

Sir Benjamin Brodie's doings in diseases of the joints and spine / by Jonathan Dawplucker Clearthedust.

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Publication/Creation

London : John Ollivier, 1852.

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SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE'S DOINGS

IN

DISEASES OF THE JOINTS AND SPINE.

BY

JONATHAN DAWPLUCKER CLEARTHEDUST, M.D.

*Humbly
ye sa yea*

LONDON:

JOHN OLLIVIER, 59, PALL-MALL.

1852.

Price One Shilling.

LONDON:
W. H. COLLINGRIDGE, CITY PRESS,
LONG LANE.

THE following letter having been sent to the Editor of the "MEDICAL CIRCULAR," and returned by him to the writer, as unsuited to his pages, is now given to the profession and the public in this pamphlet form :—

MR. FERGUSSON AND SIR B. BRODIE.

To the Editor of the *Medical Circular*.

SIR,—In your first Number you promise great things ; of course you mean to perform them. Believing you to be sincere, I have no doubt you will lend me a helping hand to expose the miserable cliqueism by which, according to a certain popular author, "In physic, as in fermentation, the dirt and scum too often get to the top." You, Mr. Editor, know SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE. You know, moreover, what a great name he has ; but you are not afraid of him, for all that. You are quite up to the way in which, by means of the "caw-me, caw-you" system, a very little man may be made to figure as a giant in the eyes of the good people of this be-fogged metropolis. Yes ; everybody knows Sir Benjamin Brodie. A very great reputation has Sir Benjamin ! If we may believe PROFESSOR FERGUSSON of King's College, there is nobody like him in London, or, indeed, anywhere else. In a late Number of the *Lancet*, Mr. Fergusson bows the knee to Sir B. Brodie, as "the present acknowledged and justly-respected head of Surgery in Great Britain." What will Professor Syme, of Edinburgh, say to

that—Professor Syme, who fancies himself the first Surgeon in Europe! Like some of your readers, Mr. Syme, who believes himself to be a great discoverer, will, doubtless, be curious to know how the worthy Baronet, who never made a discovery at all, contrived to achieve an equally high position as himself. In the same Number of the *Lancet* to which we are indebted for Mr. Fergusson's "fact," we have Mr. Fergusson's explanation. According to Mr. Fergusson, Sir Benjamin Brodie,

"Besides the benefit he has conferred on all by his admirable *Work on the Joints*, has given one of the best illustrations of what he, Mr. Fergusson, has ventured to term *Conservative Surgery*, that could well be selected for illustrating these observations.—In 1824, Sir Benjamin *amputated a leg* for a painful disease in the lower end of the tibia, of twelve years' duration, which had resisted all treatment [good or bad?]. On *examination of the bone afterwards*, an abscess, about the *size of a chestnut*, was discovered in its centre, at the seat of the protracted pain under which the patient had suffered. Three years after, Sir Benjamin, in a *somewhat similar case*, applied a trephine to the affected part, let out the matter, *saved the limb*, and made a complete cure; so that, in 1846, the patient continued well."

How lucky some people are! How easily they achieve a great reputation! Sir B. Brodie's blunders absolutely turn to his advantage. Instead of being blamed for having, for twelve long years, ineffectually treated a poor devil's carcase, and afterwards amputated his leg for a disease, which a little examination showed might have been cured by an operation that could not fail to suggest itself to the meanest capacity, Sir B. Brodie receives something like praise; while for not repeating the same succession of unhappy mistakes in the next case of the kind, Mr. Fergusson actually holds him up to an admiring

world as a perfect model of Conservative Chirurgery! Save us, ye gods, from our friends!

Ah! but what about Sir B. Brodie's "admirable work on the Joints, which has conferred such benefit on all?" How mean you, Mr. Fergusson? Which of Sir Benjamin's works on the joints do you allude to? Which *Edition* rather? The edition of 1813—the edition of 1834—or the edition of 1850? Thereby hangs a tale! Let Dr. DICKSON tell it—let the author of the *Fallacies of the Faculty* restore a very great man to his true dimensions! The following abridgement of Dr. Dickson's history of Sir B. Brodie's "Doings in Diseases of the Joints and Spine," I give from the second volume of the *Forbidden Book* :—

Sir B. Brodie first published on Diseases of the Joints so far back as 1813. This he did in a paper which appeared in the Transactions of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society; and he followed it up by two others on the same subject in the succeeding years, 1814 and 1815. The practice Sir B. Brodie *then* recommended, resolved itself chiefly into bleeding, leeching, cupping, purging, salivation, blisters, setons, and caustic issues. Twenty-one years after—in 1834, to wit—Sir Benjamin again published the results of his matured experience as an hospital surgeon in the same complaints, confirming all he had written in 1813-14 and 15, and more particularly confirming the value of bleeding, leeching, cupping, calomel, blisters, setons, and caustic issues, with long confinement to the recumbent position. His treatment of chronic disease of the joints and spine, in 1834, was as follows:—

"As the *Chronic* inflammation is relieved more slowly [than the acute] in the first instance the joint should be kept in a state of perfect quietude, blood should be taken from the part

by means of leeching or cupping." "A blister may be applied; and if necessary, several blisters may be employed in succession." "I have employed CAUSTIC ISSUES in a great number and variety of instances, and have found them to be USUALLY productive of SINGULAR BENEFIT, where the cartilages are in a *state of ulceration*. *Setons and blisters* kept open by means of the savine cerate appear to operate nearly in the same manner, and may be used with ADVANTAGE in the same description of cases."

Such from 1813 to 1834 inclusive, was Sir B. Brodie's practice in Diseases of the Joints and Spine. How long he continued it after 1834 is of little moment to any but his patients. But in 1836—just two years after—DR. DICKSON, now of Bolton Street, in his "Fallacy of Physic as taught in the Schools," as well as in his "Unity of Disease," published in 1838, made a wholesale attack on each and every of the measures which had for so long a time been advocated by Sir Benjamin Brodie in his various writings, and which, on his authority, had become the surgical practice all throughout England. Dr. Dickson, in his "Unity of Disease" more particularly, in 1838, denounced Sir B. Brodie's treatment as a barbarism from beginning to end. In that year Dr. Dickson condemned everything Sir B. Brodie did;—he condemned the bleeding, leeching, cupping, blistering, and purgation—he condemned the setons and caustic issues—he condemned the abuse of calomel—he condemned the long confinement to the recumbent position; in a word, he condemned every part of Sir B. Brodie's treatment, whether local or general, so far as regards the management of the diseases of the joints and spine. Every and all of these diseases, according to Dr. Dickson's view of the matter, growing out of a great *antecedent* constitutional wrong—each and all of them, according to him, being special developments of a remittent or intermittent febrile affection of the whole

frame—each and every of them he contended could only be safely combated by quinine, iron, and other internal remedies, proper to the treatment of remittent or intermittent fever. Dr. Dickson, moreover, gave cases in proof—cases, which after having been ineffectually treated by Sir Benjamin Brodie's method, readily yielded to this tonic practice.

Of this book—this *Unity of Disease*—Dr. Dickson sent copies to a number of medical men of eminence, and among others to Sir Astley Cooper, and Sir B. Brodie. Sir A. Cooper acknowledged the copy sent to him by a polite note, in which he thanked Dr. Dickson “most sincerely for his valuable work.” Not so, Sir Benjamin Brodie—the only notice Sir Benjamin took of the book was to pooh-pooh its author whenever his name happened to be mentioned in connexion with diseases of the joints or spine.

But mark what follows. In 1850, just twelve years after the publication of Dr. Dickson's “*Unity of Disease*,” Sir Benjamin Brodie brought out another edition of his “admirable work on Diseases of the Joints and Spine,” with “additions and alterations”—which words appear on the title page. Alterations there were indeed—the book was altered from beginning to end. In the new edition—if new *edition* it could be called—Sir Benjamin Brodie, backing out of all, or nearly all, he had for twenty-one years recommended in his published writings, adopted, without acknowledgment, the greater part of Dr. Dickson's views and treatment. When I come to analyze Sir B. Brodie's “additions,” you, Mr. Editor, will perhaps agree with me that “subtractions” would have been the fitter word.

“In the early part of my professional life,” Sir B. Brodie tells his readers in this new edition, “in the early part of my professional life, I was led to follow the practice which was

then very generally adopted for treating Caries of the Spine by means of setons and caustic issues—one on each side of the diseased vertebræ.”

In the early part of your professional life, Sir Benjamin! Dr. Dickson asks,—do you think that a fair way of putting the case? When you published your book of 1834, in which you still continued to recommend these very measures as “*usually productive of SINGULAR BENEFIT*,” you had been full *thirty* years in practice. In that year 1834, you had taken your last look of the sunny side of fifty. You were upwards of half-a-century old. Ah! you were very juvenile then, Sir Benjamin. Not till full sixteen years after your publication of 1834, did you think it necessary to tell the world, and the many young men let loose on the world, all crammed with your notions, that everything you had hitherto taught them on this subject was a mistake from beginning to end. Not till the year 1850 did you make the following remarkable confession:—

“A more enlarged experience has satisfied me that in the very great majority of instances this *painful* and *loathsome* treatment is not only not useful but actually injurious. For many years past I have *ceased to torment* my patients who were thus afflicted in any manner, and I am convinced that the change of treatment has been attended with the happiest results.”

From 1813 to 1834, Sir Benjamin, you treated the diseases of the Joints and Spine as *local* diseases chiefly. You confess this much in your edition of 1850. In 1850, for the first time, you give the world to understand you have changed your opinion in that respect. But let us give your confession in your own words:—

“Indeed I must confess that, in proportion as I have

acquired a more extended experience in my profession, I have found more and more reason to believe that local diseases, in the strict sense of the term, are extremely rare. Local causes may operate so as to render one organ more liable to disease than another; but everything tends to prove that, in the great majority of cases, there is a morbid condition either of the circulating fluid or of the nervous system *antecedent* to the manifestation of disease in any particular structure."

Now really, Sir Benjamin, did you get that knowledge solely from your own experience? You now admit, with Dr. Dickson, the cold and hot alternations that periodically affect the local diseases "as regularly as an Ague." In your book of 1834, you make no mention of either. Disguise it as you please, Sir, *you* now adopt *his* theory in its totality, and in principle you adopt his treatment; for, instead of leeching, cupping, blistering, salivating, setoning, &c., you now follow Dr. Dickson's practice of giving Iron, Bark, and Quinine!

In your published writings from 1813 to 1834 inclusive, you make no reference to these remedies. On the contrary, in your edition of 1834, in a case with well-marked *periodic* symptoms, illustrative of your *then* practice, you do not administer either medicine. But let this case speak for itself. I give it verbatim from your book of 1834.

"A young gentleman about 13 years of age, in July, 1817, was seized with inflammation of the synovial membrane of one knee [inner surface of the joint], attended with the usual symptoms. *Blood was taken* from the knee by means of *leeches* and *cupping*; cold lotions were applied, and the violence of the inflammation subsided. In the beginning of October, a *blister* was applied; and, at the end of October, the knee was in the following state. It was larger than the other, the swelling having the form of the articulating extremities of the bones, and appearing to arise from a thickened state of the

synovial membrane. The joint admitted only of a limited degree of motion; and the motion of it, beyond a certain point, was productive of pain. He was now directed to apply friction with a stimulating linament. The complaint continued very nearly in the same condition till the middle of November, when the swelling became suddenly reduced, and almost wholly disappeared; but, on the *same day*, he complained of an acute pain of his *head*, shooting from the temples to the forehead, just above the eyebrow. The pain went off in a few hours, leaving only a slight soreness; and for several days it returned *periodically*, in the form of a *nocturnal paroxysm* of great severity, but only of a few minutes' duration."

And now for the treatment. How was this young gentleman treated? The greatest booby in the profession could hardly have failed to try bark, arsenic, or iron, in this case—a case in which the *periodic* headache only lasted a "*few minutes*." This is the way Sir B. Brodie treated it:—

"*Leeches* and *blisters* were applied both to the head and *legs* [!!!], and *purgatives* were administered. At the end of a week the pain ceased, but he was seized with great somnolency, which was soon followed by strabismus [squint], partial blindness, and almost total cessation of speech; and after remaining in this state about a week, he DIED!"

He died! How very wonderful, after he had been so admirably treated by "the present justly-respected head of surgery in Great Britain!"

Such, Sir Benjamin Brodie, was the treatment employed by you in 1817, and recommended by you as good surgical practice in your edition of 1834. But all this you have now altered. Now, instead of bleeding, purging, and blistering, as you did from 1817 to 1834 at least,—among other confessions, in your edition of 1850,—you confess you give iron or bark in almost every case of diseased joints; and this

change, forsooth, you made on your OWN experience! Nothing whatever do you owe to the "Fallacy of Physic as taught in the Schools;" where, so far back as 1836, Dr. Dickson taught that AGUE is the type of all disorder. Nothing do you owe to the "Unity of Disease," published in 1838. Nothing to the "Fallacies of the Faculty," which made such a sensation in 1839—a book which has been translated and re-translated on the Continent, and, by numerous reprints, has been more extensively circulated throughout the United States of America than any other medical work whatever. How you commiserated the Author of the *Unity of Disease*, when his name first happened to be mentioned in connection with diseases of the joints and spine! In those days, of course you could not have read the passages in which Dr. Dickson denounced the barbarous practice of bleeding, leeching, setons, and caustic issues, in these particular complaints. No; not you. The *Unity of Disease* was on your table, but you never opened it! How came you, then, to "pooh, pooh," Dr. Dickson? Whose plumage do you strut in now, Sir? Whose coat have you put on? Is it Joseph's coat, or no? If it be not Joseph's, at least it is not Benjamin's; but whoever be its owner, you are not the only evil beast that has devoured him!

Such is the charge of plagiarism that for more than six months has been openly laid before the public and the profession in the pages of the "*Forbidden Book*," and allowed by Sir B. Brodie and his supporters to remain unanswered. Not a single soul connected with the "caw-me, caw-you" system has had the effrontery to meet it with either defence or denial. Will Mr. Fergusson, after this, have the face to speak of Sir Benjamin Brodie's "admirable Book on the Joints!" *Nous verrons!* Meanwhile I will conclude this communication with a passage from the *Medical Times*, in which the Editor charges

the great Edinburgh Surgeon, Mr. Syme, with a plagiarism of a similar kind.

“Plagiarism does not alone consist in copying, without due acknowledgment, men’s modes of action or methods of speech. It is quite as much a literary theft to avail ourselves, without stating their origin, of the principles and ideas of others; and that, although we may not walk exactly in their paths, nor use their identical words.—ED. *Med. Times and Gazette*.”

I am, Sir, your very obedient,

JONATHAN DAWPLUCKER CLEARTHEDUST, M.D.

London, Feb. 19th, 1852.

P.S.—The following extract from the *Forbidden Book* will further illustrate the “caw-me, caw-you” system:—

We will suppose a young man has just purchased a share of the business of an old-established practitioner. At first, he makes a daily round with his partner among a certain number of patients; after a time, he is permitted to see a certain number by himself. Now and again he will meet with a case where the patient or the family wish for “further advice.” Full of enthusiasm for his profession, the young gentleman naturally thinks of calling in a physician of talent. He communicates the idea to his partner in something like these terms:—“Mrs. Doubtusall does not get on as we could wish; so her friends will have a consultation in her case. Suppose we call in Doctor Dawplucker Clearthedust; Doctor Dawplucker Clearthedust will enable us, in no time, to bring the case to a satisfactory conclusion.” “Bring the case to a satisfactory what?” cries the old gentleman. “A satisfactory conclusion.” “Why, young man, you are mad! Bring your bread-and-butter to a conclusion!—very satisfactory that!

But that is not the way we do business in London. We don't want a *clever* man to cure our patients, and put them out of conceit with us. At that rate we should be ruined before the year be done. What we want is a *safe* man—a man who just knows enough to know how to hold his tongue; or, if he needs must open his mouth, who will be sure to say, 'What a difficult and important case it is, and how admirably it has been treated; and that nothing better can be done than to pursue the same practice.' When did you ever hear of Messrs. Foolem and Hocusem, the great West-end apothecaries, calling in Dr. Dawplucker Clearthedust? They know better how their bread is buttered. Messrs. Foolem and Hocusem will not even meet Dr. Dawplucker Clearthedust; none of us will meet him. It would be absolute ruin to meet him! Where would be our four draughts a-day for months together, and all our other pretty little pickings, if we called in Dr. Dawplucker Clearthedust? To him, and such as he, we invariably give the cold shoulder. Our existence depends on our keeping down Dr. Dawplucker Clearthedust. We determine to keep him down; and, with all his ability, we know we can do it. Bless your life, we hold the public by the nose; we can make them believe whatever we like. We have only to 'Pooh, pooh,' them, when they mention the name of Dr. Dawplucker Clearthedust; and where we cannot do that, we japan his character. Besides, how easy it is to frighten sick people with the words 'horrible poison,' 'kill or cure,' and the like. As I said before, we don't like clever men—we like safe men. Dr. Watergruel Wadeinblood, whose *Practice of Physic* we all think so highly of, is a safe man. Dr. Watergruel Wadeinblood is the 'dummy' we all call in to our medical cases. In surgical matters, we prefer Sir Bantomy Bungle. We have every confidence in Sir Bantomy. Sir

Bantomy Bungle and Dr. Watergruel Wadeinblood are both particularly safe men. Heaven help you! *we* soon know who is a safe man. Long before he knows it himself, *we* have him in our eye; and when he least expects it, *we* make him a great man—though occasionally, too, when he least expects it, *we* turn him to the right-about (as we did Dr. Emptychambers, the other day), and make him look like what he really was—a monstrous fool, with only sufficient knowledge of himself to do as he is bid, and hold his tongue!”

Aye, gentle reader, that is the way of all “consultations” now, whether in town or country. If you have a clever son, who wants to become a great doctor, you will do well at once to dispel the illusion. If you have a donkey of a lad you know not what to do with, you may, by a little money, and a very little management, make him a “safe man.” In time, you make a Dr. Watergruel Wadeinblood of him; or, if you bring him up to surgery, you may make him a Sir Bantomy Bungle even. In either case, without comment or question, your donkey of a boy may commit as much devastation here in London as Samson ever did among the Philistines, and with exactly the same implement. Talk of a tomahawk! what is a tomahawk to the jaw-bone of a jackass!

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