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REMARKS ON THE PRESENT ASPECT OF MEDICINE.*

By W. NEWNHAM, Esq., Farnham.

It is perfectly true that medical persons often gain credit for cures which nature has performed, and which they have been too indolent to attempt; and it is equally true that they suffer oftentimes a great deal of discredit, for cases in which nature, seconded by art, has failed, and upon which they have bestowed the utmost energy of their powers, their research, their experience, their full thought, their deep anxiety;—and that simply because the malady was in itself incurable, or had been negligently allowed to obtain such a hold upon the constitution as to render it impossible to be overtaken; and while we bear the one without murmuring, it is scarcely to be expected that we should have moral courage sufficient to disclaim the apparent compensation afforded by the other. In medical practice there is not such a preponderance of pleasing circumstances, as to enable us willingly to quench even the fitful sunshine of an April day.

It is equally the fact that medical men, as they grow older, become more distrustful of results; the enthusiasm of their early years is abated, and they become less “heroic” in their prescriptions, more trustful of nature, less confident in themselves. In proportion, too, as they shall have been imbued with the practice of our continental neighbours, they will see abundant reasons for diminished activity in the use of the lancet, and mercurials, and other violent means. The effect of this natural process may be good or evil. If parties shall have been enthusiastic students,—almost believers in the omnipotence of medicine, the effect will be good; their enthusiasm will be exchanged for zeal, and their practice, without abating of its energy, will lose somewhat of its temerity; their expectations will have been reasonably sobered; and they will become admirable practitioners. But if they shall have commenced life in the spirit of business, with less benevolence, and less enthusiasm, and less interest, the moderating influence of time will act injuriously; the little interest of first love cannot suffer abatement without irreparable injury; and they will become sceptics in the power, and inert in the practice of medicine. They will shelter their natural love of ease and indolence, under the pretext that nature must be allowed to have her own way; that she is the only real

physician; and that we only disturb her agencies by interference; and thus become criminally careless of human life, always flattering themselves that they are consulting the good of mankind by doing nothing. And yet, it is manifest that they pursue the *post hoc propter hoc* argument in its most erroneous possible form. Certain individuals have been affected by certain maladies; nothing has been done for them, and they have recovered; therefore, they have recovered *because* nothing was done for them. Thus, the advocates of natural cure have no other ground to stand upon than that which they attribute to their less passive brethren, but which judicious medical persons abjure. It is freely allowed that the specific diseases are not to be interfered with; that they must run their course; that fever also is not to be strangled at once; and probably, that many other maladies may have their course; and that in such cases, the department of medicine consists in carefully watching any organ or function of the body which may especially suffer, and in applying a remedy corrective or palliative for such disorder. Yet, this by no means justifies a reliance upon nature exclusively; it is only that her own curative processes are not to be violently and carelessly interfered with, and that wherever these are excessive, or defective, or erroneous, or threatening, there is the dominion of art to be called up.

It is curious that in his zeal against the influence of the *post hoc propter hoc* treatment, Dr. Forbes should have adduced in illustration, a case which has no other ground to rest upon than this very *post hoc*. The case of a little girl, admirably described for effect, who had been under his care in a dispensary, and for whom he had prescribed according to the most approved rules of art, with “its basis, its adjuvans, its dirigens, its corrigens, and its constituens;” and who, at his visit, reported that she had been well since *Friday*, and that because her “medicine was done” on that day. Now, we verily believe that Dr. Forbes never wrote a prescription with a view to these especial *ingredients*, and, therefore, while we fully admit the bare fact narrated, we cannot be blind to the truth, that it has been dressed up to serve the particular occasion. But, supposing the whole to be a true, and faithful, and unadorned representation, what is the fair inference? Is it that the girl was well *because* she had left off her medicine since *Friday*? This would be simply *post hoc propter hoc*. Is it that nature had effected the cure in spite of the medicine? This would not be borne out

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by the circumstances. Or is it that nature, aided by the medicine, had completed the cure a little earlier than the doctor's prescience had anticipated? This again would be *post hoc propter hoc*; and, at any rate, the case adduced to throw ridicule upon this very absurd mode of reasoning, is itself an instance of that same reasoning.

Fully admitting the absurdity of the *post hoc propter hoc* argumentation, we yet think that more has been made of its absurdity than it deserves, and we wish clearly to point out that the converse of the proposition is equally absurd and untrue; the inference drawn *may* be just, but as a general rule it is unspeakably absurd, however useful as a weapon of sophistical warfare, *post hoc, ergo non propter hoc*. Here there is no reasoning at all, whereas the man of science who, from his previous knowledge of the laws of healthy function, and morbid action, and of the agency of medicine upon these respectively under given circumstances, selects a remedy which he believes calculated to produce a certain effect upon the present disorder of the system. When he perceives that this effect is produced, and when after repeated trials he finds similar results, he does rationally arrive at the conclusion that the latter is the consequent of the antecedent. It is upon evidence of this kind that rational medicine is founded, and Dr. Forbes must have been singularly unhappy in his cases, in his selection of remedies, or in his judgment of the disease to which they were supposed to be applicable, if he have not for ever and for ever found exactly the effect he calculated upon. And if this so calculated effect be not produced, it is because the remedy has been badly chosen,—or sufficient discrimination has not been employed with regard to the disease,—or there has been *too great simplicity* in the prescription,—or there has been some other error, which may prove the fallaciousness of our judgment,—or our indolence,—or our want of tact,—or the necessity for more attention and study, but by no means shews the inefficacy of medicine.

We have mentioned the *too great simplicity* of the prescription, because Dr. Forbes seems to lay great stress upon this simplicity. Now, cordially averse as we are from the system of prescribing for symptoms, and of putting into our remedies a little of everything, in order that each apparent disturbance may get something for its peculiar phenomena, yet we do think, and are sure, that the efficiency of medicine depends greatly upon judicious combination. For so long as there is no simplicity in morbid action,—so long as the body is composed of a set of mutually dependent organs and functions, the disturbance of one of which involves the disturbance of the whole,—and so long as we possess classes of medicine capable of acting especially upon one or other of these organs and functions, so long will the efficacy of means, and the success of treatment, be dependent upon the judicious combination of medicine. Everybody in much practice is aware of this circumstance: give a single remedy, and you produce no effect, or a part only of what you wish,—combine it, and you not only obtain the peculiar action you require more efficiently, and at less cost to the system, but you further act upon other

organs and functions, the restitution of which to their normal condition is necessary to health. Examples of these facts cannot be required; they must be familiar to every observer, and it would seem that the great art in medicine is a deep study of this judicious combination,—not a throwing together of many heterogeneous materials, but a selection of several, all bearing upon certain great scientific indications.

It is perfectly true that as practitioners grow older, they become less confident in heroic measures, but they become more confident in the means they do employ, and they do not lapse into that inertness which leaves the patient to the unaided efforts of nature. We have before stated the common reasons for this inertness as arising out of mental constitution, natural indolence, defective judgment, or moody disappointment. This class of expectant practitioners will stand by and witness nature's own unassisted efforts, and from day to day will sooth their consciousness with the hope that the patient is not worse, and with their oracular apothegm, "Non regredi est progredi," forgetting that this is but a *post hoc propter hoc* argumentation, and that it is met at once by its crushing converse "Non progredi est regredi."

One word on the desirableness of the natural history of disease. Alas! that we have already too much of this natural history. How perpetually are we consulted by patients, who have allowed disorder to run on unchecked in their constitutions, till it has passed the reach of art to overtake! How perpetually are we grieved by being asked to prescribe for patients whom we know full well we should in all probability have restored to health by an early application of remedies, but to whom attention is now hopeless! How perpetually do we see disorder, unchecked, run its *natural* course to the extinction of life on the one hand, or checked by science, and life and health restored on the other! We may be told that we have no good ground for this assertion, for that what is *post hoc* is not *propter hoc*. At any rate there is the same reasoning for medical treatment as for natural agency: both stand on the same footing; and since in serious malady the one very frequently terminates in the destruction of life, and the other very frequently in recovery, it is cruel, it is unjust, and a grievous dereliction of duty, to allow morbid action to go on where it *can* be arrested, for the sake of obtaining a *natural history of disease*, which is at all times sufficiently obtained by watching its progress, notwithstanding the means judiciously employed to avert its disastrous consequences. This of course supposes that the means have been *judiciously* chosen: we are not prepared to say that they always have been so chosen; we are not prepared to say that they may not have been ill-chosen in a great majority of instances: but this, if granted, is not an argument against the employment of medicine, though it is an argument for the improvement of professional character, and above all, of that preliminary education which has the principal influence in teaching to think clearly,—to discriminate justly,—to compare accurately,—to combine with discretion,—to judge rightly,—to decide fairly,—and to act *fearlessly*, though not *rashly*.

We have said enough of the *post hoc propter hoc* principle, but we must notice a little further its practical application. Our author has argued that homœopathy and allopathy rest on the same ground, and appeal to the same success, as the consequence of their means; and since homœopathy is not true, and allopathy is only partially true, we must explain both upon a third power common to each,—viz., the power of nature, which in these instances effects the cure. Grievously as such views must paralyse exertion, and close up the avenues for inquiry,—and stunt the human intellect,—and wither investigation,—and blast every object for advancing pursuit,—we are particularly anxious to show, that while we would invite and watch the powers of nature, we dare not leave her to her own resources; for perpetually does nature overact her part, or fail in its due performance; and in either case she requires to be controlled or aided. Besides, it is not true that homœopathy and allopathy stand upon the same ground, or that they possess only similar claims to attention with Parr's life pills, and others similar remedies. It is easy to understand how a succession of new patients may be found for these novel and unknown and mysterious remedies;—it is easy to understand how the slightly indisposed, or the fanciful patient, may recover; and how the really serious invalid may conceal the memory of his injuries in the grave, thus leaving the recovered to sing the praises of the remedy, and the destructive agency of "trusting things to nature," to be concealed by the art of the undertaker. But such cannot be the case with legitimate medicine; there is no mystery-loving agency here,—there are no high-sounding pretensions, nor alluring advertisements, but results stand on their fair basis. With regard to homœopathy itself, there is a great deal of this mysterious agency at work, and before its statistics of a few years can be placed in comparison with the experience of medicine of 2000 years, there must at least have been time for the subsidence of that prestige in its favour, which enthusiasm in support of its mysteries, and the general self-love engendered by the individual power of every body equally to cure diseases shall have subsided;—and then might a comparison be instituted,—and then might it be inquired, if there be any power or principle common to both which might be adduced to explain the results. It is obvious that none such now exists, and therefore all attempts must fail to convince that homœopathy cures by the powers of nature,—that allopathy obtains the same results with homœopathy,—and therefore that both cure by a common power, even the power of nature. All bounteous Nature! from this time forward are we to trust to thy powers? Then no more let us plough our grounds,—or sow our seeds,—or plant our gardens,—or prune our trees,—or manure our soil;—but let us trust to thine unassisted powers;—let us first of all obtain a natural history of thy rude growths, and not till then dare to interfere with thy productions!

We are fully disposed to admit that the treatment of disorder by medicine is oftentimes *inefficacious*, and sometimes *injurious*;—nay, we can believe with Dr. Forbes, that the rapid cure of some patients under hydropathic or analogous treatment, may depend upon

their abandonment of injurious medicine. But we place on the opposite side of the question, the awful ravages of uncontrolled disease, and the deaths, and frightful disorders mental and bodily, produced by hydropathy. We will take our disputant into the cottages and hovels of our land, where he shall see disease and destitution; we will take him among the wealthier classes of society, yet still among those who, from some circumstances have not had recourse to medical aid; where disease shall have pursued its unchecked course, and where his sympathies shall be called into exercise, over maladies which in their origin might have been averted, but which now too surely convey the sufferers to a premature death: and admitting in its fullest force, that some *mischief* is effected by injudicious medical treatment, yet this is nothing when compared with the irremediable evils presented to the mind, of uncontrolled malady constantly pursuing its relentless course, because it has not been *early* arrested. "Obsta principis,—sero minus medicina paratur." Place the two evils in opposite scales, and the one instantly kicks the beam. But even without this comparison, what is the value of the argument to be drawn from the evils induced by injudicious medical treatment, and the good arising from its abandonment? Why surely *not* that *medicine* is an evil, or its disuse an advantage! But simply that the study of medicine requires more attention,—and that the practice of medicine demands further improvement,—and should be placed under the control of minds adequately prepared, and properly constituted for this great object. We shall notice in the sequel, some of the more prominent evils which require abatement.

Surely it is not extraordinary, that the inmates of hydropathic establishments, after having had their prejudices against medicine loudly and largely excited, should retain those prejudices in after life,—should cherish the horror of drugs thus imbibed, and should if possible avoid them for ever! Who, that is conversant with the human mind, and with the strength of its prejudices, can be surprised at such effect on persons incapable of forming a correct judgment upon the subject? Who, that is acquainted with the history of mental obliquity, and is not thoroughly aware that it is useless to argue against prejudice, because it has no ear for reason,—no eye for demonstration,—no taste for truth,—no perception for right, but remains unapproachable within its own self-created narrow circle, and most religiously believes that beyond its magic influence, there is *nothing to be known, because it knows nothing!*

With regard to those older physicians, who have abated much of the energy of their early practice in after life, and who could boast that they had been curing their patients with "nothing at all," we can certainly conceive of such a result in certain indolent minds,—or in those who, disappointed in their too sanguine expectations, have naturally enough rebounded to the conclusion that there was *nothing in medicine*—a revulsion of feeling very common with the human mind, enthusiastic to extreme in its first love, gradually abating in that love till it has passed through

indifference to aversion; and now the zealous devotee has become the bigotted persecutor, and the purblind admirer has lost his senses in the intoxicating charms of another seducer. But the evil does not rest here; for not only has the faithful enthusiast become a sceptic and a bigot, but alas! for his moral standing, he has become a *hypocrite*; for with his belief that medicine is useless,—with the fact that he is doing nothing for his patients,—that nothing is required to be done,—and that the veriest old woman in the world will prescribe as successfully as himself, he has still gone on to prescribe, and to receive his patients's fees,—a depth of delinquency, which throws the air of doubt over his whole conduct! To physicians entertaining such views, nobody would send a patient if they could avoid it; and they are called upon to abjure and renounce all connection with medicine, or its study, or its literature, for of what avail is it, if it be useless?

Our author thinks that we shall by-and-by obtain a true natural history of disease by means of homœopathy. We think *not*; because, first, in patients who submit themselves to homœopathic plans, a very great effect is produced upon their nervous system,—a very large proportion of faith is developed; hope is cherished in an extraordinary manner, and the attention is so rivetted upon the strictness of the method of treatment, that it is impossible but that the nerves of intellectual and organic life should be largely impressed and excited, and that this impression and excitement should be all on the cheerful side,—all tending to restore health to the body, and therefore exerting a large and extensive influence upon all the functions of life. Moreover, a direct medicinal effect is produced by an altered and peculiar diet and regimen,—an effect analogous with that produced by medicine in a different way. In fact, regimen is another form of medicine; it need not be called physis, but it is so, and exhibited, if wisely given, to fulfil the same indications. If then, through homœopathy, a large impression is exerted upon all the functions of life primarily, and, secondly, by the regimen inculcated in lieu of other medicine, it is clear that a disturbing agency is effected upon the morbid actions of the body, and that it is useless to look for a natural history of disease through the vista of homœopathy, however long the experiment may be conducted. The only *natural* history of disease which we can obtain, is that fatally instructive one, so frequently placed before our vision, of malady, pursuing its destructive course, till shrouded from our sight by the night of the grave. Well indeed for our own peace, if we have not been accessory to this grievous conclusion, by our own criminal negligence, and apathy, and listlessness.

It is freely allowed that the history of medicine is one of perpetual change, and the fact is *partially*, but not *entirely*, to be regretted. This change is dependent sometimes upon the increase of knowledge, and juster and sounder views of disease and its treatment; it is sometimes dependent upon the introduction of new and valuable remedies, or upon the supersession of long cherished errors and prejudices; it is sometimes dependent upon the altered character of disease, a

fact probably arising from the epidemic constitution, of the atmosphere, and which has been noticed by that great master of our art, Sydenham; and it is sometimes dependent upon closer research, and novel discovery. In all these cases change is beneficial; but even here the benefit is much alloyed, by the change becoming fashionable; it is taken up by everybody, and carried out in its extreme bearing, losing every feature of its original constitution, and then becoming injurious. At other times this change shall have been effected by prejudice, arising from a very narrowed sphere of observation; yet ushered into notice by the authority of some great name, it is supported and carried out till it is found to be useless and injurious. So the present extension of homœopathy, and the undue exaltation of the curative powers of nature, is only another change,—another wild offset, from the wild stock upon which medicine has been grafted, but which will never tend to produce good fruit, because its tendencies are all the other way,—to exalt ignorance upon the same pedestal with science,—to repress investigation,—to stunt the human mind,—to convert practitioners of medicine into exhibitors of globules,—and to transmute the man of science into a meek helpmate of the culinary and murky denizens. The whole world is one perpetual scene of *change*; the charge of mutability is not confined to medicine; in all but the fixed sciences, who can reckon upon the doctrines of to-day surviving the discoveries of to-morrow? Who can find fault with the changes which have taken place during our own life, (almost a sexagenarian,) in chemistry, botany, natural history, geology,—changes so great as to make these sciences new sciences, and requiring to be re-studied by those who have not kept their knowledge up to the advancement of the hour? Change is not essentially an evil in itself; it ought to be an improvement; and we have no right to complain of change in medicine; all we have to care for is, that the change should be in the right direction, and not retrograde,—not in a line which will finally terminate in the gloom of the darkest ignorance, and in the aberration of asserting that it is *perfect light*.

We have lived to see the high reputation of antimony, blood-letting, and mercury, for the cure of fever, pneumonia, and syphilis;—we have lived to see epidemics of fever which must be variously treated according to their peculiar constitution;—we have lived to witness doctrines and practices change;—we have lived to change our own, and, we venture to hope, to discriminate better when to give and when to withhold our more active agencies; but amidst all the turmoils of these conflicting elements, we venture to say, that we in common with all other observers, have also lived to see the time when bleeding, and antimony, and mercury, can be judiciously given, and to reap decided good from their employment to-day, and equally decided advantage from withholding them to-morrow, according to the circumstances.

But with regard to *mercury*, there are perhaps few, very few, who have witnessed its surprising influence over disease, and who have not been at the outset of their career enthusiastic in their employment of this

medicine. It is only after they have discovered that it does not always do good,—nay, more, that it sometimes does harm,—that they become discriminative as to the time and the dose, and the manner in which it ought to be exhibited. It is then only they will have discovered that it is not every case of inflammation which requires mercury for its cure, and that they cannot in every instance rely even upon it;—it is then only they will have discovered the importance of mercury, judiciously, boldly, yet prudently administered, when inflammatory action has to a certain extent been controlled by other means, and when by the establishment of a new mercurial action in the system they will thoroughly supersede the morbid action, or control and remove its morbid sequelæ;—it is then only they will have discovered those cases and those stages of disease in which they can pronounce the patient safe so soon as they can trace the smallest influence upon the gums;—and it is then they will have discovered the lamentable consequences of leaving these cases to their natural terminations. The influence of age and experience upon the exhibition of this remedy is not that we become averse from giving it, but that we know better when to give it, that we become more cautious in its mode of administration, and that we give it perhaps in one case out of ten of our early exhibitions; but that whenever we do give it, we give it fearlessly though prudently, and in perfect confidence of its beneficial influence. These are the observations of an old man, of one who has abated nothing of his early enthusiastic love of his profession, and one over whom 35 years of active practice have not diminished his confidence in medicine judiciously employed, have not lapsed him into the inertness of dozing expectancy, but have, as he hopes, extended his means of usefulness, and enabled him to become acquainted with the spirit of the motto adopted as an armorial ensign by one of his progenitors—“*misericors succurrere disco*.” In saying this, he would strongly deprecate the egotistical phrasiology, too common in the professional world, of saying, “I have cured this and that malady by this and that treatment;” and while he has frequently seen the results he was endeavouring to obtain, he would always hope to feel that he was an agent in the hands of Providence for bringing out His merciful designs; that he was eminently responsible for the active and intelligent employment of every portion of the talent entrusted to his care; and that while thus truthfully, zealously, and honestly devoting his powers to the welfare of his patients, he was not answerable for results, but might confidently expect that the general issue of his labours would be in some portion of the blessings diffused by Infinite Goodness and Mercy.

(To be continued.)

SHORT NOTES OF THE OPINIONS AND PRACTICE OF THE LATE JOHN PEARSON, ESQ., F.R.S., ON SYPHILITIC DISEASE.*

By W. S. OKE, M.D., Physician to the Royal South Hants Infirmary.

Eczema continued.—Eczema, although produced, is not always aggravated by mercury, and there are some few cases in which there has been a recurrence of the eruption without any more mercury having been employed, coming on five or six weeks after a mercurial course.

When a patient has returned to the use of mercury, after perhaps a week's intermission, there will occasionally be a slight redness of the skin over the whole body, unattended by vesications, yet terminating by desquamation.

Eczema mercuriale does not resemble any other eruption produced by mercury on the skin, and, therefore, there is no difficulty in the diagnosis. Mr. Pearson never knew the disease to prove fatal, nor has he ever seen it in any patient above 50 years of age. He became first acquainted with this disease in the year 1781.

[Vide “Observations on the effects of various articles of the Materia-Medica, in the cure of Lues Venerea.” Second edition. Page 167.]

Treatment of Eczema Mercuriale.—When the eczema has affected the skin partially, it is not always exasperated by persisting in the use of mercury; nevertheless, there are reasons sufficiently obvious to render the continuance of this medicine improper when the whole surface is infested with it; as a general rule, therefore, the administration of mercury must be discontinued on the first appearance of the eruption. At an early period, small doses of antimonial powder may be taken, with saline medicine; a gentle purgative should be given every three or four days, and opium may be administered to allay irritation and procure sleep.

When the discharge is no longer ichorous, and the tumefaction is subsiding, sarsaparilla and bark may be given liberally; the dilute sulphuric acid also will sometimes be found beneficial. The diet is to be light and nutritious; but it is not generally advisable to allow of fermented liquor, till the desquamation of the cuticle is somewhat advanced.

The misery arising from the irritation of the skin may be greatly alleviated by strict attention to cleanliness, the warm bath, and changes of linen. Where the warm bath cannot be conveniently used, the body may be washed with warm water-gruel once or twice a-day.

Those parts of the surface where a separation of the cuticle has taken place, may be covered twice a-day with linen rollers of different lengths, thickly spread with a soft mild cerate, consisting of litharge plaster, yellow wax and olive oil.