

Homœopathy. Letter / of J. Silk Buckingham, Esq., to the "British Banner."

Contributors

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HOMŒOPATHY.

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Letter of J. SILK BUCKINGHAM, Esq., to the "British Banner."

SIR,—I have read with the deepest interest your able and impartial article on Homœopathy, in the last number of your widely-extended and deservedly influential Journal; and, seeing the manner in which the opponents of this system exert every nerve to destroy its credit, and thus to obstruct its progress among mankind, I feel it a solemn duty, as one of the many thousands who have derived unspeakable benefits from its use, to endeavour to neutralize these attempts of its enemies, by briefly describing the facts of which I have myself been the subject, as well as what I have witnessed in others; in the hope that by so doing the cause of truth in science, and of humanity in the abatement of disease and suffering, may be in some degree promoted by such a course.

In the year 1830 I happened to be with my family at Paris, and there met the late Dr. John Borthwick Gilchrist, the well-known Oriental linguist, and Professor of Eastern Languages, for many years engaged in preparing pupils in Hindustanee for the East India Company's service. He was then bordering on seventy years of age; but, after a long and active life, remarkably free from illness, he had become the victim of some disease which rapidly exhausted his strength, reduced his size, and brought him to such a state of imbecility, that he was in his second childhood: his eyes protruding, his under lip fallen, his hands tremulous and paralyzed, and his memory and consciousness so obscured that he could recognise no one except his affectionate wife, whose attention was such that she scarcely ever left his presence. During all the period of his suffering, the best medical advice that money could procure, in London and in Paris, was had for him, but all without avail; and when, with some difficulty, he was removed to Brussels, we expected that the next intelligence we should receive of him would be that of his death.

About six months after this, in the spring of 1831, while walking in Piccadilly, near the doctor's usual residence in Clarges-street, I met, with as much astonishment as pleasure, the same Dr. Gilchrist, walking erect, with firm and healthy step, his person filled out to his former size, and his whole aspect more full of strength, activity, and vigour, than I had ever before seen in his best days,—for I had known him several years before his illness. In accosting him, I expressed my surprise and delight, and asked him to what cause was to be attributed his almost miraculous resurrection, from what appeared to us the brink of the grave, to his present happy condition? He replied, that when at Brussels he had been placed under the homœopathic treatment by a physician there, and his recovery was as rapid as it was effectual, astonishing all his friends as well as himself. He asked me if I had ever read anything on the subject of this new system, to which I replied in the negative; when he told me that he felt so grateful for his cure that he had determined to write a pamphlet on his case, which he afterwards sent me, and which I read with deep interest; but I regret to say, that, in my frequent wanderings since then, this pamphlet has been lost; and I cannot, therefore, refer to it for any details.

In 1837, on resigning my seat in parliament, I made a visit to the United States of America, for the double purpose of giving my Lectures on the Countries of the Oriental World, and acquiring all the information I could respecting the institutions and condition of the Great Republic. We landed in New York in October; and, my public labours commencing immediately, they were followed up so incessantly, that the continued excitement of the throat, from

much and loud speaking, and the extreme variability of the climate, brought on so severe an attack of bronchitis, that I was obliged to suspend my labours altogether. I had recourse to the best medical advice of the city; and after a treatment prescribed by three separate physicians in succession, each persons of the largest practice, I derived so little benefit, that I entertained the resolution of abandoning my original intention of journeying through the country, and returning to England, from an impression that, owing to my peculiar liability to quinseyed sore throat (with which I had been afflicted on four different occasions in England and in India, and on each occasion with such severity as to excite the greatest alarm for my safety), added to the trying nature of a North American climate, and its severe cold in winter, there was great danger of my sacrificing my life, if I persisted in my public labours under such circumstances as these.

At this conjuncture of affairs, a clergyman of my acquaintance called on me to invite me to dine with him, which I felt obliged to decline, from the state of my health (wasting night perspirations having accompanied this inflammation of the throat, and greatly reduced my strength), when he asked me if I knew anything of the homœopathic treatment, and whether I should be willing to try it. I remembered the case of Dr. Gilchrist; and though, from that period, 1830, to the year of this interview, 1837, I had no serious ailment, requiring medical advice, so that I had had no occasion to have recourse to any change of system, I felt strongly disposed now to try it. To this, indeed, I was greatly encouraged by the many proofs which this clerical friend adduced, of the efficacy of the homœopathic treatment in cases similar to my own, once in his own person, and several times in that of his friends.

In the course of the same evening, he brought to me Dr. Vanderburgh, a gentleman born and educated in New York, descended from one of the old families of the original Dutch settlers there, and for many years one of the most eminent and successful physicians of the allopathic school, but now as extensive a practitioner of Homœopathy. This gentleman, then about fifty years of age, had, from severe professional labour and the effects of a trying climate, fallen into a state of consumption, a disease more prevalent, perhaps, in the Northern States of America than in any part of the world; and was so reduced in strength by the ravages of this disease, which was manifested in its worst forms, that neither he himself nor any of his friends entertained the least hope of his recovery. At length one of his relatives advised him to give Homœopathy at least a trial, as all hope from every other source was gone; to which he replied, with as much of indignation as his strength would admit, that he would never so far stain his professional reputation as to encourage this "humbug," and that he would rather die than submit to be deluded by such "arrant quackery." In his case, as in most similar ones, these terms were applied in utter ignorance of all the works written on the subject; the pride of professional eminence, and the indolence and aversion to innovation, so common to all professors of established systems, preventing his taking the only rational course of carefully examining a thing before condemning it. The nearer approach of death, however, and the quickened sense of duty which that solemn hour begets, induced him to rescind his former inconsiderate refusal. He submitted to homœopathic treatment, and in six months he was gradually, but steadily and substantially, restored to his former state of health. As might have been expected in a conscientious man, he soon felt that it was his duty to study and practise a system from whence he had derived so much benefit, and he issued notices to his former friends and patients accordingly; when such was the confidence in his sincerity and skill, that ultimately his practice became larger than ever; and, at the period of his calling on me, which was about a year after his recovery, he had a practice which kept him in

constant motion from early in the morning till late at night, and was as vigorous and healthy a man in all respects as any person of his age in the whole city.

Dr. Vanderburgh commenced his duties with me, by a long, careful, and patient examination of the history and progress of my disease, and, having satisfied himself on the minutest matters of symptoms, diet, &c., he took from his pocket medicine-box and administered to me some of those globules—the smallness of which is made the subject of so much ridicule by those who ought to know that much smaller globules than even these, which float invisibly in the air, and can neither be seen, handled, weighed, tasted, nor felt, are powerful enough to convey pestilence from one region to another across the widest oceans; and that the poisoned arrows of the Indians, and the bite of the scorpion, the cobra, and other venomous animals, will kill the strongest man with smaller globules of poison than any that are administered by homœopathists; and to *cure* need hardly require larger quantities than to *kill*.—I am free to confess, however, that having, through all my previous life, seen medicine administered in copious draughts, and bulky pills, and habitually associating quantity with force, I at first felt a little incredulous as to the power of such an apparently simple agency to remove so confirmed and severe a disease as that from which I was then suffering; and, therefore, I had no active faith in the efficacy of the remedy applied.

A few days were, however, quite sufficient to prove its salutary effects; and, without any other change than that of ceasing to take the larger pills and copious draughts prescribed by the regular faculty, and substituting for them the smaller globules of belladonna, bryonia, and sulphur, in highly diluted forms, and at intervals of several hours apart, for each separate dose, and of two days between each change of medicine. I was, in three weeks, restored to perfect health, my night perspirations ceased, my strength and appetite returned, and my throat was rendered so sound, and my voice so clear, that I speedily resumed my labours. From that time till I quitted America at the close of 1840, I passed three years of severe labour, in giving public lectures, or speaking at public meetings almost every evening, from one to two hours at each time, and to audiences, varying from 500 to 2,000 each; and in the day time, either travelling from town to town, or visiting the institutions and establishments of the country; enduring all the vicissitudes of weather, sometimes melting beneath the heat of Philadelphia, with the thermometer at 104 deg., or braving the cold of Boston, with the thermometer 8 deg. below Zero; traversing the mountains of the Alleghanies, the swamps of Virginia and Carolina; sleeping in log huts in the forest among the wild Indians; driving in open wagons across the praries of Illinois, or sleeping on the decks of steam-boats along the sedgy banks of the Mississippi; from Canada in the north to New Orleans in the south, and from the borders of the Atlantic in the east to the banks of the Missouri in the west; enjoying during all this period almost uninterrupted health, and removing every symptom of disease as soon as it appeared, by the prompt and timely application of homœopathic remedies.

It would fill every column of your paper, ample as is its space, if I were to narrate to you the scores of cases well known to me in the circle of my immediate friends and acquaintances, as cured by Homœopathy, when the allopathic physicians and surgeons had effected no benefit by their treatment, to say nothing of the cases of which I have heard through the testimony of others. But it will, perhaps, be sufficient to say, that from that period to this, now thirteen years ago, from 1837 to 1850, we have used no other remedies than homœopathic ones in my own family, and that we never, at any period of our lives, enjoyed better general health; though age and hard labour has begun to mark its traces on me more visibly than before; but when a man approaches

towards his seventieth year, he cannot reasonably expect not to feel the advance of that weakness and infirmity which is inseparable from such a stage of his existence.

I most cordially rejoice, therefore, to see the establishment of Homœopathic Hospitals in London, and I hope to live to see them increase throughout the country. The interests and the prejudices of established systems and their professors, have always opposed with great violence the introduction of any improvements which oblige them to renounce their favourite theories, and begin to learn new ones. Their pride of intellect revolts at any admission of their ignorance; and, in the self-sufficiency of their wisdom, they claim to be infallible, and treat all innovators as "humbugs," and "quacks." Their very phraseology betokens their anger, and their anger is proof of their illiberality. This is not peculiar, however, to the professors of medicine: it is common to almost all established systems and their teachers,—and the reason is in each case the same. All such changes have a tendency to excite alarm in them as to their pecuniary interests; and this being, with the majority of mankind, the test by which they try every proposed innovation, it is hailed as a good if it will put money in their pockets, it is denounced as an evil, if it is thought likely to abstract it from them. This test will solve many a problem in politics, as well as in science. The parties who believe, whether rightly or wrongly, that the pecuniary interest of their class will be benefited by any innovations, hail them as blessings; those who fear that such interests will suffer, dread them as curses; and each party acts accordingly. But science and the interests of humanity ought, at least, to rise superior to such grovelling tests as these. The progress of Homœopathy—of Mesmerism—of Hydropathy—of Hypnotism, will not only lessen the amount of human suffering, by curing existing diseases more rapidly, and by less painful processes than before, but will bring about such a change in the habits of mankind, by encouraging temperance, bathing, ventilation, open air exercise, simple diet, early hours, and other great restoratives of natural health and strength, as to prevent the existence of many diseases, now unhappily too prevalent from the mere violation of Nature's simplest laws; and if, thereby, mankind are saved from the drenching system of bleedings, vomitings, and purgings, with all the other accompaniments of nausea and disgust, and can at the same time keep a large family in perfect health at an expense of £5 a-year instead of £50, the pecuniary loss to the medical profession may be considerable, just as the advance of temperance lessens the gains of brewers and distillers, gin-palaces and beer-houses, and as the electric telegraph has led to the discharge of all the officials who were paid to superintend the working of the old semaphore between London and Portsmouth, which has just been taken down by orders of the Admiralty, and just as the change from war to peace leads to the dismissal of soldiers and sailors; yet the general good cannot fail to be promoted by every improvement that shall lessen the necessity for such medicine, and abate the cost of its administration; and on this ground the public will ultimately view this question, leaving the medical profession to shift for themselves, as all other parties are compelled to do when their services are no longer needed.


St. John's Wood.

J. S. BUCKINGHAM.

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