EFFECTS OF A LARGE DOSE OF ARSENIC
TAKEN BY A LUNATIC.

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In the year 1838, a gentleman who had been insane two or three years, the cause of which was probably ill health from disorder of the digestive organs, acting upon a nervous temperament, took a teaspoonful of the white oxide of arsenic with the view of destroying himself. It was taken immediately after eating a hearty dinner, and washed down with a draught of water. Soon after, or within half an hour, he vomited freely, and in the course of the day a diarrhœa set in, which continued for a day or two. He then informed his medical attendant of what he had taken, and his regret and contrition at the act. All this time he experienced but little of what could be attributed to the poison; the diarrhœa was not attended by anything peculiar, he had eaten his usual meals with a tolerable relish, and complained of no unusual burning or pain in the stomach and bowels. Within a week or so he was taken with severe pains in his legs and arms, which he described as most excruciating; the sensation he compared to the gnawing of rats, or the boring of a gimblet into the bones; there was some swelling of the legs and feet, but no preternatural heat. After the pain had continued some days a partial paralysis of the limbs was observed. He took various medicines, mostly of the anodyne class, with stimulating liniments and frictions, which were persevered in for a length of time. The paralysis, however, remained obstinate for months. The strychnine was finally given, and continued several weeks. The paralysis gradually left him, and he regained his health and resumed his business as a merchant. But what was most curious to the physician, and to the patient of the most importance, was the complete restoration of his reason and ultimately his health. Previous to his insanity he was of a reserved and cautious disposition—was taciturn, diffident, and exemplary in his conduct—was on the point of contracting an eligible matrimonial engagement; his pecuniary circumstances were unembarrassed. Yet all at once he became talkative, boisterous, and mirthful; entered into speculations, contracted for farms and property which he did not want, supposed himself in possession of immense sums of money, and that his speculations would conduct him to boundless wealth. He insisted upon his marriage taking place immediately—invited everybody he saw to attend his wedding. His marriage finally took place, as his friends imagined it might be a means of restoring him, or an exasperation of his malady a result of his wishes being thwarted. But these palmy days of ideal wealth and splendour soon wore away, and he sank down a gloomy, desponding, and dejected lunatic, unfit for business or society. He was, however, harmless, and lived with his wife for two or three years, attending to no business. He was in this state when he took what he imagined would be his last dose, but which in all probability was the means of restoring him to reason. Since that period there has been no sign of insanity, and his health has been good since the removal of the paralysis from his limbs. He has resumed his business as a merchant, and conducts it judiciously and with success.—*Amer. Journ. Med. Sci.*, Oct., 1843.

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The practice of reviewing, from time to time, the progress which the current of events brings with it in any particular branch of inquiry, is attended with much advantage. The retrospect affords opportunity for reflection on what has been done, and thus brings to bear the light of experience on those further steps which are or may be necessary to proceed in the course already marked out; it points out what is erroneous, and should, therefore, be retraced, or for the future avoided, and enables us to hasten onwards towards the attainment of a given object, or the completion of a given undertaking, in a more assured manner. Such a retrospect may be conveniently taken at different periods; and the close of the old or the commencement of a new year is one which, by common consent, has often been devoted to it. We purpose, on the present occasion, to look back on what has been done in the—to us, and, as we believe, also to the general public—important question of a reform of our medical institutions.

The past year, notwithstanding that at its commencement it promised much, has produced only two measures, emanating from authority which have any bearing on the subject; the one a royal charter, granted under the advice of the ministers of the Crown to the London College of Surgeons; the other a revision, at the instance of the Home Secretary, of an order previously issued and attempted to be acted upon by the poor-law commission. Of the former of these, we have already, and recently, had occasion to give our opinion; and we need not, therefore, here again go over the same ground. It may, perhaps, however, cause some surprise to our readers to learn that the latter seems to us to be, as regards the ultimate settlement of the general question, the more important document of the two.

In order to place this opinion in its true light, it will be necessary to bear in mind that the poor-law commissioners, apparently in entire ignorance of the unsettled and anomalous state of the medical profession, as established by custom (of genuine and definite legal authority there is as yet but little) in this kingdom, had taken upon themselves to define the right to practise medicine of certain individuals possessed of degrees, diplomas, and licenses, from recognised universities, colleges, and corporate institutions. That which the statute law of the land had failed and still fails to do, they, regardless of the rights acquired by custom, and, therefore, at least as good as much of what is recognised as law, and stepping out of their own province, took upon themselves to attempt. The result of their examination