Lectures

ON

CERTAIN MUTUAL RELATIONS OF PHYSIOLOGY, PATHOLOGY, AND THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

BY

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LECTURE III. (Concluded.)

On the Pathology and Treatment of Certain Forms of Delirium. Therapeutics. The Physiological and Therapeutic Action of Alcohol. The Present State of Therapeutics, and the Direction which Therapeutical Inquiries should take, etc.

I MIGHT mention further illustrations of the principle to which I am referring, in regard to other remedies; but I must pass on to the consideration of another point in relation to therapeutics—the direction which our therapeutical inquiries should take. And I would observe that, valuable as the numerical method is in many questions relating to medicine, it is, perhaps, of least value in reference to therapeutics. That we shall ever arrive at any correct principles of treatment of a particular disease—such as pneumonia—by a system of tabulating mere results, I venture to express a doubt. Without the context of a case, the mere details of treatment are utterly useless as to the value of that particular plan in regard to other cases. Two cases of pneumonia—and I merely speak of this disease for the sake of example—lying side by side in the same ward, may require modes of treatment which differ materially from each other, as, by different constitutional symptoms, they show the different pathological states under which they occur.

Are we then wrong in tabulating our cases of disease, and in recording the results of our practice? By no means; but let us not be satisfied with a mere statement of the disease and of the result which follows our treatment. Rather let us give the symptoms which characterise the cases we relate, and the phenomena attending their progress, that others may judge as to the value of our therapeutic measures.

I think we should be wrong—that we should be attempting to put the practice of medicine on a narrow basis, a basis that would crumble under a superstructure of ever-accumulating facts—were we to endeavour to reduce the treatment of a particular disease, especially of an inflammatory kind, to one particular line of practice, or one particular set of remedial agents. It is not in this direction, except in regard to a few specific ailments, that our researches should be made. Rather we should endeavour to ascertain the therapeutic measures which are applicable to different pathological conditions, whatever be the individual disease with which they are associated. And is not this characteristic of a large portion of our practice—except, perhaps, in those cases of the pathology of which we are ignorant, and in which our treatment bears the stamp of much that is empirical?

There is a wonderful catholicity in disease; and

to the recognition of this is due the fact, that in a vast variety of affections, we administer, not merely similar, but identical remedies. And to the ignorant and uninitiated a practice of this kind might seem simple, easy, and to savour much of mere routine; and yet it is most difficult, and indicates a high development of therapeutics, and a profound knowledge of the nature and causes of disease.

And in regard to another point arising out of the consideration of the subject—the specific action of medicinal substances—I think we shall probably better serve the ends of medicine by a careful investigation of the *modus operandi* of some of the remedies with which we are acquainted, so as to establish on sounder principles the particular pathological conditions to which they are applicable, than by a search after new substances, or new combinations of old compounds. It would, no doubt, be a great boon could we discover some new remedial agent possessing a specific power like that of quinine in ague, or even some decided therapeutic action in any disease whatever; but when we see the failure which has so constantly attended the progress of some vaunted nostrum—an alleged specific for a disease of whose pathology we are ignorant—we may well be excused for exercising a certain degree of scepticism in reference to the value of a remedy, which comes to us recommended by limited experience or hasty generalisation.

The careful investigation of the modes of action of many of the substances in common use might lead us to a more precise knowledge of their value, and teach us to use them in a more definite and scientific manner; and I cannot but hope that the therapeutic inquiry which has been commenced by our Association will meet with the encouragement it deserves, and be the means of establishing important principles of practice.

But whilst deprecating the excessive desire which seems to agitate the minds of some, in their search after new specifics, or new chemical compounds, let us by no means discourage the laudable ambition of enriching our *Pharmacopœia* with articles of sterling value. We must never forget that the present century has given us, through the agency of the chemist, a substance which is capable of annihilating the pangs of the most painful manipulations of surgery, and of obviating the tortures formerly incidental to all operative procedures. In the face of such a fact as this, we must be pardoned if we express doubt whether we have yet arrived at the limits of our therapeutical discoveries; and although we believe that we shall do more for the progress of medicine, by studying the effects of the remedial agents with which we are at present acquainted, than by a search after new ones, we would by no means discourage any legitimate endeavour in the latter direction. For, as with chloroform, so, possibly, with some of the other products which result from the labours of the chemist, and which, as yet, possess scarcely more than a scientific interest, they may, in course of time, and as they pass into the hands of the practical physician, add to our healing powers, and give us means of more effectually controlling certain forms of disease. And I think it is a matter of extreme satisfaction that, although we are not rapidly increasing the number of valuable medicinal materials, in another important direction, one which enables us

to use with greater certainty the remedies we already possess, viz., that of diagnosis, we are constantly adding to the scientific certainties of practical medicine. We need not wonder at the difficulties under which our predecessors of the last century laboured, when we consider how much at fault we should be, in the various diseases which we have to treat, were we ignorant of the practice of auscultation; and surely it is a matter for congratulation that, by the use of other physical means, we are enabled to bring to bear another of our senses to discriminate the healthy and morbid conditions of parts hitherto beyond our reach. What the ophthalmoscope is doing for the diseases of the eye, the laryngoscope is doing for the diseases of the larynx; and there are few of us, probably, who have not had actual experience of the practical value of these instruments; and it is, perhaps, not too much to hope that by a more extended application of similar measures we shall, in course of time, have additional means of discriminating the nature of diseases of organs still beyond the reach of either ear or eye.

With these facts before us, with the knowledge of our increased acquaintance with the nature and causes of diseases, and of the means by which they may be prevented; of the greater precision of our diagnosis, and our more simple methods of treatment, we must be allowed to join issue with those who express a doubt as to the advance of medicine, or assert that there is nothing in connection with it that is characteristic of progress.

Although neither physiology, pathology, nor therapeutics can be ranked amongst the exact sciences, there is much in them that is accurate, precise, and clear. And surely those who boast of the perfection of physical science, and rail against the shortcomings of medicine, would do well to pause in the comparisons which they make. For has it not been shown of late that uncertainties exist even in that most exact of all sciences, that which forms the most complete exemplification of the wonderful genius of man, and of the skill with which he has been able to see into the workings of almighty power? Has not the astronomical world been startled by the assertion that, in calculating the mere distance of our planet from the sun, a serious error, an error to the extent of nearly one-twentieth, has probably crept in?—that, in fact, we are some four millions of miles nearer to the central luminary of our planetary system than has hitherto been supposed? If this be true, our views of the rapidity with which light travels will require modification, no less than the estimated distances, from each other, of the various bodies which we see rolling in space.

If these things happen in relation to physical science, in relation to a question of distance, are we to be surprised that uncertainties should exist in regard to a science like medicine, which deals with the most complex and difficult subjects into the study of which it is possible for the mind of man to enter?

But whilst we claim for medicine a share of that progress which has characterised other sciences, let us not claim too much of the credit for ourselves. We have profited by the experience of our predecessors, and, as we have had additional means of research and observation, we may have avoided some of the errors into which they fell. Let us use these means with diligence. The field of medicine is abundantly large; there is no subject in physiology,

or therapeutics which may not receive additional light from the labours of those who will zealously pursue it, and who may thus contribute to the advance of practical medicine, as they shall more fully reveal the principles of these sciences and their relations to each other.

Lettsomian Lectures

ON

MIDWIFERY AND DISEASES OF WOMEN.

Delivered before the Medical Society of London.

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LECTURE I. (*Continued.*)

ON SOME POINTS CONNECTED WITH THE PATHOLOGY AND ETIOLOGY OF FIBROUS TUMOURS OF THE UTERUS.

d. These tumours are sometimes the seat of *suppuration*. Dr. R. Lee has stated that this change is a rare complication. Still it occurs more frequently than is generally believed. Such a case is quoted by M. Guyon from Huguier, in which death occurred from this cause about twenty-five days after admission. Another remarkable case, which occurred in the practice of M. Huguier (*Union Méd.*, 1860, p. 331), is the following.

A young woman was admitted into the Hospital Beaujon with a fibrous tumour of several years' duration, and so far painless, in the uterus. It was of the size of an adult head, and had produced cedema of the extremities from pressure on the veins. The vagina was contracted circularly, so as to make it difficult to reach the os uteri. Some days after admission, she was seized with fever, the tumour inflamed. An abscess formed in it, out of which from a tumbler to a tumbler and a half of pus came away. The uterus remained intact. The tumour became so soft, that the finger could be pushed through it. The next week, the patient was progressing most favourably. The tumour had greatly diminished in size, but its progress in this respect was slower. The excretion of pus was diminished. All evidence of compression of the veins has disappeared.

Dr. Robert Lee, in a supplementary paper (p. 281, vol. xxxiii) of the *Medico-Chirurgical Transactions*, gives also a fatal case, where a quantity of greenish yellow foetid pus was found to exist in the very centre of a fibrous tumour. Dance also quotes another case referred to by Guyon (p. 95), in which an incision, practised upon an interstitial fibrous tumour after death, gave exit to eight or ten ounces of pus. Lisfranc also (*Clinique Médicale de la Hôpital de la Pitié*, Paris, 1843) mentions a case where an abscess was found in a fibrous tumour.

Marshall Hall relates the case of a woman who died after parturition from inflammation and suppuration of a fibrous tumour of the uterus. (*Cyclop. of Practical Med.*, p. 388, vol. iv.)

A remarkable example of hysteria, followed by death, in which a fibrous tumour in a state of suppuration was found at the *post mortem* examina-