommended by Mr. Locke; at least in my case it had not the effect of rendering my bowels in the slightest degree more regular, although I practised it for several years.

*Physician.* Mr. Locke's expedient might, perhaps, be tolerated if it were only useless, but, unfortunately, it is worse. The daily visit to the water-closet when there is no call of nature leads to straining for the purpose of effecting an evacuation, and this straining when long continued is apt to bring on either a rupture or piles, or some other disease of the parts immediately concerned, while, at the same time, it tends to produce a fulness of blood, and sometimes even the bursting of a blood-vessel in the head or lungs. Useless, however, and injurious as was this practice, the recommendation of Mr. Locke caused it to be adopted by great numbers of persons, all, or the majority of whom, along with the practice, adopted also, as a matter of course, the principle on which the practice was founded. From the operation of this cause, combined with that of the other causes I have already enumerated, the doctrine that a daily evacuation of the bowels is essential to good health, had already gained considerable currency, when, about the commencement of the present century, the ingenious and eccentric Mr. Abernethy published his *Treatise on the Constitutional Origin and Treatment of Local Diseases*—

*Patient.* You have anticipated me in mentioning that



work; it fell into my hands several years ago, and first produced upon my mind that deep impression of the necessity for purgative medicine, which it in some degree retains, notwithstanding all the arguments which you have urged with so much kindness and patience.

*Physician.* The object of Mr. Abernethy's treatise was to prove that almost all, if not all, the diseases to which any part of the human frame is liable, arise from disorder of the digestive organs, and are to be cured solely by rectifying that disorder. It is obvious that, before this theory could be established, it was necessary to show that the digestive organs are generally in a disordered state in those persons who are affected with local diseases, for which purpose nothing could be more convenient than the already fashionable doctrine that a daily evacuation of the bowels is necessary to the health, and that every deviation from that rule is evidence of a disordered state of the digestive organs. This doctrine was most convenient to Mr. Abernethy's purpose, because there were few, if any, individuals the state of whose bowels accorded with the rule; and if there were any such, it was easy to exclude them by annexing to the rule, as he actually did, the condition that the required daily evacuation should also be of a certain colour and consistence. By thus assuming a standard of healthy digestion, with which it was impossible for the digestion of any individual to agree, Mr. Abernethy was enabled to prove at pleasure the disordered state of the digestive organs of all those affected with local diseases. This first step being gained, he found but little difficulty in advancing the next, and persuading his patients, and no doubt himself also, that the best method of curing those diseases consisted in bringing the stomach and bowels to the normal state by means of blue pill and other purgatives, the blue pill being used alone if the stools were deficient only in colour and consistence, and other more active purgatives being added if they were deficient also in frequency. These medicines seldom failed to produce, at least during the time the patient was using them, the required changes in the colour, consistence, and frequency of the stools. It was not, therefore, unnatural for the patient, who saw that the very changes which had been required, and even foretold by the physician,



took place under the use of his medicines, and who at the same time actually experienced the temporary relief which purgatives always afford, and who besides could scarcely be without some prejudice in favour of the fashionable doctrine of the necessity for frequent evacuations of the bowels ; it was not unnatural for the patient, under such circumstances, to form a high estimate of the efficacy of blue pill and other purgatives to cure, not only local diseases, but those disordered states of the digestive organs, commonly denominated nervous and bilious, and from which, according to the theory, local diseases arise. Thus, on the one hand, Mr. Abernethy found a ready foundation for his theory of the origin and treatment of local diseases in the popular doctrine that an open state of the bowels is indispensable to good health, whilst, on the other hand, this doctrine derived additional popularity from the eclat of the new theory grafted on it by Mr. Abernethy. The fame of that theory became every day greater and greater ; it was simple and easy to be understood, and was besides applicable, not only to all kinds of diseases, but to every individual person, because, if the theory were true, there was no person whose digestive organs were not in a disordered state ; as soon, therefore, as it attracted attention, it could not fail to spread, and it spread with a continually increasing velocity, because it was not, like many theories, a mere matter of speculation, but wherever it found an adherent, found also in that adherent a subject and a proof. All, therefore, were patients of Mr. Abernethy ; not the sick alone, but the healthy—every one the state of whose digestive organs did not exactly accord with the rule. Those who could afford the expense of the journey visited Mr. Abernethy at London, and were invariably informed by him that they would find their cases described in his book, and that, in order to obtain a cure, they had only to adopt the remedies therein prescribed. This advice, which seemed almost oracular, as it was given on a single glance, and without inquiry into the particular circumstances of the respective cases, and which was besides rendered impressive by the very eccentric manner of the adviser, was not without its use to the patients, who were benefited, sometimes perhaps by the medicines, but oftener by the stimulus of hope, by the change of air and



diet, and by the exercise and recreation of the journey. They returned home, loud in their praises of Mr. Abernethy and of the purging system; and their friends, who could not afford the expense of a journey to the metropolis, read Mr. Abernethy's book, and purged themselves at home. In the mean time other physicians followed in the track of Mr. Abernethy; some convinced by his reasoning, some stimulated by the expectation of reaping a similar harvest, the greater number hurried away by the fashion and the prevailing rage for opening medicine, until at last the purging system became so general that, long before the death of Mr. Abernethy, it was the almost invariable practice of every physician to inquire of every patient whether his bowels were open daily; and if, as usually happened, the answer was in the negative, immediately to prescribe purgatives, and to accompany them with a solemn warning to the patient, as he valued his health and life, never to allow the second day to pass without, in some way or other, obtaining a passage in the bowels. Independently of the example of Mr. Abernethy, the great facility of this mode of practice recommended it to the medical practitioner; under this system, a careful and laborious investigation into the particular circumstances of each case was no longer necessary; well prepared with his purgatives, the physician was ready for every case which might occur; if he understood the case, he gave purgatives, because he was convinced that they were required; if he did not understand the case, or had not leisure, or inclination, or ability to investigate it, he still gave purgatives; and thus, if he did not cure, he at least purged the patient, and so avoided the appearance of not knowing what should be done, and of standing an idle and inactive spectator of the progress of the disease. Thus were purgatives at one and the same time the offensive and the defensive armour of the physician; the keen weapons with which he combated all diseases, and the secure coat of mail which covered his own ignorance, incapacity, or inattention. The practice of physicians to prescribe and recommend opening medicines, and the general use made of them by the public, produced, of course, a great demand for medicines of this class; the manufacture and sale of purgatives, therefore, became a profitable employment, and



was carried on extensively by great numbers of persons, who, deriving large incomes from the sale of their medicines, took infinite pains, by means of advertisements in all the newspapers and periodicals, and by agents in almost every town in the empire, to give notoriety and celebrity to their nostrums, and at the same time to keep up the credit of the purging system, on which the sale of their drugs, and of course their revenues, entirely depended. Thus did the demand for purgatives produce a large class of persons who subsisted by their manufacture and sale, and these persons, in order to maintain and improve their trade, used every exertion to propagate the opinion, not merely that purgatives cure all diseases, but that an habitually open state of the bowels is indispensable to the enjoyment of health.

*Patient.* You will excuse me if I interrupt you for a moment. I shall not say one word in defence of quacks, or of the medicines which they recommend ; both are alike offensive to common sense and common honesty ; but I confess that I feel surprised at the terms in which you just now spoke of your brethren of the profession. I cannot, without some difficulty, bring myself to think that there are regularly educated physicians so ignorant or so dishonest as to make a practice of prescribing useless or injurious medicines ; it is only the quack who is capable of such conduct, and to him alone, not to the regularly educated physician, is your severe language applicable.

*Physician.* There are ignorant and dishonest persons in the medical profession, as there are in every profession, and in every sphere of life ; it is not the possession of a medical degree, but honesty and medical skill, which truly constitute a physician ; he whom you call a quack because he is without a degree, is truly a physician if he is honest and skilful ; while he whom you dignify with the name of physician, is no more than a quack if he is dishonest or unskilful—a quack, too, whom his degree renders only the more dangerous, because he is the more trusted on account of it. If I have used severe terms, it has been solely with reference to such dishonest or unskilful persons, not by any means with reference to the numerous well informed physicians whose labours are alike honourable to themselves and useful to society.



But to return to the causes of the popularity of purgatives ; another of those causes, and the last which I shall mention, is to be found in the purging spas ; for those who were bilious and nervous, only because they were rich and luxurious, returning with greatly improved health from their annual migrations to those spas, the improvement was ascribed not to its true cause—early hours, temperate living, change of air and scene, and regular daily exercise—but solely to the operation of the waters. The reputation of the waters, therefore, soon became so great, that quantities of them were bottled and exported for the use of those who could not afford to visit their native sources ; and not long afterwards, as the waters themselves were inconvenient for exportation, and, therefore, expensive at a distance from the springs, the salts were extracted from them, and sold dry, by which means it was put within the power of every one to manufacture the purging springs for his own use, merely by the addition of a little water to the dry salts. Hence arose a greater demand for the dry salts than could be supplied by all the purging springs in the world—a deficiency which was soon more than compensated by the chemists, who not only discovered processes for making the several salts without the aid of the water of the springs, but actually succeeded in manufacturing Epsom salt, on a large scale, and by a cheap process, from common sea water. Thus the purging spas not only extended the credit of the purging system, but facilitated the practice of that system, by introducing into general use a new class of cheap and active purgatives. I have now enumerated the various causes which have co-operated to produce the modern system of purging ; you will find, on reflection, that they afford a satisfactory explanation of the extraordinary credit and popularity of that system—an explanation which we seek in vain in the gratuitous assumption of the truth of the system.

*Patient.* Your explanation is quite satisfactory. I have no longer any doubt of the correctness of the principle you have laid down, and shall from henceforward renounce the use of purgatives altogether. I have the less difficulty in coming to this determination as you have not forbidden the use of lavements, and I can, therefore, at any time by their



means quicken the action of the bowels as much as may be necessary. You will correct me if I err in inferring from your silence on the subject that you do not disapprove of the use of lavements.

*Physician.* I made no special mention of lavements, because I supposed them to be included under the general term purgatives. A lavement is neither more nor less than a purgative which has a certain peculiarity of action arising from its peculiar mode of application. Opening medicine taken in this form is taken for the same purpose, on the same principle, and operates in all essential respects in the same manner, as opening medicine taken by the mouth; it is, therefore, liable to the same objections, except so far as its operation is modified by the peculiar manner in which the lavement is applied.

*Patient.* There must be some considerable difference, for I have always observed that opening medicine taken in the form of a lavement does not produce so much sickness at the time, nor so much weakness afterwards, as the same medicine when taken by the mouth.

*Physician.* Your observation is correct. The medicine in a lavement not being applied to the stomach and upper parts of the bowels, produces less disturbance of those parts than when directly applied to them. There is less sickness and less griping, the evacuations are less copious and less watery, and there is, of course, less consequent debility. The difference, however, is only in degree, because the nature of the intestinal tube is such that impressions made upon one part are felt by all the other parts, even the most remote. For this reason the stomach and upper part of the bowels always participate in the impression which a purgative injection makes upon the lower part, sometimes even so much that the whole canal is emptied as effectually as if the purgative had been taken by the mouth. As the impression made upon the lower parts by the stimulus of the injection becomes weaker by repetition, the participation of the upper parts becomes of course less, but it does not and cannot cease altogether, and the stomach and upper part of the bowels continue to be affected in a greater or less degree every time that a purgative injection is taken. But even if this were



not the fact, and if the stomach and upper parts of the intestinal canal were not at all affected by the operation of a lavement, its superiority in this respect over opening medicine taken by the mouth would be more than counterbalanced by its greater inconvenience, its more disgusting nature, its stronger disposition to produce piles, and its direct tendency to injure the bladder, and in females the uterus. But suppose the use of lavements to be unattended by any of those evils, suppose that it is neither inconvenient nor disgusting, that it does not encourage the growth of piles, injure the bladder or uterus, nor in the smallest degree disturb the functions of the stomach and upper part of the intestines, there still remains the paramount objection that, by the use of these artificial stimulants, the bowels are rendered less susceptible of the impressions made by their natural stimulant, the excrement; or, in other words, are rendered more costive, and thus a real and severe disease is produced by the operation of remedies applied to cure one which is wholly imaginary, or which, if it exists at all, cannot be cured except by remedies of a directly opposite kind.

*Patient.* You have proved your case as regards lavements composed of purgative ingredients; I must admit that it is no more than reasonable to suppose that purgative medicines operate nearly in the same way, and are liable to nearly the same objections, when they are taken in the form of lavements as when they are taken by the mouth; but you will hardly urge the same objections against lavements which contain no purgative ingredient whatever, and which, consisting only of tepid water or milk, are limited in their operation to the mere washing out of the intestine.

*Physician.* You take a very incorrect view of such injections when you suppose that their operation consists in washing out or mechanically cleansing the intestine. If such injections did not so stimulate the bowel as to cause it to contract, they would not only fail to produce the evacuation of the excrement, but would themselves remain shut up in the bowel because the sphincter muscle keeps the orifice of the bowel firmly closed, and effectually prevents whatever is inside from passing out until such time as the bowel contracts; then and not till then does the sphincter yield and



allow the contents of the bowel to be expelled by its contraction. It makes no essential difference whether that contraction is produced by the quality of the injection—as when it contains castor oil—or by the mere quantity of the injection—as when it consists solely of water or milk—if the contraction be not produced, the lavement does not operate at all, and if the contraction be produced, the lavement operates as a purgative, and is liable to all the objections which apply to purgative lavements.

*Patient.* You need say no more upon the subject ; I am quite convinced, and now at last clearly perceive how erroneous my medical opinions have been, and how injurious the practice to which they led ; I feel greatly indebted to you for the trouble you have taken, but have still a favour to beg of you ; you have satisfied me that I have been pursuing a wrong path, you must not leave me until you have put me upon the right one. As I am henceforth to make no use either of purgatives or of lavements, it remains for you to tell me upon what kind of medicine I am to depend for the recovery and preservation of my health.

*Physician.* You still rely entirely upon medicine, and only transfer your confidence from one kind to another, forgetting that I informed you, soon after you entered the room, that your disease is one of those which cannot be cured by any medicine whatever ; having then proposed to effect your cure by the regulation of your diet and regimen, and by the substitution of wholesome for unwholesome habits of living, I shall now more fully explain to you my meaning. Shortly after eating, you feel a sense of weight and oppression exactly where the stomach is situated ; you are conscious that something is going on wrong there ; you bring up acid liquor, or wind, or mouthfuls of half digested food ; these all coming from the stomach afford sufficient evidence that your food and it do not agree, that your stomach is unable properly to digest the food you have put into it. It is plain that the fault is not in the kind or quality of the food, because, as you just now told me, you have the same symptoms, only differing in degree, no matter of what kind or of what quality the food may have been. As the fault is not in the quality, it must be in the quantity of the food as compared with the powers of



the stomach ; but your stomach was formerly able to digest this quantity without inconvenience ; let us try if we can explain the reason of the change, or why it happens that you cannot now digest the same quantity of food which, some ten or twenty years ago, you digested with the greatest ease. *First*, then, when you arrived at the full maturity of growth, and still more when you passed that period, as there were no new parts to be formed, there was necessarily less demand for nutriment than when you were in the prime of youth, and still growing ; there was, therefore, less appetite for food, and less power in the stomach to digest it. *Secondly*. The season of youth being past, your habits became more sedentary ; you spent more time in the house, and less in the open air, and took less active bodily exercise. This change of habit caused a still further diminution of the demand for nutriment, and, of course, of the appetite for food, and a corresponding diminution of the capacity of the stomach for digestion. *Thirdly*. Along with mature age came care, the various anxieties, and troubles, and disappointments of life, all of which affect the stomach, and greatly diminish its powers of digestion—a fact which is familiar to every one, and of which novelists and dramatic writers have made frequent use ; thus, Henry the Eighth to Wolsey, in Shakespeare's play of "King Henry the Eighth"—

—————Read o'er this ;  
And after, this ; and then to breakfast, with  
What appetite you may.

*Fourthly*. The love of ease, and the power to indulge it, increased with years ; you dined late in order that your business might be completely over before dinner, and that you might pass the whole evening at your ease ; your dinner, which you had formerly regarded solely as a means of appeasing or preventing hunger, and of supporting the strength of your body, came to be regarded as a gratification of the palate, and, instead of eating less in proportion to your diminished appetite and diminished powers of digestion, you eat even more than formerly ; this produced a feeling of oppression after dinner, nature's warning that you had eaten too much, and that you should not continue to do so with impunity ; you misunderstood her warning, and thought that the oppression



arose from the want of stimulants ; you seasoned your food more highly, and began to take wine or punch after dinner, or, if you had been accustomed to the use of those liquors, you now used them more freely and more regularly. By these means your stomach was stimulated to increased exertions, and you no longer felt oppressed after dinner ; or, if the oppression did at any time return, either from your exceeding your usual quantity, or from your partaking of something rather less digestible than usual, you had a certain remedy at hand in a glass of cordial, or one or two additional glasses of wine. In this way matters went on pretty smoothly for some time, perhaps for some years, the stomach all the while becoming weaker and weaker from the very exertions which the stimulants called forth, just as a weak horse becomes exhausted by his own efforts when over-spurred. At last even stimulants failed to rouse your stomach into action ; the oppression came on after breakfast as well as after dinner ; after simple scarcely less than after rich food ; your stomach and bowels were distended with wind ; mouthfuls of food came up, half digested, and mixed with sour water ; you had restless nights, morning head-aches, and, what was more intolerable than all, your spirits were oppressed with a load which you were unable to shake off ; you sought the advice of a physician ; he pronounced you bilious, and prescribed purgatives ; you followed his advice ; with how little advantage, your visit to me this day sufficiently proves. You have now no longer any doubt that those so called remedies are useless—worse than useless ; you have resolved to abandon them, and have thus advanced the first step towards recovery—the first indispensable step, but not the only one which is required ; you have yet to advance another step before your recovery is complete.

*Patient.* You mean that I should take air and exercise.

*Physician.* You are perfectly right ; I mean that you should take exercise in the open air. Your symptoms having arisen from the inability of your stomach properly to digest your food, and air and exercise affording the natural, and certain, and well known means of strengthening the stomach and increasing its digestive power, it follows that if your stomach is not, as I believe it is not, already injured beyond recovery,



and if you are careful not to injure it in future, you have only to take sufficient exercise in the open air, in order to render your stomach equal to the digestion of your food, and so obtain the perfect recovery of your health. You have for many years lived an anxious, sedentary life; you have passed much of your time in close, badly ventilated apartments, and have taken but little exercise or healthful recreation; you must change your habits in all these particulars; you must give less time to business and sedentary occupations, and more time to exercise and recreation in the open air. If your circumstances do not permit you to ride, or hunt, or shoot, or course, you can at least afford some time for quick walking; if the middle of the day is engaged, you can rise early and walk before breakfast; or if that time also is devoted to business, you can take an hour's walk at night, just before bed-time, a practice quite free from danger to those who have not delicate lungs, and which has the advantage of warming the skin, and particularly the feet, before going to bed, and of composing and refreshing the mind after the fatigues and business of the day. This is a frequent practice of my own, and I have constantly observed not only that I fall asleep more quickly, but that I sleep more soundly after it; I do not allow even a wet night to interrupt this practice; but if you are too timid to go out at night in bad weather, you can practise dancing, or fencing, or sparring, or some other gymnastic exercise at home, or you can play with young people or children at some of their cheerful games, or you can read for an hour in a loud voice—an exercise celebrated even among the Romans for the cure of bilious diseases, but most unaccountably neglected in modern times, although it has the effect not only of strengthening the stomach, and assisting the action of the bowels, but also of bracing the chest and lungs, and improving the organs of voice and articulation, while, at the same time, it affords you an opportunity of directly cultivating the mind itself. I hardly know a more useful exercise, training and strengthening, as it does at one and the same time, both mind and body, and giving a command over the muscles of respiration, enunciation, and articulation, which is valuable to every one, but more particularly to those whose profession calls upon them to speak in public. Having myself practised this exercise to a



very considerable extent when a student at the university, I have had ample experience of its power to counteract the noxious influences of close confinement and sedentary occupation; and I have since remarked that those parts of the academic course which I thus read aloud are the parts which present themselves to my memory with the greatest freshness. Besides these exercises, which are particularly suited for bad weather, there are also the exercises of bathing or swimming, which if you practise, you should remember to walk from the bath, if not to it also; then you might make excursions into the country, or join a party going to travel either in England or Scotland, or on the Continent.

*Patient.* Your advice is excellent, but not so easily followed; my business is not only of a sedentary nature, but so engrossing as to leave me little leisure either for exercise or amusement; and even if I had the leisure, I fear that I have not sufficient spirits or energy to employ it as you desire.

*Physician.* I do not propose that you should use all the kinds of exercise which I have mentioned, or that you should sacrifice every thing to the improvement of your stomach; but you must at least do something to counteract the bad effects of close air, sedentary occupation, and anxiety of mind. Some one or more of the exercises and recreations which I have enumerated will be found practicable, and suited to your taste and disposition. There are but few who cannot take an hour from business either in the evening or morning. It is said, and I believe with a good deal of truth, that a man can always find some time for what he is fond of; and I have frequently observed that men who were much engrossed by serious business, could yet contrive to visit a race-course regularly, and even to spend whole days there; or could devote an hour or two hours to dinner, which seldom occupies me more than fifteen minutes; or could afford a reasonable share of time to music, or to politics, or to clubs, or to the theatre, or to light reading, or to literature, or, in short, to any thing to which they were strongly inclined by the natural bent of their disposition. If, however, you are unfortunately so circumstanced that you cannot, or will not, put into practice any of the measures which I have mentioned, there is yet another method to which you may have recourse, and from



which I can promise you very considerable benefit—a method, too, which is perfectly in your own power, and which does not involve any sacrifice of time or any expense.

*Patient.* You have only to tell me what it is, and I shall adopt it instantly. I am ready to do any thing which does not require me to leave or neglect my business.

*Physician.* As you find it impracticable to take those measures which are necessary to render your stomach equal to the work which it has to do, give it less work; do with it as you do with a weak horse; when you cannot strengthen the horse so as to render him equal to the work, you diminish the work so as to render it equal to the strength of the horse; do the same with your stomach.

*Patient.* You are mistaken if you suppose that I eat too much; I assure you that there are few who do not eat more heartily than I do.

*Physician.* You cannot take the stomach of another person as a measure for your own. The powers of the stomach differ as much in different individuals as the powers of other organs; one man will lift two hundred weight with ease, it will distress another to lift two stone; one man will walk twenty, or thirty, or forty, or even fifty miles in a day; another will be fatigued by walking five; one man will see at the distance of several yards a minute object, which another will scarcely be able to distinguish at the distance of as many inches; so it is with the stomach; one man will be filled, even to repletion, by a quantity of food scarcely sufficient to satisfy the cravings of another man's hunger. There is no rule so good, or so general in its application, as the feeling of the stomach itself; if, after a meal, you are light and cheerful, and without flatulence or acidity, you have not eaten too much; if, on the contrary, you are oppressed or flatulent, you have erred either in the quantity or quality of the food taken. We have seen that in your case the error is not in the quality, because the symptoms, although mitigated, continue when the quality is changed; the error, therefore, must be in the quantity; in the quantity, considered not absolutely, but relatively to the powers or present state of your stomach. You inform me that circumstances render it difficult for you to use the means necessary to strengthen the stomach; the conclusion is



obvious; you must diminish the quantity of the food. By so doing you will relieve yourself from the bilious symptoms; you will be no longer troubled with flatulence, acidity, and oppression after meals; your tongue will become clean, your spirits light, and your stomach, being no longer required to do more than it is able to do, will gradually improve in tone and temper. But this method, although calculated to cure your bilious symptoms, is still an imperfect method; because your sedentary, anxious, careful life—the original cause of the disorder in your stomach—will still exert its injurious influence, weakening and emaciating your muscles, shattering your nerves, and unfitting your stomach for the digestion of more than the smallest quantity of the plainest food. You will be improved indeed, because your stomach will be able to digest the diminished quantity of food, but this quantity of food being too small to impart full strength and vigor to your frame, you will still be an invalid, although no longer bilious. If you wish your cure to be complete, combine the two methods judiciously together. While your stomach continues weak, give it less work, but in the mean time do not neglect the means necessary to restore its strength. As it grows stronger, it will not only be able to do more work, but its work will be better done; it will digest its food better, and the food digested better will produce stronger muscle, bone, and sinew, by means of which you will be enabled to take an increased quantity of exercise without fatigue; the increased quantity of exercise will produce increased strength of stomach, and the increased strength of stomach, increased strength of muscle, bone, and sinew; and so the improvement will go on in a circle; your bilious symptoms will disappear as if they were charmed away; you will lose the fastidiousness of palate, and capriciousness of appetite, which a disordered stomach always generates; and you will restore to your dietary, with safety and even with advantage, various articles of food which are at present excluded from it; the bloom of health will adorn your cheeks, and vigor of body will accompany and promote vigor of mind and serenity of temper. Now compare the two methods one with the other, the purging method with the method by diet and regimen. Under the former the health is continually growing worse,



under the latter continually improving. The former method is expensive, disagreeable, troublesome, dangerous, debilitates your body, enervates your mind, and fills it with vain fears and apprehensions, especially on the subject of your health, which it teaches you to watch with a feverish anxiety, not far removed from insanity. The latter method is cheap, in as much as it requires neither medical attendance nor medicines; it is also simple, easy, safe, and agreeable; it will not only strengthen your body, but invigorate your mind, and fit it for the exercise of all its nobler faculties. You have tried the former method, tried it in every form and shape, and for almost your whole life; by domestic purgatives, by the prescriptions of physicians, by lavements, by every variety of quack medicine, Gregory's powder, antibilious pills, Hunt's pills, Morison's pills, yet you are still bilious, as bilious, or even more so, than when you began. The principle on which you have hitherto acted must be false, for you have tried every possible modification of it without success; you have at last resolved to abandon it; go now, adhere to your resolution, and immediately enter upon the new method. I shall be glad to see you at the end of three months, or of six months if you please; if you are not then a healthier and a happier man than you are now, I shall submit to take Gregory's powder and Morison's pills regularly, and to be a bilious man for the remainder of my days.

*Patient.* I will put the plan in execution at once, and return after a short time to make my report; in the mean time I beg to assure you that, whether the result of the trial be favorable or unfavorable to your opinions, I shall always remember your kindness with gratitude, and never cease to entertain the highest respect for your profession.



## A DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A

BILIOUS PATIENT AND A PHYSICIAN.

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### PART SECOND.

*Physician.* I am glad to see you. At first sight I did not know you. You are greatly changed for the better.

*Patient.* Yes, and I have to thank you for it. I am a new man ; you have been the means, under Providence, I will not say of saving my life, but, which is much more, of enabling me to enjoy it. The existence, that was almost a burthen to me, has become delightful ; my mind and body are both at ease, and I am able to employ their energies for the advantage of my family, and the good of my fellow creatures ; all this happy change has been effected in the short space of three months.

*Physician.* I need not inquire what you have done ; I see it in your air and countenance.

*Patient.* I followed your advice as closely as possible. I left off the use of purgatives altogether, and have not taken even one single dose since I saw you. You will, perhaps, be surprised when I tell you that my motions have notwithstanding been as numerous as when I followed the purging system. There was, however, a difference in their quality, which at first caused me some uneasiness ; they were always hard,



scanty, and dark coloured, and never of the yellow laxative kind. But the uneasiness which I felt on this account was not of long duration, for I soon perceived that I was in better health than I had ever been when my motions were of the opposite character. And I am now thoroughly convinced by my own experience that costive motions, so far from being evidence of a bad state of health, or of a necessity for opening medicine, are in reality the ordinary accompaniment of strength and good health. No bad result followed, even when my bowels remained entirely shut up for several days together; on the contrary, I felt strong and well all the time; and they never failed soon to come round again, either of their own accord, or from increased exercise, or some little change in diet; if they had not done so, I would have called on you to inquire what should be done.

*Physician.* And I would have advised you to wait a little longer, and if the confinement of the bowels had still continued, and no symptom of disease arisen, I would have recommended even further delay. At the worst, either colic or spontaneous diarrhoea would have given notice when the time had arrived for the interference of the physician.

*Patient.* However, the necessity did not arise, as my bowels always came round before the costiveness produced any inconvenience; and it seldom happened that the use of stirabout, or fresh vegetables, or ripe fruit, articles of diet which I had formerly regarded with all the horror of a bilious man, did not speedily produce a change in them. At first I found it necessary to be very cautious as to the quantity of food which I took, but the necessity for this caution became less in proportion as my stomach regained its strength; and I now can eat as heartily as I desire, and of all the usual kinds of food. The nature of my occupations did not permit me to take as much exercise and recreation as I should have wished, but, by a little management, I was enabled to take a great deal more than I had been accustomed to. I read aloud, as you desired, for nearly an hour every morning, and, if prevented by business from taking exercise during the day, I had always my resource in a smart walk before going to bed. If, for the sake of additional recreation and exercise, I sometimes encroached even upon the hours of business, I found by



experience that my business did not lose by it, as my increased strength of body and increased alacrity of mind, enabled me to transact my business not only in a shorter time, but in a more efficient manner. I had also at my disposal, either for business or recreation, the time which was formerly passed in illness, or in taking medicine, or in the necessary confinement after it. On the whole, therefore, I had more time for business, as well as more time for recreation. Even business itself, which had hitherto been so irksome to me, now that my strength was equal to it, became a recreation, and being better done than before, improved in proportion. I have thus, by following your advice, gained in every respect; in health of body and vigor of mind, as well as in worldly circumstances; in each and all of these respects I am a gainer, and, at the same time, your most thankful debtor.

*Physician.* If there are many disappointments in the practice of my art, there are also some elevated pleasures, not the least of which is the consciousness I at this moment feel that I have been the humble instrument by which a fellow man has been rendered a healthier, and happier, and more useful member of society.

*Patient.* An apprehension has this moment occurred to me, which I wish to mention to you before we part. Extremes are dangerous, and men are but too prone to run into them. I have suffered so much from the abuse of opening medicine, that I fear I shall now be likely to fall into the contrary extreme, and either neglect or decline to use that kind of medicine at the very time, perhaps, when it is most required.

*Physician.* You will not be likely to commit that error unless you renounce the guidance of common sense. There are only three cases which can by possibility occur. You will either continue in good health, as you are at present; or you will relapse into your former state of biliousness and nervousness; or some new kind of illness will arise. These three cases comprehend every possible future condition of your health. In the first of these cases—*i. e.*, if your health continues good, as it is at present, purgative medicine cannot be required, because it is only to the state of disease, not to the state of health, that medicines of any kind are applicable. Remember the adage, “*Let well enough alone,*” and remember



also the inscription on the tomb of the Italian physician, "I was well, I would be better, and here I am." In the second of these cases—*i. e.*, if you relapse into your former state of ill health, still purgatives cannot be required, because, having been injurious to you before, they must, under the same circumstances, be injurious to you again, according to the well known principle that similar causes always produce similar effects. There is, therefore, only one case in which it is at all possible that purgatives may be required, and that is, if symptoms of new disease arise.

*Patient.* That is the very case which I apprehend. Unless I am removed by sudden death, new disease will certainly occur sooner or later, and may possibly at this very moment be near at hand. That disease may require purgatives, and yet I may be deterred from using them by your former advice, and by my own past experience of their injurious effects.

*Physician.* Common sense will prevent you from applying either my former advice or your own former experience to a case of a different kind. The same medicine is at one time useful and at another time injurious, according to the disease in which it is administered. This is the nature of all medicine, and particularly of all purgative medicine, a single dose of which may at one time, and under one set of circumstances, destroy life, and at another time, and under another set of circumstances, afford the only means of saving it. As soon, therefore, as you have sufficiently ascertained that opening medicine is required in the case, you should have recourse to it with as little hesitation as to medicine of any other kind.

*Patient.* The difficulty is how I am sufficiently to ascertain that such medicine is required. The medical art is, as you must be aware, uncertain, and doctors disagree.

*Physician.* Absolute certainty is, of course, not to be had in medicine more than in any other department of human art, nor is perfect agreement to be expected amongst medical advisers more than amongst advisers upon any other subject of equal difficulty. If new illness should, as you apprehend, arise, you can have no greater certainty either as to the propriety of using purgatives in the case, or as to its general treatment, than that which is afforded by the advice of one or



more persons of intelligence, honesty and experience in the art of medicine. The degree of certainty so obtained may, indeed, fall far short of absolute certainty, but it will be sufficient for a reasonable man to act upon, and in no respect inferior to the greatest certainty which human advice affords upon any subject of a similar nature.

*Patient.* I feel the truth of what you say, Doctor, and beg once more to thank you for the kindness and patience with which you have listened to my questions and satisfied my doubts, and I now take leave of you, with the hope that if it please Providence at a future time to afflict me with illness, I may again be allowed the assistance of the kind friend to whom I already owe so much. I wish you all happiness: farewell.

THE END.