MEDICAL ADVERTISING AND MEDICAL REVIEWING.

Abstract of an Address delivered at the Harveian Society of London, January 7th, 1875.

By JAMES R. LANE, F.R.C.S.,
Surgeon to St. Mary's and the Lock Hospitals; President of the Society.

[MR. LANE, after alluding to the difficulties in the choice of a subject suitable for such an occasion, said he had decided to abide by the instructions conveyed in the laws of the Society, and to occupy himself chiefly with its condition and future prospects, and with such events as had occurred during his year of office, which seemed to invite attention and to suggest comment.

The favourable state of the finances of the Society was a matter for congratulation, and suggested the question whether it was not in a position to increase its sphere of usefulness; and amongst other modes of doing so, he thought the establishment of a Lectureship to be held annually by some member of the Society was well worthy of consideration. After some further remarks, he alluded to certain occurrences which took place in the early part of last year, which he considered worthy of notice on account of their bearings on the dignity and honour of the profession and on the character of medical literature.

In March last, an extraordinary meeting was held, to consider a proposition for the expulsion of a member who had pursued a system of advertisement in the daily papers, which, in the words of the law, was thought to be an "offence against the established usages of the profession".

The advertisements in question, which occupied a whole column in the *Times* and other papers, were of a kind happily hitherto unknown amongst respectable medical practitioners, and that they were derogatory alike to their author, to the Society, and to the profession was generally admitted. Nevertheless, there were members whose opinions were entitled to attention and respect, who urged that the advertisement of medical books in non-medical journals had become one of the established usages of the profession; and that, therefore, the advertisements in question, though deserving of censure, could not fairly be brought within the terms of the law. In the end, the necessary majority of three to one was not obtained, and the motion for expulsion was consequently lost. The result was, the immediate resignation of various official and other members, and the imminent secession of many more, which seemed almost to threaten the disruption of the Society, when fortunately the offending member came to the rescue, and solved the difficulty by his voluntary resignation.]

In commenting on these occurrences, he said: What seems to me most deserving of attention is the fact that there were members of the Society who stated in plain terms that they could not see any *essential* difference between the advertisements which were held to be so obnoxious, and those of medical works (some of which were mentioned by name), which appear constantly in the *Times* and other non-medical papers; and I think there can be no doubt that a feeling adverse to the practice in any shape is pretty largely entertained throughout the profession. That being so, the custom seems fairly open to criticism and remark; and it may fairly be questioned whether the practice of advertising medical works on disease of all kinds in the daily journals is conducive to the credit and legitimate advantage of the profession.

Far be it from me to presume to hint the smallest blame on those who had availed themselves of a custom which has undoubtedly become one of the established usages of the profession. Amongst them may be found many who are entitled to all honour and respect; it is against the custom only that I venture with all deference to enter an humble protest.

It is worthy of remark that, what may be called the classics of medical literature, works of established repute on medicine, surgery, physiology, and anatomy, and the like, rarely grace the advertising column, though, if the real object were to instruct the public in medicine and the allied sciences, these would seem to be the most appropriate channels through which information might be conveyed. But that column is almost exclusively occupied by announcements of the works of Dr. A. or Mr. B. on this or that particular class of disorders, some of which it is hardly decent to parade upon the daily breakfast-table, for the edification of the wives and daughters of the period. That these

announcements should be made under the ægis of respectable publishers, by whom they are ostensibly inserted, in no way alters the principle, or diminishes the responsibility of those whose names are thus put forward.

In the *Essays of Elia*, there is one "On the Two Races of Men", in which Charles Lamb explains that "the human species, according to the best theory he can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, the men who borrow and the men who lend; to which two original diversities may be reduced all the other various impertinent classifications into white men, black men, red men, etc.," and he goes on to demonstrate the infinite superiority of the former (the men who borrow); "they take no more thought than lilies; whereas the latter are born degraded—he shall serve his brethren—and there is something lean and suspicious in his air, contrasting with the open, trusting, generous manners of the other." Somewhat similarly an old teacher of mine divided medical authors into two classes; the men who write *for* practice, and the men who write *from* it. He might, paraphrasing Elia, have pointed out the great superiority of the former. "How freely and openly doth he avail himself of the intellectual capital of his inferior brethren, never troubling them with acknowledgment or receipt. What a liberal confounding of the pedantic distinctions between *meum* and *tuum*—what approaches doth he make to the primitive community, to the extent of one-half of the principle, at least. Lend, therefore, cheerfully, O man ordained to lend, that thou lose not in the end the reversion promised."

Now, those who write *for* practice and those who write *from* it—those who only want to say *something*, and those who have something within them which they want to say, both have their representatives in the advertising columns of the daily papers. Will it be thought too presumptuous to suggest to the latter, whose works are really written for the profession and not for the general public, and many of which are an honour alike to their authors and to science, that they might fairly content themselves with the publicity afforded through the medium of the medical press? It cannot be contended that there is any demand for works of this class amongst non-medical readers: the only real effect, then, of such advertisements is to bring the names of their authors prominently before ordinary newspaper readers, an aim hardly worthy of those whose acquirements fit them to be our leaders and our teachers, of whose reputation and fair fame we are jealous, and whose character and motives we wish to see not only without reproach, but above suspicion.

With respect to the class of authors who write *for* practice, it is not likely that on them any words of mine will have much influence. Were it not for the advertising columns of the daily papers, the crude and slipshod productions to which I allude would never see the light, for the parade of their authors' names is the very reason of their existence.

I remember that, many years ago, an old friend of mine, who was, I believe, sincerely anxious for my advancement, said to me, "Why don't you write a book about something? get it advertised in the papers, and keep your name constantly before the public." I replied that I had nothing to say about anything in particular which had not been already said by others much better than I could say it. I saw at once that I had fallen many degrees in his estimation, when he rejoined somewhat contemptuously, that it did not matter what I wrote or whether anybody read it—I had only to keep my name well in the front, and my success would be certain. No doubt my old friend was wise in his generation—much wiser than I was—for somehow or other that book never was written, and, on the whole, I am not sorry for it.

Now, it is a great encouragement to those who write books of this character, that they have the opportunity of introducing them to general notice in such respectable society, where they can at once flaunt it with some of the best amongst us; but if their betters could be induced to withdraw from the association, if it came to be understood that, to use a prevailing vulgarism, it was "bad form" to resort to such modes of publicity. Perhaps in time even these notifications would cease to greet the public eye, and aspirants for practice might be led to turn their energies in more legitimate directions, and at all events to make themselves masters of a subject first, and write a book about it afterwards.

I shall here venture to quote a passage from Macaulay, on the pernicious effects of puffing on the character of the general literature of his day.

"Though we have no apprehension that puffing will ever confer permanent reputation on the undeserving, we still think its influence most pernicious. Men of real merit will, if they persevere, at last reach the station to which they are entitled, and intruders will be ejected with contempt and derision. But it is no small evil that the avenues to fame should be blocked up by a swarm of noisy, pushing, elbowing pretenders, who, though they will not ultimately be able to make good their own entrance, hinder, in the meantime, those who

have a right to enter. All those who will not disgrace themselves by joining in the unseemly scuffle must expect to be at first hustled and shouldered back. Some men of talents accordingly turn away in dejection from pursuits in which success appears to bear no proportion to desert. Others employ, in self-defence, the means by which competitors far inferior to themselves appear for a time to obtain a decided advantage. There are few who have sufficient confidence in their own powers, and sufficient elevation of mind, to wait with secure and contemptuous patience, while dunce after dunce passes before them. Those who will not stoop to the baseness of the modern practice are too often discouraged. Those who stoop to it are always degraded."

Such were the words of the brilliant essayist forty-five years ago; they may seem somewhat strong in these politer times. In fact, our fathers were harder hitters than we are, but hard hitting is in no way inconsistent with fair fighting. They appear to me worth repeating now, and they are not without some application to the subject I have been discussing.

I cannot help thinking that if medical reviewers of the present day were animated by a like spirit, we should soon see changes for the better in the character and tone of our medical literature; at all events, we might hope for a great diminution in the numbers of books written. But, somehow or other, now-a-days it is only as a rare exception that one sees a medical review in which the talents and research displayed by the author are not conspicuously put forward; and if we are to depend upon reviewers, most of the medical books now published are as nearly as possible on the same dead level of superiority. I do not know how to account for this; I never wrote a book, and therefore have not been behind the scenes. I should be the last person to imagine that private influences or personal friendships had anything to do with it, because these, of course, never count for anything when it is a question of the performance of a public duty. But "a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind"; and when almost everybody writes a book, and the reviewer of to-day will often be the reviewed of to-morrow, may not such fellow-feeling sometimes exercise an unconscious operation? Or may it be that reviewers act upon the maxim laid down, I believe, by Sydney Smith, who said it was taking an unfair advantage of an author to read his book before reviewing it, because it is so important to approach the subject with a mind perfectly free from prejudice. Anyhow, it appears to me that in the matter of reviewing, it would be a great advantage to have a little more critical discrimination, a little more separation of wheat from chaff, perhaps a little less good nature, but certainly a good deal more plain speaking.

Our profession has, I believe, a bright future in store for it, but it rests with itself whether it will use its opportunities aright. Its sphere of usefulness is expanding day by day. The great science of public and preventive medicine is only now just springing into active life. Its cultivation is an object worthy of the highest ambition, and affords ample scope for the highest order of intellect. The public is by degrees learning to look to us for the solution of some of the most intricate and important social problems of the day; and as the necessity for doing so becomes more and more manifest, so, if we prove worthy of its confidence, must the estimation in which we are held be increased.

But if our calling is to rise in the future to that high position—which, for the welfare of the community at large still more than for its own advantage, it *ought* to occupy; and which, as I believe, there are signs of the times indicating that it is sooner or later *destined* to occupy—it must be, amongst other things, through the resolute discountenancing by the general body of those petty artifices by which some among us try to steal a march upon their fellows. It must be by the abandonment of individual self-seeking, at the expense of the character of that general body; it must be by the cultivation of a thorough loyalty to our order, combined always with the consciousness that the profession is for the public, and not the public for the profession. Such self-abnegation will be found in the end to be only a more enlightened self-interest, but of a kind at which no man will have a right to scoff. Still, it is only by insisting, as far as possible, on the maintenance of an elevated standard among the units, that the elevation of the mass can be secured; and each of us cannot do better than keep in mind that

"The purest treasure mortal times afford
Is spotless reputation: that away,
Men are but gilded loam, or painted clay."

THE BOSTON COTTAGE INFIRMARY will soon be completed and opened for patients. Nearly the whole of the estimated expense of the building has been subscribed; but, owing to the loss of part of it, which was paid into Messrs. Gee and Co.'s Bank, £250 is still required.

THE RELATIONS OF WOMEN TO OBSTETRIC PRACTICE.

Extract from the President's Address, delivered at the Obstetrical Society on January 6th, 1874.

By EDWARD J. TILT, M.D.,
President of the Society.

[THE first part of the President's address was mainly occupied by obituary notices of deceased Fellows and a review of the affairs of the Society. It concluded as follows.]

Independently of our work as a scientific Society, you know that we have been occasionally obliged by our metropolitan position to take the lead in questions relating to the welfare of obstetric medicine; and last year we were called upon to decide whether our laws permitted us to admit women to the fellowship of the Society. Your almost unanimous decision that women were not admissible was one of great importance; for the profession felt that, although the question was tried on a technical point, your verdict really meant that women were not qualified by nature to make good midwifery practitioners; that they were unfit to bear the physical fatigues and the mental anxieties of obstetrical practice at menstrual periods, during pregnancy and puerperality; and that it was unfair to society to encourage women to suppose that they could ever fit themselves to assume responsibility in those formidable obstetric emergencies which too often completely paralysed men of experience as midwifery practitioners. The remembrance of your decision on this question may also remind you that last year I explained to you that, in England, the lower classes of society were at the mercy of uneducated midwives, uncontrolled by aught else than the fear of a coroner's inquest. Last year, Lord Aberdare and Mr. Stansfeld were in office; they favourably entertained the views repeatedly brought forward by the Society; and they were prepared to bring in a Bill for the better education and registration of midwives; when a change of Ministry convinced your Council that the question must be left in abeyance. It was after mature deliberation that the Obstetrical Society of London determined to move in this matter. Its original resolve has been sanctioned by successive Councils, and it will be for the new Council to decide whether it is not time to reopen the question with the new ministers. Ours is the only civilised country that has left unregulated the midwifery of the humbler classes; and it is a disgrace to obstetric medicine, that there should be no means of preventing an incompetent and drunken woman from assuming the name and the duties of a midwife. There is every probability that our efforts in this direction would be favourably received by a Government that has no great measures to carry, and which seems bent on dealing earnestly with all questions relating to public health.

Gentlemen, I cannot vacate the chair without thanking you for the invariable courtesy you have shown me in the discharge of my duty; and I likewise thank the numerous officers with whom you have associated me for having rendered easy and pleasant the duties of office. I am glad my place will be taken by one so well qualified as Dr. Priestley to preside over your meetings, to further the interests and support the honour of the Obstetrical Society of London.

REMARKS ON THE ORIGIN, VARIETIES, AND TERMINATION OF IDIOCY.*

By GEORGE W. GRABHAM, M.D.,
Resident Physician and Medical Superintendent to the Asylum for Idiots,
Earlswood.

THE information which I have to give upon this subject has been somewhat hurriedly got together in the intervals of routine work. Though not sufficiently definite or extensive for the foundation of any theory, and perhaps containing little that is new, the statistics and remarks upon individual groups and cases may nevertheless prove interesting to those who have not made idiocy their special study. The time at my disposal to-day being necessarily very limited, I will at once proceed to give short definitions of the terms "idiocy," "imbecility," "cretinism," and "dementia"; and afterwards some particulars of the causes of these affections, as far as I have been able to ascertain them by inquiries in eight hundred cases.

Idiocy may be defined as "an absence or arrest of development of the intellectual and moral faculties, either congenital, or occurring in new-born children". *Imbecility* is generally taken to signify "a milder

* Read before the East Sussex District of the South-Eastern Branch.