

Mercury stark naked : a series of letters addressed to Dr. Beddoes, stripping that poisonous mineral of its medical pretensions ... / by Isaac Swainson.

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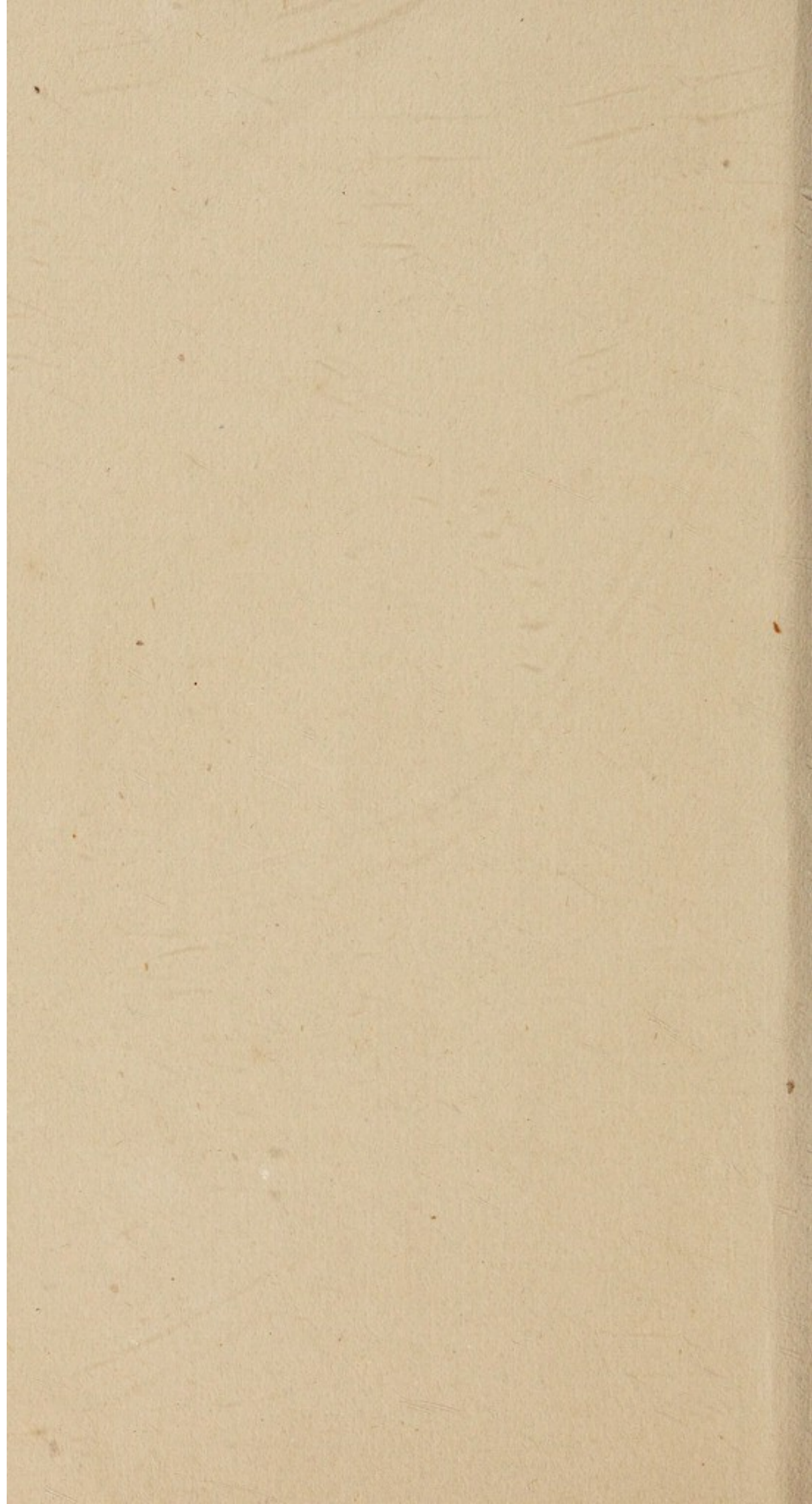


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MERCURY STARK NAKED.

A SERIES OF
LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

DR. BEDDOES;

STRIPPING THAT POISONOUS MINERAL OF
ITS MEDICAL PRETENSIONS;

And showing, that it perpetuates, increases, and multiplies
all the Diseases for which it is administered; and, while
it may sustain worthless Branches of Medical Practice, the
Use of it is an Opprobrium to the Scientific and Moral
Character of the Profession.

By ISAAC SWAINSON,
PROPRIETOR OF THE VEGETABLE SYRUP OF
DE VELNOS.

Precipitated Efforts all are vain,
And undigested Cures break out again.

L O N D O N:

PRINTED FOR JAMES RIDGWAY, YORK-STREET,
ST. JAMES'S-SQUARE.

1797

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APOLOGY FOR THE TITLE.

I HAVE lately seen two ingenious little pamphlets, called *Hermes Unmasked*, in which some rogueries of the god of verbal impostors are humorously exposed: my business with him is, as the conductor of human souls to the other world. In ancient times, he confined himself to his office, and left to diseases the task of killing men. In modern times, he has treacherously assumed the medical character, and by assisting diseases in their work of death, he multiplies his original occupation as conductor of souls.

It is in his modern capacity of doctor, sometimes regular, sometimes irregular, that I wish to strip him of all his pretensions; and not to present his *figure* in any manner that may offend the delicacy of the times.



LETTER I.

SIR,

AS I have not any of those titles which give to a man the reputation of knowledge, without his possessing it; as I have neither been educated at an university, nor wear a diploma*; and as I have not any personal acquaintance with you, it is necessary I should account for the liberty I take, in addressing to you these Letters.

In every thing, I perceive you to have that *spirit of a reformer*, which disdains those barriers which privileged ignorance has placed in the way of industrious enquiry.

You do not seem to imagine that an education at Oxford, where medicine is hardly an object of attention or study, is the best claim to its honours, or the best pretention to its practice. In the efforts you have made to improve the practice of physic, you have not scrupled to rest your principal dependence

* On purchasing the succession of the property of De Velnos, in Frith-street, I was furnished with a Scotch diploma of M.D. but I have never worn it; as I saw similar titles used in advertisements, as the instruments of the grossest imposture. Indeed, I have often wondered that men of unquestionable merit, such as many of the dissenting ministers, who have been learnedly educated at those dissenting academies or colleges in England, which confer no degrees, either procure or accept of diplomas, such as are obtained by quacks, the profligate venders of the most despicable and the most pernicious preparations.

on empyrical aid; for though important discoveries in air were made by Dr. Black, within the precincts of a college, the developement of those discoveries has been empyrical, in the language of universities, and, in some cases, by persons tainted with heretical imputations.

Relying, therefore, on your candour, on your apparently zealous love of truth; and hoping for some assistance from you, in the pursuit of my grand object, **THE EXPULSION OF MERCURY FROM THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE**, I will state to you, in a few words, the grounds and reasons of my bold, and, you may possibly imagine, my impracticable attempt.

Circumstances, which I have related in other publications, led me to quit a business to which I was bred, but for which I never had a taste, for the administration of a celebrated vegetable medicine, introduced into this country by *M. De Velnos*†.

My great view in the advantages I saw I must derive from it (having attentively observed its effects) was to obtain leisure and books, and to indulge my passion for literary and scientific enquiries.

The conduct of the faculty, respecting the vegetable syrup, directed some of those enquiries to the respective operations and effects of vegetables and minerals, as medicines, in disorders of the human

† Though pills, improved syrup, and other trash, are advertised in the name of De Velnos, he never had any knowledge of them; nor can the impostors advertising them, produce any authority from him or his family, for using his name to their own miserable

constitution—for in all cases of difficulty and importance, I found myself surrounded by swarms of interested medical practitioners, who considered the patient as a sort of property; and many of them have bitterly remonstrated with me, as depriving them of families, which had regularly *belonged* to them, and on which they relied for an income of nearly a certain amount.

This view of the profession was unpleasing and discouraging: I had quitted trade, from a dislike to many of its common customs, and I found myself entangled and embroiled with a profession which was actually the most contemptible species of trade. For the woollen or linen-draper, in disposing of his commodities, has no mode of increasing the wants of his customers by the very goods with which he furnishes them; and his hopes of gain are not masqued by hypocritical or professional pretences.

This difficulty, for some time, I was disposed to consider in the light of a competition, and to such competition I should have had no objection.

But I soon found, that the profession pretended to an exclusive right to all knowledge and practice in an art which, from its nature, is open to all who will study and make experiments in it, and which is confined within privileged boundaries, always at the expence of the health and property of the people.

But, in proportion as I proceeded, and I relieved or cured cases, by vegetable preparations, which surgeons rendered desperate, lingering, and mortal, by metallic salts, or the spirituous results of chemistry, I

found the general sympathy and common interest of the faculty arranging its members into a deep and determined phalanx against me.

The effect of this sympathy was a general calumny, most industriously and indefatigably propagated, "that I made the syrup the vehicle of mercury," and by that mode only cured diseases.

I call it a calumny, because the physicians who hinted it, and the surgeons and apothecaries who trotted with it daily from house to house, could not have committed a mistake on the subject; for almost all my intercourse with the profession has been in cases where the members of it *have failed*, either in the use of mercury, antimony, arsenic, or the spirituous results of chemistry.

They, therefore, must have concluded I used not the minerals which had failed in their hands—for the opinion that I combined them with the syrup, when they had combined them in vain with the decoction of the woods, could not impose on the practitioners; but it might on their patients, for the most part ignorant, credulous, and taking physic from faith in a profession, more than from an opinion of the skill of any of its particular members.

As I am not uncandid or avaricious, the first effect on my mind was only a general conviction that the incorporation of classes and professions is, in all cases, injurious to the sort of knowledge it was intended to promote; and that it is a great injury, and an useless expence to the public, to maintain numerous swarms of retainers to a profession, who
study

study and apply to pass a short, perhaps a trifling, examination; and practise generally by routine, without the necessity or capacity of thought, by a Pharmacopeia, which is, like the Mass Book of ignorant priests, the rule of their faith and conduct.

That many of them think they have a right to be maintained by the meer profession, independent of their merits in the practice of it, I have seen in several striking instances. The bishop of ———, a prelate of distinguished talents, as well as amiable character, had tried very successfully the effect of my medicine, in his own case as well as on persons in whose health he was deeply interested.—His beneficence induced him to recommend it in the principal city of his diocese, to persons who had been long afflicted in a similar manner. The principal apothecary was astonished at the cures; and at the sudden loss to him of several opulent families, to which he considered himself as an appendage. He collected all his children, walked at their head to the palace, demanded an audience of the bishop, and declared peremptorily, if he did not discontinue his recommendation of the medicine, that is, if he did not desist from rescuing the afflicted—he (the surgeon) must quit the place, and begged to leave his children to be supported by the bishop.

But they generally have recourse to falsehoods, and not to complaint. Instances of atrocious ill conduct have sometimes thrown me off my guard. I have treated with severity a superficial and supercilious

lions medical lecturer, on whom I proved one of these falsehoods.

On another provocation, from an impudent untruth, in a compiler of medical recipes, I gave him an opportunity to put his hand in my pocket to relieve his necessities.

I have nothing of this nature to fear from you. You will neither instruct your pupils to calumniate me; nor have you any *trade* of propagating popular errors;—in short, your writings and practice seem to be free from that spirit of *Scottish Pedlarism**, from which the professions and even the philosophy of Scotland is not exempt; and which remarkably actuates many of its most distinguished candidates for public opinion and favour in this country.

I therefore address you with confidence, and with hopes of your assistance, as I shall keep merely on public ground; having myself nothing to hope for or to fear from you. I want not even to incline you in favor of the medicine I use, or my mode of using it. I am fully content with the opinion of those who see my daily conduct and practice. I want not to increase a business which often overwhelms me, and which is daily multiplied by the operation of mercury. I wish to point out to you the general source of those melancholy diseases which have heavily afflicted my mind for

* This is not intended as a reflection on Scotland, or on Scotchmen, but on the influence of the remains of its government; which reduces the industrious classes, even in literature, to a state of penury, which generates selfishness. Scotland produces numerous and honorable exceptions even in medicine; and the names of Pitcairne, Cruikshank, &c. are those of liberal men.

nearly twenty years; and which will wring your heart, however they may bring grist to your mill, when you have made your preparations for curing them.

I am, Sir,

With great respect,

Your very humble servant,

Frith-street, London,

I. SWAINSON.

December 1, 1796.

LETTER II.

SIR,

HAVING introduced myself to you, in the best manner in my power, I proceed to the propositions I mean to discuss with you :

I. That mercury is not a remedy, and does not effect a cure in any of the disorders wherein it is administered.

II. That the principal of those disorders owe their dreadful notoriety, their establishment, and their increasing prevalence, to the use of mercury, and the conduct of interested medical classes in the use of it.

III. That, as a medical, moral, and political reformer, it seems to be your duty, and your interest,

to

to commence your operations, by the introduction of a *Materia Medica* wholly vegetable.

On the first proposition, I might address you as a man attached to demonstrative and philosophical proofs; and rest my argument on the uniform determinations of nature or of nature's God, respecting the limits and uses of unorganized and organized productions, in those departments of the globe called its three kingdoms.

No mode of just reasoning, authorised by an enlightened experience, will warrant the conclusions against the general rule of nature, that vegetables affixed to the earth are to find their subsistence in health and their remedies in disease, in the bosom of that earth—and that animals detached from it, and endowed with different organs, find their food and remedies, either in the vegetable or animal kingdom.

I shall not attempt to discuss this question at large. My business is with the sophisms which have been introduced into medicine to avoid rational conclusions.

The chyle, the lymph, and blood, are the materials with which the human body is formed. Certain portions of them having been organized by a process, which the imagination of a Darwin becomes puerile in guessing at, this chyle, this lymph, and this blood, are prepared from foods in a fluid state, to be propelled and distributed through flexible tubes to all parts of the body. They are divided into portions as the vessels branch off, and they furnish the repairs and increase of the vessels that circulate them.

In this grand process, minerals are excluded. It

is alledged, that iron is sometimes found in the blood. Resemblances to all the substances in nature may possibly be found in the animal system—but they have been introduced either by injurious accident, or by medicine; or they have previously undergone a preparatory process in vegetable circulations.

To obviate the effects of this reasoning, the very few among those administering minerals in medicine who can write, have adopted a new theory, founded on the late experiments in animal electricity; and they have affected to maintain the interest of minerals, by the opinion that the diseases are to be found, and the remedies directed to the solids only.

In this, as in most cases, the best maxim may be

“ In medio tutissimus ibis.”

Acrimonies, however, all allow to exist in the fluids; whether they may be the result of a feeble imperfect vitiated secretion, by the solids, or of miasma infection, or virus, circulated by the fluids: analogy, facts, and observations, favor both these opinions.

In phthisis pulmonalis, or true consumption, the lungs themselves form an acrimony of a peculiar kind. In the rickets, the blood-vessels intended to nourish the bones, secrete a solvent of the earth constituting their basis, and the diseased lymphatic glands prepare a scrophulous acrimony.—All scrophulous affections, such as scurf of the head, eruptions and leprosy of the skin, indolent and phagedenic swellings terminating in cancer or the evil, are all effects of morbid humors *elaborated in the lymphatic system.*

How

How are these to be affected or remedied?—The solidists say, by the use of minerals applied to stimulate the solids.

This would prove too much: and would take the medical and profitable administration of minerals out of their hands; for stimulating lotions and unguents, frequently the disguised vehicles of mercury, antimony, arsenic, and lead, would put in their claim, and snatch the patient from the physician.

It is known, however, that external applications alone, by stimulating the surface, and obstructing the excretions, are, in such cases, generally injurious, and often fatal.

The dispositions of the secretory organs must be changed—and can it be a question, either in reason or fact, whether this change be best effected by the agitation or stimulus of a poisonous mineral, “putting nature to a shift;” or by supplying what is defective, by furnishing *a vegetable and nutritious stimulus* to the chyle, the lymph, and blood, which will infallibly, by a certain instinct and law of nature, carry it to the parts that need it.

The sympathy or intercourse between the solids and the fluids of the human body, is certainly of the utmost importance, and designed by nature for mutual support. In some diseases, when the machine cannot be furnished in the common way, the solids supply the defect by returning what they have received from the fluids, and the animal becomes lean.

The fluids seem to be rather more the objects of our attention, certainly more accessible to our reme-

dies,

dies, than the solids. Medicines, therefore, should generally and primarily affect the fluids; and any stimuli to the solids be generally conveyed by their means. Matter can be divided only into solid and fluid; and it is continually passing from one of these states into the other; but no species of it can assume a solid form, without having been first a fluid; nor can any change take place in a solid until it be first formed into, or suspended in, a fluid.

All living bodies are subject to these general laws. All solid animal matter has been fluid; and having passed into solid and vesicular forms, is the recipient of other fluids, out of which all the solids are repaired, renovated, and increased.

All the processes for animalizing are made by means of vegetable or animal materials, never of earths, stones, or minerals; and reason must conclude, that all the remedies for any defects in those processes must be in similar materials. The processes are carried on in the sanguiferous and lymphatic system; and, it must be allowed, the action of that system depends greatly on the state of the solids; but the nutritious or medicinal matters, supporting or repairing those solids, and even stimulating them to action, are contained in the blood, and become effective by causes operating first on that blood, and independent of the condition of the solids.

It is clearly demonstrable, that variations in the action of the heart and arteries have been caused by variations in the state of the blood. Its qualities are liable to material alterations, according to alterations

of diet, &c.—and, consequently, its power of stimulating must also be altered. In diseased old age, it is often destitute of the proper matter of the animal fibre, and supplies its place with osseous or bony substance. Hence indurations in the valves of the heart, and in the large vessels that enter it, and which might be prevented by attention, and remedies for the state of the blood. These remedies, this matter of the animal fibre, is to be found, not, surely, in the mineral kingdom; not in mercury, antimony, arsenic, or lead; not even in iron or steel: but in those parts of the vegetable kingdom which have been overlooked in the preparation for our diet, and which should be attentively examined as medicines to correct the defects of our food, and to remove our diseases.

If this be the clear and general conclusion of reason, it may be asked, why the vegetable kingdom has been deserted for the mineral? and why simple, easy, and salutary preparations allied to our food, assimilating with it, and correcting its defects, should be superseded by the hazardous and poisonous productions of chemistry?

The answer may be made to a similar question in any useful science or art. Its efforts have been soon involved in mysteries; for mysteries astonish the vulgar, render them credulous, and the dupes of those who would profit by them; all the sciences and arts have had their sorcerers, their conjurers, their priests, and medicine at this time abounds with them.

But the use of minerals is said to be justified by the increased action they are supposed to induce in the
vessels

vessels or solids of the body, and the power they confer on the body, by that action, of throwing off disease.

This may be called *The Philosophy of medicinal Minerals*, and particularly of MERCURY. It originated among the speculations of the Edinburgh school, and owes its propagation and establishment in England, principally, to the late John Hunter, an ingenious and indefatigable enquirer; but fond of philosophic conceits, and not cleared of the almost inevitable infection of what I call *Scottish Pedlarism*.

In this philosophy, the mode of cure may be thus explained:

All maladies are defined *diseased actions*, either of the whole body, or of particular parts: and the method of cure is to induce or force other and stronger actions, that may suspend and obliterate the former. Thus mercury, in morbid affections, either scorbutic or venereal, by inducing a general and violent action in the body, or in some of its parts, may suspend or obliterate the morbid action of the disease.

This is allowing mercury all the effect claimed for it by its votaries. This is its merit; this is its citadel: and here I mean at once to attack it. Here, as at their source, I mean to trace all the numerous evils it has inflicted, and continues to inflict, on the human race.

But, hearing in imagination the retainers of the profession alternately whetting their knives, and clapping their hands on their pockets; hearing the clamour and menaces of their inveterate rage, I will give

you and myself a little time to breathe, and subscribe myself,

Sir, your very humble servant,
I. SWAINSON.

Frith-street,
Dec. 4, 1796.

LETTER III.

SIR,

I RESUME my station under the citadel of mercury* ; or, in plain language, I return to develope and expose the philosophical sophism, by which its credit has been supported.

I will fully admit, because I have frequently seen it, that the action of mercury suspends and obliterates the action of morbid affections, both in scurvy and the venereal disease.

And this is its crime and injury—Pretended cures thus effected, recur, if the action be only suspended; and they are said to be cures only when the action is obliterated. But the action is *never* obliterated by mercury, until it has enervated the whole body out

* It will be seen, that in the crime and injury of using mercury, I involve the use of all minerals as medicines. But mercury is the leading and notorious offender.

stimuli, from the gentlest and blandest nourishment, to the most prompt and expeditious poison.

It is not, therefore, owing to the want of stimuli, that minerals are preferred, but to a different reason, which I shall discuss hereafter. But, as a chemist, you will probably say, chemical results from minerals and vegetables are so similar, that they may be indiscriminately used; and that the effects are also similar, with the advantage of expedition and certainty on the side of minerals.

I am not yet going into facts—I object here only to the false reasoning of avarice, from philosophical experiments; a fruitful source, you know, Sir, of profitable and prevailing impostures.

I do not dispute, that the chemical results of minerals and vegetables are similar; but if you say they are *the same*, I will fix the mistake on you, both from reason and from fact. The vegetable organization being evidently designed as a chemic machinery, to prepare first principles, foods, and remedies for the use of animals, no artificial mode, no chemical instruments yet invented by man (for he has not yet invented a vegetable) can give this effect, or produce the necessary alteration, slight as it may appear to be in some cases.

This reasoning, clear and irrefragable, accounts for the difference, which I shall fully state in practice, between the effects and consequences of the use of minerals and vegetables. I would willingly rest the decision of this question on a fair experiment.

I have a botanic garden at Twickenham, which

contains eight or ten thousand species of plants. You, or any man of equal candor and character with yourself (for, I assure you, I know consequential medical men, who possess neither) shall take a patient for a mineral poison, I will take another, to whom I will administer, *prepared* before your eyes, and taken out of my garden, an acrid and deleterious vegetable. You shall apparently *cure* the disorder, and leave your patient emaciated and enervated. I will really cure the disorder, and send the patient away in firm and good health : and the difference shall merely and wholly arise from a difference, to chemistry imperceptible, but perceptible to the living fibre, between a vegetable and mineral poison.

We avoid the use of the acrid deleterious vegetables in our food : this, and the custom of over-boiling the milder vegetables, is one of the reasons of the prevalence of the English land-scurvy ; and not the use of animal food. The French eat almost all the vegetables that grow in their country ; they eat them raw in sallads, or they stew them in close vessels, so as to preserve all their original qualities. The French, in the same latitude with us, are strangers to scurvy ; and not being generally poisoned, as we are, by mercury, all the tribes of nervous and hypochondriac disorders are unknown to them.

Our wretched fellow subjects, the Irish, are also free from all similar disorders, for a similar reason. The potatoe, a poisonous plant, is their principal food ; they eat it half boiled ; and they think themselves ill used if, by boiling, the potatoe is deprived

prived of what they call its heart. An Irish peasant, if his misery will admit of the same, swallows, three hundred and sixty-five times in a year, a quantity of vegetable poison, equal, in chemical effect, to a certain quantity of mercury, and it preserves him healthy, robust, and cheerful, plunged as he is in want and wretchedness.

I beg you will administer daily a quantity of mercury, of equal power, for one month only, to the most robust labourer at Clifton; and if you do not reduce and injure his health—I will permit you to affirm, without contradiction, that there is no real, as well as no chemical, difference between mineral and vegetable poisons; and that they may be used indifferently, according to the convenience of the medical practitioner.

From this mode of reasoning, I deduce a clear proof of my first position: that mercury does not *cure* the diseases for which it is administered.

I will fully establish the assertion by facts; but I thought it necessary to deprive the interested votaries of this dreadful poison of the sophistry they derive from a pretended philosophy, which has lately been introduced into the provinces of medicine and surgery.

You will see that by *CURE*, I do not mean the suspension or obliteration of one diseased action by another diseased action more powerful and violent, for this is done by mercury; but the suspension or obliteration of it, by the action of a material suited to the human frame, by a previous vegetable chemistry

or elaboration, and which restores the health while it removes the disease. This circumstance is the criterion of the cure.

The mineral poison, by substituting, in every degree, one diseased action for another, enfeebles and emaciates the body; and, if often repeated, extinguishes life.

The vegetable poison substitutes an increased, but, in its due degree, a salutary, action for the diseased; never injures by repetition; and restores and confirms the general health.

I shall detail facts to the purpose of this argument, in my next.

Believe me, Sir,

Your's, with great respect,

Frith-Greet.

I. SWAINSON.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

MY relation of facts may not be as extensive as it might be rendered, but it may save you the trouble of a great deal of distressing reading; and it will prove my proposition, that mercury does not *cure* the diseases for which it is administered; but only changes them

them for other, and generally more deplorable, diseases, or occasions the speedy death of the patient.

I will not lead you far back into antiquity, lest the effects be attributed to want of skill.

Hildonus gives two instances; one of an asthmatic woman, who died the same day in which she had taken a single dose of the *mercurius vitæ*; and the other of a lady, who, taking three grains of it, had such violent vomitings, cold sweats, and faintings, that it was with great difficulty her life was saved.

Brassavolus gives an instance of a patient who was *smoked* with mercury, for a disreputable disorder; and died in the operation.

Dr. Harvey says, an apothecary gave three children each a dose of *mercurius dulcis*, a common remedy both as a nostrum, and prescription for the worms, and that all three died the same day. He likewise relates that an English gentleman, at Venice, having slight venereal symptoms, had a dose of *precipitate* given him by a surgeon; which operating well, he ventured on a second, which also seemed to answer, but the third sent him to his grave. He also gives an instance of a man who sustained a salivation seven days, and died the eighth.

Dr. Fuller, in the *Medicina Gymnastica*, says, that having unfortunately caught the itch, he wore a *mercurial girdle* to remove it; which it generally appears to do. He was soon seized with giddiness, and with violent convulsions in his hands; the use of which he recovered by a course of medicines, but the giddiness remained several years.

The same writers give instances of spasms, of loss of sight, hearing, smelling, and taste, tremblings and palfies, from the same cause ; but I shall notice these things hereafter.

At the head of modern testimonies of the inefficacy of mercury (which, however, he sometimes calls a specific) I will place John Hunter ; a singular man, without education, but with great ingenuity and industry ; having, however, a much higher reputation than he deserved.—Being dead, I shall the more freely admit his merits, and lay my hand as lightly as possible on his philosophical affectations and infirmities. In anatomical pursuits and actual experiments, he was accurate and faithful ; but his theoretical hints were often feeble fancies, which misled both himself and his readers.

In page 26 of the first edition of his *Treatise on the Lues*, he describes symptoms as growing worse, by pursuing the mercurial course ; a new disposition and a venereal disposition taking place alternately.

Finding mercury frequently unsuccessful, in page 70, he says, “ it is a specific only in some forms of the disease.” He adds, “ the disposition and specific mode of action being destroyed, the poisonous quality of the matter is also destroyed. This is the cure of the disease but not of its *consequences*.”

The Jesuitism of the above mode of curing and not curing, or of removing the disorder and not the evil of it, need not be pointed out to you. He artfully confounds the old doctrine of poison

in the humours, with his own, of removing irritation by greater irritation, to get himself out of a difficulty.

In page 86, he says, " a venereal disposition once formed, is not to be cured by mercury, but it will prevent the disposition from forming." And yet he afterwards calls it a specific. The idea of a specific, on his theory, is an absurdity.

The preparations of mercury act like all the metallic preparations, those of lead, copper, iron, &c. by increased absorption; but, like all poisons, they may destroy by excessive action, and they are seen to injure by what may be called *unnatural* action, as the mineral is destined to act on the vegetable, and the vegetable only on the animal world.

In page 94, it is distressing to observe his attempts to account for the return of the *disorder*, after mercury has removed the *symptoms*. It is, and it is not venereal; and he knows not what to think; but any reader may see he could not *cure* the venereal disease. He attempts to shelter this incapacity by distinguishing between the modes of action; but where I cure the venereal or any morbid disease (and in the former I have never yet failed, when the case was under my own direction) no diseased modes of action ever ensue.

In page 175 he seems to think a swelling of the prostate gland is incurable, because mercury cannot cure it. It is often an obstinate symptom; I have, however, always found it yield to the vegetable syrup; but

but that is not the question here. It is sufficient that he admits mercury to be ineffectual in it.

In page 226, he says, "chancre and gonorrhœa are seldom wholly venereal." This is to shelter mercury, which does not cure them. A curious specific in the abstract! affording no remedy for many of the symptoms.

In page 231, he says, "chancres, after having their venereal taint corrected, *often become stationary*, and having acquired new dispositions, *increase the quantity of the disease* in the part."—What a blessed specific is mercury!

In page 331, he asserts, "that one medicine, even mercury, does not cure all the forms of the venereal disease." This is a proof of its inefficacy: for I find no difference in removing any of its forms.

Pages 332 and 333 show the entire uncertainty and inefficacy of the mercurial practice, "for the venereal action may, to all appearance, be stopped, and symptoms disappear, and yet all appear again." This is a decisive testimony of the inefficacy of mercury. But to render the evidence complete, he says, in page 338, that the courses of mercury necessary in some cases, would kill the patient.

Mr. Hunter relates the following cases, which are irrefragable proofs of the inefficacy of mercury:

"A gentleman had contracted a venereal injury, of which he was *cured*; but for two years afterwards many of the *symptoms* continued, and even with considerable violence."

"A young woman continued two years in the Mag-

dalen Hospital. The moment she came out, she was picked up by one who was in waiting for her, and she gave him the venereal disease."

" A gentleman received the same disease, in the beginning of April, 1780, which had disappeared (by mercury) by the first of June. September first, he married, and communicated the disease to his wife."

Mr. Bell, of Edinburgh, a practitioner and writer of the first reputation at this time, holds the same language with Mr. Hunter :

" No part," says he, " of the treatment of this disease gives more distress to patients (he should also have said to practitioners, who have not lost their humanity) than the management of the ulcerated state of buboes, which, besides being accompanied with much pain, is often one of the most obstinate symptoms of the disease. Instead of yielding to the use of mercury, some of this description *become often more obstinate, after mercury has been employed* : fever is apt to take place, and when the constitution is not very robust, they even sometimes end in the death of the patient.

" It often happens, that the cure of these sores proves tedious, notwithstanding all the attention we can give to them. Their edges become hard, livid, and often retorted ; the matter thin, sharp, and foetid ; and instead of healing, the matter gradually extends, or if it heals in some parts, it breaks out in others, giving a honeycomb appearance to all the contiguous parts. In some instances, the tendency to this depa-
ficient kind often is so great, that it soon spreads over
all

all the under part of the abdomen, and upper parts of the thigh; in some cases, by the matter being so acrid as to corrode and destroy all the contiguous parts with which it comes in contact; and in others, by spreading beneath the skin, and bursting out, from time to time, in a variety of small ulcers.

“ The situation of patients, with sores of this description, is often very deplorable. The pain with which they are attended is commonly severe; hectic fever is induced, the patient becomes hot and restless through the night, and almost a total want of appetite renders him soon much emaciated.”

These are, I think, sufficient proofs of the inefficacy of mercury as a medicine: for if it fails, as it always must, in the venereal disease, for which it is held a specific, there will remain no doubt of its inefficacy in other forms of morbid affection, such as scurvy, scrofula, cancer, the king's evil, &c.

In all these cases, it acts in the same manner. If its action, or irritation, can surmount that of the disease, it makes the symptoms of the disease disappear, by forcing the attention and powers of the constitution to the greater evil, the action of mercury.—But in both cases, the actions are diseased, and have no tendency to health; often the constitution wavers, or vibrates between the two diseased irritations, that of the disease and that of mercury; but if the patient can afford a surgeon, mercury will probably be so often rallied, as to ensure the victory; the irritations of the disorder will give way to those of the mineral, assume the form of some other disease, and the pa-

tient either suddenly drop off in an apoplexy, or become paralytic, or languish the remainder of a wretched life, in an incurable atrophy, or in a consumption.

I am, sir,

Your humble servant

Frith-street, London,
December 8. 1796.

I. SWAINSON.

LETTER V.

SIR,

I NOW proceed to my second proposition, that the principal disorders for which mercury is administered, and the numerous classes immediately springing from them, owe their *establishment* and *increasing prevalence*, to the use of mercury, and to the *conduct* of interested, sordid, or mistaken practitioners in the use of it.

I say *interested and sordid* practitioners, because I would not shock you, by at once involving in this imputation the whole faculty.

But, in the medical, as in the theological, indeed, in every faculty, there is a prevailing spirit, subject

to certain failings, and even crimes, from which individuals of that faculty, are wholly free.

When you write, as you do forcibly, on the abuses of political power, you do not mean to convey personal reflections on all who are the servants of that power. Even the hero of your satire and reprehension, Mr. Pitt, is the object of your anger as a *minister*, not as a man.

In the same manner, while I animadvert on the deficiency of *professional study*, and *high professional honour*, in the medical faculty of Great Britain, I mean no personal reproach, when I do not make a personal reference.

I know men of the highest honour, as well as of the most accomplished literature, in the profession. I know others, who would twist the nose, and pick the pocket, by drenching the body, of the keenest Jew in Duke's-Place.

But, in the most honourable characters, the spirit of the profession and the spirit of the man are often held distinct; the physician, as a gentleman, as a companion, as a friend, is a man of scrupulous honour and inflexible integrity; as a practitioner, he thinks he must go in the beaten track; he must adhere to the pharmacopeia, he must consider the apothecary's bill, in short, he must not listen to the voice of his own mind; or he can never make his fortune.

This I look upon as the favourable representation of the *spirit of the profession*. I will relate instances of the operation of that spirit, in a sort of gradation, from the most favourable, to the most illiberal and detestable;

and I mean it as an apology to you, for attributing to the sordid avarice of certain individuals, and perhaps classes of the faculty, that mercury is continued as a medicine, while it undermines and ruins the constitutions of the greater part of the people of this country.

A gentleman of extensive acquaintance in the liberal professions, had a swelling of the legs, which a surgeon pronounced to be a dropsy. He was teased and enfeebled by the medicines given him, the principal of which were mercurial pills, without perceiving any abatement of the disorder. He was advised by an acquaintance, to take the expressed juice of artichoke, and to sup on strong leek broth. He took this advice with apparent benefit; and the information being communicated to another friend, he advised him, as vegetable remedies seemed to suit his constitution, to take the syrup of De Velnos. He very prudently hesitated, as he knew nothing of the medicine or its proprietor—and he sent for a physician, who was also a friend.

When he had related his case, the medicines he had used, and what he was advised to take, the physician asked, “Am I to speak to you as a physician, or a friend?”—As both—“No,” said he, “it must be positively, as the one or the other. For if I am to act as a physician, give me my fee, and a piece of paper, that I may prescribe principally for your apothecary; if, as a friend, go on as you have been advised. But if I were to write the following prescription: Take expressed juice of artichoke, or the
syrup

syrup of De Velnos—almost all the apothecaries in town would know it in a week, and in half a year I should find myself deprived of a practice in which I regularly receive six or seven guineas a day.”

The next case is not so favourable: but it happened in my own knowledge:

A young lady, of great beauty and merit, was ensnared by a man of fashion, and dreadfully diseased. She went through several mercurial courses, under the direction of a surgeon of great eminence; if having great practice, and getting a vast income, can give eminence; and who has since procured honors to enable him to get more money.

The mercury, though it bestowed numerous diseased actions on her delicate frame, such as fits, and general tendencies to consumption, could not obliterate the disease. It only transferred ulcers from the parts first affected, to the legs, where they were treated as scrofulous, or mercurial sores; and with great difficulty for some years preserved from mortification. The only expedient left, in this horrid practice, and which probably would have been resorted to, on a patient in an hospital, was to cut off both her legs; which would have afforded an opportunity for a capital operation, to practise the bloody hands, and to steel the bloody mind, of a young surgeon.

But she had neither strength of body or of mind to sustain it: and the surgeon, having had *a good* patient many years, and not being able to resist the importunities of her friends to send for me, and an approaching

approaching gangrene threatening a speedy termination of the business, he yielded, and I attended, as usual, when nothing more could be done by the faculty.

While I examined the dreadful condition of the patient, and expressed my hopes to restore her—I saw a contemptuous sneer pass over the surgeon's face; which gradually gave way as the cure advanced, to a malignant astonishment; until artifice got the better, and he affected to participate in my satisfaction at the cure.

The business occasioned a sort of intercourse between us; and he has frequently had bottles of my medicine for his own use.

You may judge of my astonishment, when men of rank, clergymen of strict veracity, in great numbers, have told me, that on asking his opinion of the expediency of having recourse to it, in cases eluding his skill, he has always either positively declared, “he knew nothing of it”—or “that it was a preparation of no efficacy, and good for nothing.”

Knowing facts of this dishonourable nature which would fill a volume—you will not think me uncandid, if I go farther, and declare my opinion, from facts which may be deemed imperfect, but which leave no doubt on my own mind; a great portion of the faculty must know, that by the use of mercury, they create and multiply diseases, and that many continue the practice to promote their own advantage.

At this charge, the spirit of the profession may revolt

volt *in you* ; and you may even affirm, that such deliberate villainy is not to be charged on human nature.

You forget that as a politician, you scruple not to charge similar villainies on ministers and their creatures.—What is there in the nature or education of a surgeon or of a physician, precluding the admission of similar dispositions ?—Is it, that he is early trained to the sight and to the infliction of pain ? Is it, that he is taught to aspire to excellence in operations, and eagerly to seek all opportunities to perform them ? Is it, that the general tendency of the practice of hospitals, the places of his *real* education, is to furnish subjects for operations ? It is commonly thought, the laws preclude surgeons as well as butchers from juries : is it from a presumption that education and practice may render them cruel ?—and where is the partition between cruelty and any conduct that may serve their interest, or make their fortune ? I, therefore, am led to conclude, from observation, and from very suspicious facts—that the use of mercury is continued in the general practice, for venereal and scrofulous disorders, not from an *opinion* of its efficacy in the more *sagacious* practitioners, but generally from the astonishing emolument that occurs by its happy faculty (happy only to the practitioner) of making symptoms disappear, while it may give to the disease, in some new form, a full possession of the whole constitution.

A child, not wholly taken from the breast, having the customary inconveniences of teething, was affected
with

with an obstinate costiveness. A surgeon was sent for, who soon removed the costiveness by the calomel pill!! The other symptoms of teething gave way on the appearance of teeth; but the bowels were irregular; and the child was seized by convulsions. The apothecary attended three months, without succeeding against the convulsions; when a physician was called in, who was told the child had convulsions, and no more; and he prescribed and visited three months, *and the child died.*

I need not calculate to you, the expence—not much short of a hundred pounds—but I affirm, it was so much profit to the surgeon and physician, wholly produced by the calomel pill.—I also affirm, if the costiveness had been removed by a vegetable purgative, no such profit would have accrued;—*and the child would have been saved.*

This, sir, in the eye of reason and humanity, is nothing less than *indirect murder*—and it is committed on great numbers in this town yearly.

Consider, sir, that the general remedy for worms, is the calomel pill; that almost all children are afflicted with worms; and every family above that of a scavenger and chimney-sweeper, has its apothecary. The calomel-pill is the common purge, not only in general disorders, but in incidental costiveness. In the suppression of the menses, mercury is given plentifully; in rheumatism; dropsy, and in all the numerous branches of scurvy and scrofula.—And all the pills and drops, advertised by quacks, are mercurial, antimonial, arsenical, &c. of which thou-
sands

lands of boxes and bottles are sold daily, Hence the universal prevalence of nervous and hypochondriac disorders. Hence the melancholy debilities which have given a new character to the diseases of the present times, and rendered the general practice of physic, and of *prescribing* surgery, a mysterious, artful, often ineffectual, but always a profitable, pursuit.

In the management of wounds and ulcers, as well as in the administration of drugs, all the medical votaries of Apollo do not forget that the unprincipled god claimed the privilege of *inflicting* as well as curing diseases.

I have recorded a cure in one of my Treatises, of an ulcerated leg, which the surgeon seemed to have intended as an annuity to him during the life of the patient, which might not have been *many* years shortened by an ulcer properly managed. When I was sent for, the surgeon in a rage brought in an enormous bill. The patient carried the business into court, when the Esculapian depredator was very roughly treated, and his bill dreadfully curtailed.

I was very lately called in to a reputable tradesman in a Hamlet near Town, whose nose had been inflamed only by a little fissure in one of the nostrils. His family-surgeon, who had condescended to see him but once, had physicked and plastered him, to the amount of fifty-five or sixty pounds, in half a year; and left him in a much worse condition than he found him. He was so weakened by mercurials, that swellings took place in the ancles and knees, of an unpromising nature.

In this situation he was *marked* by some of those persons who are to be found in every district, connected with a celebrated water-doctor—if it be not a prostitution even of a diploma from a decayed University, to enable such a dealer in German horse medicines to drench the credulous out of their health and money, under the appellation of doctor.

Among other dreadful medicines, he gave him the turbith mineral, as a sternutatory. This inflamed the upper lip, the nose, and the soft parts beneath the eyes; and produced phagedenic ulcers, which a very ingenious physician pronounced cancerous.—I shall not relate the effect of my own medicine, as I have already told you, it is not *here* my object.

The extreme dejection into which the patient was reduced, had engaged the sympathy of the neighbourhood, where he seems much respected: and the news of the probability of his recovery, occasioned what is called a great noise. The neighbouring surgeons were alarmed; but affected the greatest contempt of the rumor, assuring their patients, as they carried to and collected from them the tattle of the day, that the recovery was impossible, and the man must die.

Communicating, as they always do, my incursion into their territory, to their brethren in town, the poor man was not only teased by discouraging and alarming messages, but absolutely visited by a medical stranger, who very importunately begged to remove the dressings, and to see the face.

He

He exclaimed, with some astonishment, "It looks well!"—The granulations were evidently taking place, and the corrosion of the humor checked. "Will you," said he, "permit me to dress it?" "I am much obliged to you," said the patient; "I am perfectly satisfied with the hands I am in." "Sir," said he, "I am a surgeon; Mr. Swainson is not. I will dress you for nothing, if you will permit me!"—This he pronounced with great earnestness, alarming instead of encouraging the patient; who, however, peremptorily resisted all his importunities.

But you will say, as I do, why these importunities, to dress a man for nothing, who did not solicit or want his charity; and who was willing and able to pay for all the assistance he wanted? On meeting me, he expostulated, that I called in a physician and not a surgeon. I always call in a physician, in cases of danger, as well to justify my proceedings, as to obtain assistance, where the patient has collateral ailments, or where, as in this case, great despondency and want of rest require particular treatment—and I acknowledge I have found great account in thus calling in a physician, particularly the able and candid gentleman who assisted on this occasion.

If this importunately charitable surgeon had *once* dressed the face with arsenic, the present fashionable dressing, he might probably have put it out of the power of medicine to cure and recover the patient; which was, however, happily effected, notwithstanding his positive predictions of my defeat and failure.

I shall tire you with these tales: extraordinary as

they may be, they prove *to me* an interested plan, and design in members of the faculty. But as you may still be disinclined to condemn, I must proceed to plainer evidence, and condemn their conduct, as I shall in my next, from the mouths of their own brethren.

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

L. SWAINSON.

*Frith-street, London,
December 10, 1796.*

LETTER VI.

S I R,

I MEAN, in this Letter, to prove the guilt of members of the faculty, by fair deductions, from the writings of medical men. You are not to understand, that I wish to charge this guilt on the whole profession; or even to fix it on those persons whose names and writings I make use of.

Though, to my mind, nothing can exceed the absurdity which pervades the writings of John Hunter, respecting mercury—where he often pronounces it a
specific,

specific, while he gives very numerous instances of its inefficacy and injury—yet the very absurdity may be a proof of the sincerity of the opinions of the writer.

The best abilities are wonderfully limited ; and the art of reasoning, beyond the strict comparison of anatomical facts, was not among the talents of Mr. Hunter.

To do justice to my present argument, I must lead you into a subject which physicians affect to avoid—some, because they are content with the evil fruits of it—some, because, at its reputed first introduction, it was classed among those loathsome disorders which physicians should shun—I mean the venereal disease—And I will remonstrate with the higher classes of the profession, on this subject, through you.

Surely, at this time, the improbable introduction of it from America, is not credited ; nor is the crime of it, at least of its origin, fairly considered, more than that of being infected by the itch, the scurvy, or the scrofula ; which are diseases of the same family, and often communicated and propagated in a similar manner.

If, having a scrofulous pimple, you rub or scratch it, and in the act injure the neighbouring skin, you spread and propagate the disease. If the matter of this pimple should by accident come in contact with the inflamed or excoriated parts of the body of another person, the disease may be communicated.

The venereal disease—a species of scrofula, has probably had a similar origin—and it has ever prevailed, under various denominations, among man-

kind. It assumed a specific character, when the infection had taken place, and was rapidly communicated, by classes of unfortunate beings, who lived by promiscuous love.

It is probably the running issue of the flesh * of the Hebrews, the Lepra of the Arabians, and the Elephantiasis of the Greeks. It is, and since the introduction of mercury, ever has been, the opprobrium of the medical profession; the terror of the votaries of love; the dreadful punishment of licentious pleasure; and when assisted, as it is, instead of being cured, by mercury, it is the cause of more than half the disorders which at this time infest the English nation.

But, to dwell a little longer on its nature and origin; how do you understand Hippocrates—*de Ulceribus*; c. 9, & *de Mulieribus*, c. 77, when he speaks of noses falling in, palates rotting, hair falling off, &c.? And the younger Pliny relates the tragic fate of a man and his wife, who had generated a loathsome disorder, without communication with others; and who, in despondence, threw themselves into the sea,

The disorder probably was the venereal disease, which is a virus produced by inflaming, excoriating, and wounding certain parts, susceptible of the highest irritability; participating of the nature of the virus of scrofula, tenia, and leprosy; first occasioned by

* See Geddes on the xvth of Leviticus, who uses the word gonorrhœa.

accident, violence, or injury, and which being generated, becomes infectious by the touch.

It has *appeared* to be more infectious than scrofula ; it bears not the name venereal, but when communicated in the service of Venus, and it is not so easily avoided as scrofula may be in parts not impelled into union : the passions not urging us off our guard, or over-coming our suspicion on other occasions of contact.

I dispute the *mysterious* nature of this disease, because mystery in a profession is the source of imposture. And the disease being represented as a subtle unconquerable poison, communicated only by infection, and to be subdued only by the *professional* manner of managing another poison, little short of conjuration, patients are alarmed, and frightened into the hands of *prescribing surgeons*, like silly birds into the jaws of rattle-snakes, and sometimes meet not so tolerable a fate. Whereas, if the nature and origin of the venereal disease were fairly and honestly explained, to be the consequence of an injury in parts of exquisite irritability, inflaming, festering, and producing, as in all similar parts, under similar accidents, acrimonious, corroding, and infectious virus ; a rational method of relief and cure would be devised, without going out of the province limited to man, in search of his food and medicine, and without having recourse to the lying miracles of chemistry and surgery, inferior in no respect to those so much decried by you in the regions of superstition and priestcraft.

I therefore affirm, sir, from a more extensive experience in the treatment of this disease, in a period of fifteen years, than any man in this country, it is not a poison, *sui generis*, and foreign to the human constitution; that it may be produced in the most chaste and legitimate connections, and that promiscuous commerce and infection, though they continue and multiply it, are not necessary to its production.

Away with mystery and imposture, sir, in physic as well as in other provinces—and of course, away with the incomprehensible and miraculous specific.

The simple and conscientious ancients did not meddle with mercury. It is not mentioned by Hippocrates and Galen; not even in directions for outward applications

It was not until Alchemy had puzzled and misled the human understanding, that mercury was considered, first as the great instrument for the transmutation of metals; and failing in that object, or rather detected in its pretensions, its impostures were transferred to certain provinces of medicine.

Vigo, a Genoese, and Jacob Carpus, a surgeon, led the way in the dreadful experiment; but though it has really, by transmuting disorders, turned every thing into gold for a particular set of surgeons, its effects have ever been so suspicious, that the physicians have kept aloof; and the disease, and its pretended remedy, have been suffered to spread their ravages principally under the direction, and for the benefit, of *such surgeons*.

They are at this time the general sources of that
nervous

nervous debility which is the character of the most prevailing disorders; and which affects the mind as well as the body. That debility is propagated from one generation to another; and it will be increased as these causes continue to be applied.

But let us hear some of these prescribing surgeons themselves: Dr. Swediaur*, who is among the most celebrated of modern practitioners—lays it down as a postulatam, “The patient whom we undertake to cure of the lues must have *sufficient strength*, to bear the use of mercury; and neither be affected with any nervous, hectic, or inflammatory fevers; nor with sea-scurvy, cancerous complaints, or gangrenous ulcers. *In all these cases*, I have observed mercury not only prove hurtful, but, in some instances, where its use has been insisted upon, even fatal to the patient.”

The doctor, though an ingenious man, and of great practice, had not probably *time* to discover the reason of his own facts.

The action of mercury is of such violence, that it immediately changes the general affections of the body, whether they be healthy or unhealthy, and by either producing or increasing the general debility, it produces or increases all those disorders which the doctor says the patient should not be afflicted with, if he hope to be cured by mercury; though mercury be the supposed remedy even for those disorders.

If the doctor had been obliged to reason, he would have found himself in a labyrinth—but he seems content to relate facts.

He says *, “ To stop, or even to moderate, a salivation, once begun, is, in many cases, more easily said than accomplished. This is often *entirely out of our power*. I have seen, more than once, patients *carried off* by salivation, their strength being totally exhausted, before it could be *lessened and stopped* by any remedy whatsoever. Others, who did not sink entirely under it, *remained languid for months and years*; and several I have seen die, *on a consumption being brought on*, by such a course.”

But the great hero in this field is John Hunter; for he carries a smattering of theoretic philosophy in one hand and practice in the other; and by a sleight, substitutes one for the other, so as to perplex a reader who is not well on his guard.

As an excuse for the inefficacy of mercury; and for the aggravated appearances of other disorders, during the course of it for the venereal disease, he affirms†, “ We seldom have a constitution so free from disease as to be capable of taking on the venereal action simply by itself.” Yet the principle of his theory is, that the constitution is susceptible of one action only.

In page 280, he says, “ It sometimes happens, that those sores when losing or entirely deprived of the venereal disposition, form into sores of another kind

* Page 116.—† Page 231.

and most probably of *various* kinds. How far it is a disease arising from a *venereal taint*, and the effects of a *mercurial course*, jointly, is not certain; but most probably *these two have some share in forming the disease.*"

In page 303, we find him expressly allowing that, in the mercurial practice, "the disease *partakes* of the nature of such disorders as the constitution was disposed to previously; and may *put into action* the causes of such disorders."—He coolly relates the following case, where the mercury, not the disease, killed the patient: "A poor woman had undergone repeated salivations, which *had always relieved the most pressing symptoms*; but after being afflicted, more or less, for three or four years, *ulcers broke out* in her nose, and all over her face, with what is called a *true cancerous appearance*. The sores became soon very deep, and gave considerable pain. She lost her nose and one side of her mouth. The disease returned with redoubled violence, and soon destroyed her."

Now, sir! how would you reason on this case? And what would you determine to be the cause of the cancer? I will not suppose you uncandid, or so little of a philosopher, as to believe in constitutional seeds of disease. The irritation of the mercurial poison, when it does not kill, debilitates; and that debility *commutes* the diseased action of the first complaint for another, more or less deplorable, according to the degree of the unnatural irritation. If it affects the glands, it produces scrofula, cancer, or the evil; if the lungs, consumption, asthma, &c.

To

To illustrate my opinion, I will request you *to make your own inferences* from another testimony, that of Howard, a surgeon of considerable eminence and practice. "I was called," says he, "to a gentleman who had an abscess near the seat. He had, besides this, one of the most rank venereal eruptions I had ever seen. I found he had been unhealthy for many years; about eight years previous to his present illness, he had a chancre and bubo, which was the last time he had been injured, and of these symptoms he supposed he had been *perfectly cured*. Some months *after this cure*, he felt what he had never before experienced, *rheumatic pains*. About two years from this infection, he was suddenly seized with an *inflammation of one of his eyes*, which gave way to the usual remedies; but when the inflammation went off, he found, to his unspeakable concern, that *he had totally lost the sight of that eye*; he said, *he had been deaf of one ear* for some time, and that the eruption which I then saw on his body, had come on suddenly during his present illness."

Here the poison has been as prolific in evils, for the various employments of the faculty, as could well be desired, without killing the patient, which is not always to be desired, except by the undertaker.

Mr. Howard proceeds to reason, not as I shall, not, I hope, as you will, reason.

"Having compared this man's account of the inflammation of his eyes, with some others of the same kind since seen, I have no doubt of its having been venereal. The pains he called rheumatism, so long before

before the appearance of this inflammation, were *probably venereal also.*"

Why, on this reasoning, did he not apply the grand specific, mercury?—No—he durst not. The man had undergone repeated courses; and in consequence of its poisonous and debilitating effects, he had acquired a rheumatism, and had lost his sight and hearing. Mr. Howard concluded, with just humanity, that the quantity of mercury necessary to *cure*, would probably *kill* him; and he was obliged to leave him to the diseases which are the common legacies of the mineral specific.

In all serious and important cases, the disciples of the Hunterian school appear to me clearly to represent the chance of being cured or killed by mercury as equal; and the hopes of their patients seem to be like those of the man, in a course of experiments to live without food, who died at the moment he thought he had accomplished it.

Mr. Howard, whom I do not mean to represent as having any unbecoming intention, or view, adds, "a young gentleman, who had been for some years affected (he does not say how often *cured*, which would be the most important information; for the *cure* is the misfortune) was attacked with a venereal ulceration of the nose and face. *Means* were employed for his cure. The persons under whose care he had been, *supposed* him well; but in about thirteen months, the symptoms returned with *more violence* than ever; the ulcerations were, to *the highest degree*, malignant, and hourly doing irreparable injury among the bones

bones of the nose and palate, &c. He was exceedingly emaciated, and inclined to be hectic. The most judicious means to check the progress of the ulceration and putrefactions, were used without effect. The disease continued to make its ravages, in spite of every thing that was done, till it destroyed him; *death taking place before his mouth could be properly affected.*"

This seems to me exactly the counterpart of the case of the man who would have lived without food, if death had not prevented him.

Mr. Howard is a man of character—and I mean to charge nothing on him but *false reasoning*. The patient had undergone several courses of Mercury. Every course had left him weaker, and scrofulous symptoms became more and more dreadful, in consequence of the operation of mercury. How great must be the force of prejudice, to induce a man of his good sense to hope for relief, by a repetition of the cause of the injury!

But Mr. Hunter directly affirms, "We find that *new diseases* arise from mercury alone. The tonsils shall swell where no venereal disease has been before. The periosteum shall thicken; and also, probably, the bones, and the parts over them, shall become cedematous and sore to the touch,"

Mr. Foot, says, "I shall relate what I understand to be the effects of the poison of mercury upon the constitution. They are an acceleration of the pulse from a putrescent diathesis, an universal prostration of strength, a giddiness of the head, with swooning, a
3 bleeding

bleeding at the nose, an increase of saliva which will be viscid, and attended by pain and swelling of the maxillary glands, a brassy taste in the saliva, a stubborn costive habit, an aching head, a throbbing in the temporal arteries; and the eyes hot and reddened—other effects from mercury are cholic, attended with Palsy of a limb, or general palsy.”

An anonymous writer* says, “The mischief done by mercury and its preparations, *even in good hands*, has been, perhaps, equal to all the good it has produced.” This is a tolerable confession from a professional man.—But he goes farther: “The occasions where it is administered are innumerable, and the *destruction endless*.”

Mr. Howard, whom I have already quoted, says, “The action of this medicine has a tendency to increase the disposition to hectic, *in every the best possible temperament*. How many hundreds are there, who overlook, or really are ignorant of the critical situation in which mercurial courses unavoidably place them!”

Mr. Bell, a surgeon and author of considerable repute, says, “mercury is perhaps one the most universal stimulants with which we are acquainted. Even in small quantities, it often excites heat over the whole body, quickness of pulse, and other symptoms of fever. Besides the usual symptoms of fever, mercury is apt to excite restlessness, anxiety, general debility, and a very distressful irritable state of the whole system.”

* See Popular View of the Effects of the Venereal Disease, p. 203.

“ These,” he says, “ are its *ordinary* effects; and in the treatment of the venereal disease, one of the greatest difficulties we meet with, is the *management* of this medicine; for while the *cure* of the disease often requires it to be given in considerable quantities, the constitution is apt to be materially injured, *if it be not exhibited with the greatest care and attention.*”

Who, after such a description by several of its warmest votaries, will attribute the lately multiplied instances of APOPLEXIES, PALSIES, INSANITY, and SELF-MURDER, *to any thing but the general use of mercury?*

I have thus, sir, I hope, justly and fairly, condemned the practice of using mercury, by clear inferences from facts related by the principal practitioners in this country. If the patients understood their wrongs, and could write; or if the dead could speak, what *prescribing* surgeon would dare approach the vaults and church-yards of this metropolis, where in all probability half the bodies are prematurely laid by the administration of mercury?

For, over-looking the immediate sacrifices to the mercurial treatment of the venereal disease, the inveterate scrofulas, evils, cancers, consumptions, asthmas, nervous melancholies, and insanities, which are the consequences of that horrid prostration of strength, necessarily, and under any management, produced by mercury—are every where and hourly the active ministers of death, and they keep the passing-bells of our churches perpetually going.

I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

I. SWAINSON.

Frith-street,
Dec. 12, 1796.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

SIR,

HAVING submitted to your attention several important facts relating to the effect of mineral preparations, particularly to those of mercury, which I suppose never to have occurred collectively to your mind—I call on you as a professed, a conscientious, and able *reformer*—to blend your analytic reason with the soaring, comprehensive, and poetic imagination of your friend, Dr. Darwin—and begin the general reform of your country, within the precincts of your own profession.

If you could clearly prove on ministers, or their system of policy, such evils as I really think I can prove on parts of the medical profession, you would call for axes and scaffolds, in order to have Tower-hill inundated with the blood of the offenders.

The present war, which all parties call unfortunate, with all its peculiar pressures and miseries, is not, perhaps, an evil of greater urgency, or of more extent, than the general administration of a mineral poison, to the effects of which we are liable in the womb, at the breast, and which is given us under almost all pretences, and on almost all occasions. It converts little ailments into serious disorders, disorders into horrible maladies; and renders venial irregularities and un-

avoidable accidents, irremediable and mortal calamities. War destroys thousands, and is a horrible evil; but mercury, still more cruel, prevents millions from ever *living*, from having any enjoyment of existence; or renders life a lingering death.

You will say—Why not apply immediately to Dr. Darwin, who has undertaken a new system of medicine? Dr. Darwin is, no doubt, fertile in speculation and correct in practice. He displays a fine imagination, and great reading, painful deduction, and extensive experience. His theory is splendid; but his *Materia Medica*, in my humble opinion, is common, incorrect, and generally the effect of the perusal of books.

He appears to me also not to be above the prejudices of his *education*; and I think I have had some occasions to complain of his want of candor to myself.

In the *Zoonomia*, he says, “The union of mercury with the vegetable acid, when triturated with manna, *is said* to compose Keyser’s pill; triturated with gum Arabic, it is much recommended by Plenck; and triturated with sugar, and a little essential oil, as directed in a former Edinburgh Dispensatory, it *probably* forms some of the syrups sold as nostrums.”

I should not be so captious as to think myself included in this insinuation, if from the numerous patients which have been here from him, and, I believe, with his knowledge, I had not thought I had some right to an exception, in an implied charge of fraud; for you should know, sir, that in point of honour and integrity of character,

character, I place myself fully by the side of Darwin, of you, and of the very first men in your profession.

Will Dr. Darwin admit, that he has not chemical skill to detect *any* preparation of mercury in the formula of the Edinburgh Dispensatory? If he should—the most paltry chemist in London will instruct him: if not, and he can prescribe the ingredients of the vegetable syrup, why does he suffer some of his most opulent patients to become mine? Why does he yield to me the general care of the health of a learned and amiable prelate, who has been for thirty or forty years the delight of all the principal societies, in the general scene of the doctor's practice? And why did a near relation, who minutely follows his steps, consign to me an opulent Cambrian member of parliament, who had been long under his care; and a patient he had, on many accounts, an important interest to cure?

You sir, are my man. There is an apparent integrity and frankness in your spirit of enterprize, which, to me, is infinitely more valuable, than any other species of talents.

If you defend mercury, you and I shall have a *mortal struggle*; and if I fall, I know I shall fall fairly and honorably by your hand.

If you desert it, and admit the facts and reasonings I have produced, I hope to prevail on you to adopt a vegetable *Materia Medica*, by the following additional considerations:

Brown, to whose memory you have done honorable justice, and whose theory will form an important era

the history and practice of physic, has enabled his readers to define disease, which is an action of particular parts, more or less violent, disturbing the general actions or functions of the whole body.

When these irregular actions take place, the relief, or cure, is in exciting the general functions; and the means should be, either those ordinarily employed as the ingredients of our food, or materials analogous to them, but having greater degrees of force or stimulating power.

In the vegetable world, the gradations of this force are indefinite, and may be indefinitely applied, as the action to be excited is required to be more or less forcible. For a scale may be formed of these gradations, from those vegetables used in our daily food, to those which would produce immediate death.

In minerals, no such scale could be formed, if minerals bore any strict analogy to the ordinary stimulants of the human constitution. Those persons, therefore, who use minerals, only vary the quantities of a few ingredients, to give them more or less violence.

But the mineral action, though apparently similar, is not the same in its effect with any equal vegetable action; else earths and minerals would furnish food, by digestion, as well as medicines, which the mineralists will not assert; and if they were destined to furnish medicines, the acrid and deliterious vegetables would have been appointed in vain.

But besides the mere action of excitement, in almost all diseases the solids want rapid assistance and reparation;

ration; and the evident design of the union of mucilage and acridity in some vegetables, is, that at the same time the general action is supported or accelerated, materials of repair may also be carried with celerity to the relaxed and wasted solids.

This is the reason that I daily see the patients of several prescribing surgeons around me languishing and emaciated, under the stimulating effects of mercury, while mine fatten under the effects of vegetables, perhaps equally stimulating.

And this is the reason, that vegetable medicines should never undergo the fermentative process, as they become less susceptible of digestion into any matter to be assimilated with the chyle, and to repair in the solids the injuries of disease.

Whether the action of vegetables may, or should be, carried so far as to affect the mouth, and salivate, I have had no opportunity to form a fair judgment.

No person has ever been salivated, or even had the mouth affected, under my direction; and yet I have had an Irish patient, who took a whole bottle of the vegetable syrup at a sitting, as he called it. In the peculiar mode of reasoning which facetious wits of that nation have recourse to generally after dinner, on being told by a friend recommending it, that a bottle would probably cure him of a recent gonorrhœa, he swore it should do it at once; and sat down to the bottle, which he emptied. His friend, alarmed, sent for me; but I had it not in my power to see him till the following morning: and I own I approached his bed with some concern. But he soon removed it, by saying

ing he was very well; and he believed if I looked under the bed, I might possibly see he had swetted through it, and plentifully larded the floor. He got up and took a little care to avoid cold, and felt no more of his gonorrhœa. But this is a mode of cure I would not recommend to any but very robust and jolly Hibernians.

Even in this violent use of the medicine, the mouth was not affected; nor have I ever seen any fair reasons to conclude, that vegetables will salivate, except in the very act of poisoning.

Numerous charges have, however, been brought against the vegetable syrup; because patients in the use of it have been slightly salivated. But on such occasions, either a physician or a surgeon has been sent for; who being eager to rescue the patient out of my hands *into the good old way*, has contented himself with the common exclamation, that I secretly used mercury, and bestowing such abuse as might deter the patient from seeing me again.

In all the accidents of this kind, and they have been numerous, no surgeon has had the candor, and no patient the resolution to let me see the fact.

I have no doubt of it, however—and my predecessors, M. De Velnos and Dr. Mercier, accounted for it, by the syrup's setting in motion some mercury lurking in the constitution; *for it never has happened but to those who had previously taken mercury.*

I do not believe in the doctrine of mercury's lodging or lurking in the constitution; but I can easily believe, that a constitution which has been submitted

the action of mercury, till the mouth has been affected, will, on feeling the different stimulus of the vegetable syrup, at first not *discern* the difference, if I may use the word ; but take to a similar action, and produce salivation.

This your ingenious friend, Darwin, readily accounts for, in the disposition of the internal as well as external movements of the body to act by habits.

You will observe, sir, I allude to my own medicine, merely because I cannot illustrate some facts in any other manner.

Those who have largely used hemlock and the poppy, might illustrate them in a different manner : and the great and various effects of those vegetables, particularly the effects of opium, might furnish grounds of reasoning which would render my general argument irrefragable.

The different consequences of administering medical vegetables, singly and combined, would open a field too wide for my powers and experience.

The few powerful vegetables now admitted into medical practice are generally used singly. The knowledge and experience I have is in decoctions and even in combinations of decoctions, the vegetables having undergone processes which make them yield all their ingredients.

There are, however, abundant facts of the efficacy of vegetables used singly.

The American savages use the root of the plant *Lobelia syphilitica*, in decoction, and easily cure the
various

the various forms of the venereal disease, as they are not among them *aggravated by mercury*.

The South Americans, from a sentiment of resentment, are said to have concealed from their cruel conquerors their remedy for the venereal disease, until they lost it themselves.

In the eighth article of the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of Sciences, at Stockholm, for 1785, Mr. Bjaemlunde gives certain proofs of the efficacy of the bark of the Alpine-cherry (*prunus padus*) in the venereal disease; but having the prejudices of this period in favour of mercury, he has not given the bark a fair trial. Finding it easily cured the disease in slight cases, in those of violence, he *assisted* it with mercury, on a principle as truly philosophic, as the bakers blend calcareous earth and ground bones with our bread. The decoction, he says, is antiscorbutic and stomachic, which is the case with all anti-venereal medicines, and is employed in cutaneous eruptions, cachexy, and dropsy.

Even in outward applications, the same reasons prevail for giving the preference to vegetable over mineral preparations.

I had a patient with ulcerated legs, of very long continuance and great obstinacy; and what rendered the case almost hopeless was, that it had originated in a venereal complaint, and had been treated with mercury. The legs were generally much swollen; and a metallic lotion, of singular efficacy in abating tumours, was recommended and used. The effect was apparently happy; it abated the swelling, and took
off

off all pain. The patient was much rejoiced, and I was much relieved; for I had then but little experience. I was, however, soon undeceived; the violent action of the metal on the parts rendered them flabby and almost torpid—and if the lotion had been repeated, a phagedenic or cancerous ulcer, of an incurable nature, would have been the consequence. It was with great and patient attention in the use of mild poultices, that the patient was saved.

In your *Considerations on the medicinal Use of factitious Airs*, you relate a case in Ireland, which directly favours my present argument.

The application of the wood-sorrel, of the root of water parsley, and of the common carrot, in the form of poultice, where external stimulus is wanting, is a practice as ancient as any thing recorded in medicine.

But instead of seeing the real importance of the information which it might have afforded—you yield to the false associations of your education and chemical habits; and you allow the virtue of the application from the similitude of its action to that of the metallic oxyds.

What! are there not vegetable as well as metallic oxyds?—God forbid they should be the same! for, in that case, I should have as many mutilations, impotencies, diseases, and deaths to answer for, as any thick-headed and hard-hearted votary of mercury in England. For when ulcers require stimulants, I always use them. And you may easily satisfy yourself of their superior importance, by a few simple trials.

Take

Take two patients, having the tenia or scurfy-head; you will easily find them, among the half-famished children in your neighbourhood. Treat one of them with the common decoction of the woods, and place on his head a poultice of carrots—give the other mercurial pills, and place a mercurial plaster on his head. The disease may disappear in both cases—but observe the children for some time afterwards :

The vegetable patient shall be healthy and in good spirits ; the mercurial patient, if he have no return of the disease, shall be sickly, nervous, hypochondriac and perhaps have his mental faculties affected.

The consequences are the same, in the different treatment of tumours and ulcers, or buboes and chancres, whether scrofulous or venereal.

An attention to these circumstances *may possibly* affect very importantly your choice and application of factitious airs.—But I do not feel sufficiently bold, to attack you immediately on your own ground.

It is sufficient for my present purpose, that all the *proposed* effects of minerals, as medicines, internal and external, are answered by vegetables, without inducing any of those dreadful diseases with which they supply and embarrass the practice of medicine.

I might furnish you with very numerous instances of those diseases. I might point out to you young men, who have been mutilated and unmanned by the use of mercury; and who have been left by brutal practitioners, to wander for the remainder of life, with the strong desires, but without the capacities, of men.

I charge this so pointedly on the authors of these calamities, because it is a cruelty of the most atrocious nature ; and it is avoidable, as the same treatment and remedy which I have used *to save their lives*, would have *prevented this mutilation*.

But I mean to produce publicly an example of this kind : a man mutilated in a celebrated hospital whose life I saved with difficulty ; to warn youth of their danger, and to repel calumny by an act of general beneficence—I shall not dwell on it—I shall not detail the cases in which noses, palates, foreheads, and indeed almost all the bones of the body, have been crumbled, by the aid which this mineral gives to scorbutic, scrofulous, and venereal complaints.

It is by excessive action, by repeated and violent prostrations of strength, that it introduces and supports numerous tribes of nervous disorders, and new species of convulsions and epilepsies, palsies, apoplexies, and insanities. It furnishes, either directly or indirectly a moiety of the cases in consumption, asthma, rheumatism, inveterate scurvy, scrofula, and the evil.

You very commendably turn your attention to these deplorable calamities ; but without attending to the general cause, in the HORRID PRACTICE RESPECTING MERCURY, which at this time is too prevalent. You only play with and water the extreme branches, while a surgeon may be pouring a caustic at the root of the tree.

As an honest man, which I believe you to be, in which character I honour you much more than in that of a physician or chemist ;—as a declared *reformer* ;

as a writer of various and powerful talents—I conjure you to lay the foundation of your own extensive utility and immortal fame, by considering attentively a practice which, with the appearance of benefit, undermines the general health; and which, while it removes the symptoms, inflicts on mankind numerous and incurable diseases.

My voice is in itself, feeble; and I have prejudices against me not easily surmounted. You stand on more advantageous ground; and though I have not been unsuccessful in my situation, and am considered as fortunate in the general object of my life, I should consider it as a circumstance in that life of the greater utility and the greatest honour, to have directed and fixed your knowledge and abilities against all the masqued evils, and all the indirect murders which I firmly believe to be committed by MERCURY, in the present practice of medicine.

I am, Sir,

With great respect,

Your very humble servant,

I. SWAINSON.

Frith-street, London,

December 14, 1796.

THE END.

ADVERTISEMENT.

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