General Remarks

ON THE

PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

BY

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IV.—CURE.

The vast Use of Cinchona both as a single Specific and as a special Auxiliary to other Remedies. The Use of other Substances as Specific or as Special Remedies. Their secret Operation is their common Characteristic. Of Poisons, and the Conditions which hinder their sufficient Trial as Special Remedies. Of common Remedies, which seem occasionally to have a special Power.

It is wonderful how multitudinous are the uses of cinchona; and in all its uses it is still a specific or special remedy. It is the type of remedies that cure, in all their powers, degrees, and ways of curing, from the greatest to the least. It cures single-handed and alone far beyond what can be ascribed to any other remedy. Thus it is the greatest of specifics. And it supplies, by a virtue of its own, the shortcoming of other medicines to remove the disease and restore to health, oftener and more effectually than any other special remedy. Thus it is the greatest of special auxiliaries.

Here and elsewhere, and in all the known world, experience has the same report to make of cinchona and its specific power to cure alone and absolutely, and also of the special help it has to give other remedies in curing diseases which would go uncured without it. The renown of cinchona is ubiquitous, because the diseases which it cures are found every where—diseases bred of noxious things, which come from earth and sky and changeful seasons.

If a man visit the fairest regions of the earth, he takes with him plenty of quinine as the safeguard of his existence; for it is in those regions that he is sure to encounter, in greater frequency and force than at home, all the diseases over which it exercises a specific or special power. The fruits of the ground, springing up without the helping hand of man's labour, seem to witness against the truth of the primeval sentence. Their gift is eminently gratuitous; it is neither worked for, nor paid for, nor asked for. There is no sweat of the brow in procuring it. But "the sweat of the brow" spoke and prophesied of other and higher industries than the labour of our hands, to become ministers of our well-being. The good gifts are fatally tainted. To free them from their evil, or to find the antidotes; to take them and use them without hurt; to live by them, and not die by them,—this has been the labour of man's mind—the sweat of his better brow—for centuries. And thus the primeval sentence stands firm as ever.

Now bear in mind what ague is, and what are its kindred diseases; and what the remedial power of quinine over it and them; and then think of other diseases common to the whole earth—more frequent, indeed, and oftener epidemic, and oftener fatal, in

some than in other climates, but met with, and epidemic, and fatal, in all by turns. Think of dysentery and cholera and influenza, as they are called, and all their formidable kindred; and, finally, conceive that for dysentery, cholera, influenza, all the world over, we had as sure a single-handed specific as quinine for ague, and as hopeful a special remedy for their kindred diseases as quinine for the kindred of ague; verily, three such remedies added to our stock, each in its own large sphere of operation the rival of quinine, would immensely diminish the amount of premature death and early incapacity in the whole human race. But quinine stands alone; there is nothing like it or second to it.

Now my experience of what quinine will do as an absolute specific goes for nothing, compared with that possessed by surgeons of almost every British settlement abroad. Therefore I shall say nothing more about it as such.

But here in England there is immense use made of quinine by physicians. As an absolute specific, indeed, for a particular disease, we have employed it less and less as aguish districts have been more and more drained of their endemics. As an occasional specific or special remedy for diseases which at certain times and seasons are unaccountably found curable by it, we still employ it largely; and yet more largely we find ourselves resorting to it as the special auxiliary of other remedies in our management of various diseases.

But there are other substances used from time to time by all of us, for the sake of the special power they have of dealing with diseases curatively, either single-handed or as auxiliaries to other remedies. All physicians have given mercury for syphilis, and cured it; arsenic for leprosy, and cured it; colchicum for gout, and cured it; iodide of potassium for bronchocoele and periosteal nodes, and cured them. Here is a formidable array of diseases, and a goodly array of special remedies and cures; and if these several remedies were absolute specifics for the several diseases, there would be, as far as they are concerned, an end of the matter, and a happy end too, as between physicians and mankind. The world would have nothing more to ask of us. Our duty would be complete, and we might hand over these same diseases to the pure pathologist, hoping at the same time that the remarkable fact of each having in Nature one sure antidote would be for him a great point to start from in search of their essence, and thus science and humanity be both gainers alike in the end.

But of remedies such as these, even if they were absolute specifics, and we had nothing to do but prescribe them and register their curative effects, it would look strangely incurious to have nothing more either to think or to say.

Now the first thing to be remarked is this, that of such remedies—remedies specifically or specially curative in the sense understood—physicians have greatly increased the number and the use of late years, upon grounds, I presume, sufficiently safe and trustworthy. And if the fact of one and the same disease cured uniformly or almost uniformly by one and the same remedy, as in the single instance of ague and quinine, be taken to point to some great pathological truth hitherto undiscovered, the like fact, when it comes to be predicated of many several diseases and many several remedies, denotes a whole

region of still occult pathological truths. But wherever it be within our bodies that these truths have their place, wherever they live and exercise a living force and agency, *common observation* has not reached; yet it has searched hard, and done its best within its own possible sphere. But there is a sphere beyond; and this science has found the means and implements to penetrate, and there it has traced and grasped a few elements of disease and a few substances, whether remedial or poisonous. The means used are chemistry and the microscope; the sphere reached and unlocked is that of the blood and the tissues.

Doubtless, great things, ministering both to health and to disease, are being constantly transacted within this sphere, while they give no notice of themselves during their progress, but only by their accomplishment. And it may be well believed that remedies also which *simply cure*, have this for their secret laboratory. Specific and special remedies seem to have it almost as a condition of success that their operation should be secret.

We see how great a subject is this cure of diseases by special remedies, and how it becomes fuller and fuller of interest the more we think of it. But the interest is of different kinds. We feel sure that it contains a mine of physiological and pathological truths, if we could but reach it; while it displays upon the surface abundant proofs of the weakness and credulity of medical men, from which we would willingly turn away if we could.

But the subject cannot be systematised as a whole. Some of its most important facts can only be fairly stated, without any attempt to force them into compliance with prevailing theories.

In our times, poisons have been largely pressed into the service of medicine; but upon what terms? Are they to be considered as special remedies for *curing* certain diseases secretly and mysteriously, it matters not how, if experience only give sufficient warrant that they *can* cure them? Or as remedies for *treating* diseases, remedies rationally chosen for the sake of operations, which we form some notion of from our knowledge of their common, *i. e.*, their poisonous effects? These may seem idle questions; for practically it all comes to the same thing. And physicians, however it may please them to account for the results, have all one care in using these substances; namely, that in their way to become remedies they do not fatally show themselves to be poisons. By some mode or measure of prescribing them, we seek to cheat them of their poisonous and insure their remedial effects.

It is a hard sentence to utter, but nevertheless true, that there is nothing of which the physician need be so jealous as his knowledge. Let the knowledge be ever so sound, and consequently the desire and temptation to turn it to use ever so great, the conditions of medical practice are often such as to make its use dangerous or impossible. We have illustration at hand in our present subject of what is meant, which it is worth while to pursue.

The doctrine of poisons, or toxicology (as it is called) has greatly helped pathology. But how far has it helped the practice of medicine? Toxicology, making search for the substances in which it deals, after their application to the body, has traced and found some of them deposited and at rest within the issues, and some moving and circulating with the

blood. Thus it has disclosed a new sphere of their operations. And as of many poisons, so of many medicines; for poisons and medicines are oftentimes the same substances given with different intents; and, being the same, their operation, whether for evil or for good, must, one would think, be always in the same sphere. Thus, beyond these particular substances, a clear intimation arises concerning some others, even our most powerful and summary, and hitherto mysterious agents of cure, that they possibly may have their operations in this sphere also, and that here they meet the first and finer and governing elements of the disease, and here they counteract them.

Now, one would think that medicine and its effects would derive abundant illustration from poisoning and its effects; that medicine, even practical medicine, would learn skill and exact aims from toxicology. Both bring their means to bear upon the same living body, and those means are often the same and often much alike. They dwell (so to speak) in close neighbourhood. They urge their labours, and ply their experiments, within sight, and hearing, and knowledge of each other. It cannot be, one would think, but that instructive hints must be continually passing between them, and toxicology be most helpful to medical practice. But the fact is otherwise. The purposes and ends of each are so totally different that you cannot reason or practise from one to the other. What does all we know of poisoning by opium teach us of the uses of opium as a remedy? How to kill by it is quickly learnt. The few cases of poisoning by it, accidentally or designedly, which occur at any large hospital in the course of a year, are enough to teach the student how to kill by it without fail. But a long life, spent amid the emergencies of disease and the constant obligation of ministering to them, is required to teach physicians the infinite remedial uses of opium and the skill to make those uses good.

Take arsenic, strychnine, corrosive sublimate, and think what the genius and experimental industry of toxicologists have taught us, within these few years, of the sphere and mode of their operation as poisons. Then, take arsenic, strychnine, corrosive sublimate, and think of them as medicines, and how physicians, whenever they use them, are obliged so to handle them as if they had still no knowledge of them whatever, and still took them for dark mysterious specifics. For, understanding all the characteristic effects of each as poisons upon the living body, they are daily and hourly on the alert to bar and exclude them. They so measure their dose as to keep it down below the possibility of producing the least sensible effect. They exclude all that is known of them or calculable, for fear of poisoning, and they rest in what is unknown and inappreciable for the sake of curing. Poisoning and healing work by the same means to different ends; but the end of each so imposes its own conditions upon the mode and measure of dealing with the means, that the use of them lays open knowledge to us in the one case, and closes it against us in the other.

Poisons, be it always remembered, are esteemed poisons, not because they are found in the blood and in the tissues after the man is dead, but because, while he yet lives, they damage or spoil the working of organs by which preeminently he holds his life; because they kill the brain, they kill the spinal mar-

row, they kill the heart, or because they go near to killing them. Poisons are poisons in their living signification; and, however much more may be known about them, this living signification must always be the exact rule and measure of their use as remedies.

All medicine is practised upon this condition, "Harm not man's life"; or if present harm must needs be, let it be such as will be made up for by good to come, and so man's life suffer no detriment in the end. But toxicology has life abandoned to its experiments—brute life absolutely; and as for human life, toxicology is at hand to witness all forms of violence which crime or accident can inflict upon it, and to study the ruins they have left when life is gone.

My own experience in this class of remedies amounts almost to nothing; for I confess myself altogether a coward in the use of them. But as what a man does only once in his life is memorable to himself, and he is naturally apt to make much of it; so to me is the single occasion in which I ever employed strychnine as a remedy. Let this be my excuse for mentioning it; for the result only shews how magnanimous the patient may be, and how pusillanimous the physician.

About a quarter of a century ago, there came into St. Bartholomew's Hospital a fine, tall, intelligent fellow, at the prime of life, with both his wrists paralytic and useless. He was a painter. He suggested his own remedy; the same remedy which, eighteen months before, when he was just as bad as he now was, had, by his own account, perfectly cured him. This remedy was strychnine. He had been in the Manchester Infirmary, under the excellent care of Dr. Bardsley, who had prescribed it and superintended its use. The result was the happiest possible. He returned to his trade, and handled his brush as well as ever.

Upon such shewing, it was impossible to deny the man his request: so, committing him to the charge and frequent visits of a trusty student, I prescribed him strychnine. Well! things went on bravely with the patient, but nervously with me. Never was man so happy as he. He had perfect faith in the remedy, and was constantly interested in speculating upon the progress of his recovery. At my visits, he was always urgent with me to increase the dose of strychnine, and get on quicker with his cure. And now he began to have involuntary twitchings of the extremities, especially by night, which he thought denoted the favourable operation of the remedy, and entitled him to have more of it. One day, I found him happy above measure; for, in the course of the preceding night, a convulsion had lifted him clean out of bed, and flung him bodily on the floor of the ward. This was to him a sure presage of recovery; and must be to me, he thought, an irresistible argument for a bolder use of the special remedy. Great, therefore was his disappointment, when he found me pusillanimous enough to order that for the present it should be suspended altogether. The next day my patient was gone; he had positively run away. He left me his good wishes at his departure, expressing at the same time the small opinion he had of a physician "who," he said, "could cure his disease if he would, but he would not."

What a subject of contrasts and opposites is this of special and specific remedies! We find ourselves

dealing rarely and reluctantly with deadly poisons. We wait and look on with fear and trembling, while they are at work, upon their doubtful and dangerous trials. And then we learn, on credible report, that certain harmless familiar things, which we have used all the days of our lives, doing no wonders with them, but yet a great deal of good in a common way, turn out to have special or specific virtues which nobody ever dreamt of. Remedies of common use have gained from time to time the credit of a specific or special use; valued and familiarly employed for their known power over certain indications, and frequent sharers in the *treatment* of whatever diseases, be they many or few, are wont to present these indications; they are all at once reputed to possess, moreover, a *curative* power over some one disease in particular. The authorities or sponsors for these facts are beyond all question; and thus old remedies gain renown for their new virtues, and come largely into use for new purposes.

Some years ago, my friends at Guy's announced to me that lemon-juice was a cure for acute rheumatism; and my friends at St. Bartholomew's, that tinctura ferri muriatis was a cure for erysipelas. I make no doubt that the present evidence was sufficient for the fact thus far. There was the disease, and there was the remedy. The remedy was given, and the disease ceased sooner than according to common expectation.

I earnestly hope that the experience of these two great hospitals has continued to run in the same groove ever since; that lemon-juice still cures acute rheumatism at Guy's, and tinctura ferri muriatis still cures erysipelas at St. Bartholomew's. If the case be really so, then can these two remedies justly claim the rank of specifics, each for its disease respectively. If it be not so, then they are no specifics for the particular diseases, but remedies *only upon conditions*, though the conditions were past finding out. Here we have great mysteries. We have remedies analysing diseases into something more than we know, or diseases analysing the operations of remedies into something beyond the uses of experience. At all events, the things we witness are realities; not visible and tangible, indeed, but still realities to be traced and acknowledged in their practical bearings, and to be dealt with and used from time to time, but very cautiously reasoned upon.

They suggest that the diseases spoken of, as well as other and even all diseases, are often more than their symptoms declare them to be, and that they contain some element beyond our knowledge. This element may be occasional only; and yet, when it occurs, the part which it plays may, for the time, be so essential to the entire disease, that the remedy which can reach the single element deals curatively with the whole.

And further, they suggest concerning remedies, even the commonest and those of which, as we fancy, we know the most, that we do not know all; that each may have powers in reserve beyond the reckonings of our maturest experience, and a possible sphere of operation beyond our deepest research.

But suddenly let the element which we have supposed be withdrawn, and at once the medicine which did wonders is inert, the disease becomes again its common self, and the specific is reduced to a common remedy.