



Our are the plans of fair & delightful peace,  
Unwar'd by party rage, to live like brothers.

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From the National Intelligencer.

"Seest thou not, what a deformed Thief,  
"this fashion is?"—SHAKS.

Mr. SMITH,  
ALTHO' in your capacity of Editor, the public or the body corporate is the object of your attention, or (to speak in the medical style) is the patient upon which you exercise your skill, yet it may be presumed, that the natural body is not beneath your care; and that an essay tending to the benefit of the latter, may find a corner in your paper, among the numerous attempts which are made to explain and promote the former, or the public interests.

If I am right in this conjecture, I shall proceed to claim the attention of your readers to a subject, which, though not entertaining, may be instructive, and the discussion of which (like the materials which belong to it) may be salutary in the operation, though unpleasant to the taste.

The discussion which I propose to make, is respecting the present mode of treating diseases, which (however it might be extended) will be confined almost to a single question, to which the simplicity of the modern practice seems to have reduced the healing art.

I am not insensible of the rashness of this undertaking—I know well the powers of the faculty whom I am about to encounter, even when exerted with the most friendly motives; and my dread of falling into their hands when in health, is only inferior to that of their attacking me under the pressure of sickness.

I must not however, be understood as leveling an indiscriminate censure at the respectable body of physicians. On the contrary, I hold the profession in the highest estimation. In an accomplished physician, I contemplate a man of enlarged science, of liberal mind, of humane disposition, of polished manners, of active and indefatigable exertions, and of incorruptible integrity. The book of nature is open to him. The course of his studies leads him to a knowledge of the "fearful and wonderful make of man." The pursuit of remedies carries him to the mineral and vegetable kingdoms, and he discovers the various combinations of which these productions are susceptible. And though the voice of misery and anguish often reach his ear, to him it is given to dispel that misery, to soothe that anguish and restore the happiness which health alone can give.

Such might a physician be, but it is a height which is not easily attained. Years of study, application and experience, seem to be necessary for the purpose, and it may reasonably be doubted, whether the short time which our young and adventurous doctors allot to this part of their education, is sufficient to qualify them for so important a trust.

When we consider the degree of perfection to which the science of medicine might be brought, it is lamentable to see the state in which it now is.

Like other sciences it is liable to be perverted by ignorance or abused by dishonesty. All this might be borne. But it is dreadful to reflect, that a profession which embraces the whole human race, and which (as far as finite means can extend) deals out our life or our death, should be the slave and victim of fashion.—That it should be so, I deplore.—That it is so, I seriously believe; and it is to this evil that my observations are intended to apply.

It may indeed be alleged that there is fashion in every thing.—Learned Judges have accused their predecessors of deciding according to fashion. Fashion has modelled the discourses, which are meant to instruct us in the pursuit of happiness in the next world; and those who watch over our existence in this, may perhaps claim the same privilege. I might produce the authority of many writers, to show that this fault has hitherto been attributed to the medical faculty. I shall not, however, fatigue your readers by the trite story of Dr. Sangrado, or many others that might be adduced. I shall appeal only to the facts which have arisen in our own times, and under our own observation.

To counterpoise the weight of this charge, I shall be ready to admit—that many valuable improvements have taken place, both in medicine and surgery. The "woundings of a father's curse," would, not now, as in the time of Shakespeare, be the worse for being untreated. The suggestions of common sense have taught us that, to heal a wound, it is not necessary to inflict one of greater extent and more difficult of cure; and we have discarded those wonderful compounds, the ingredients of which were expected to detach themselves to the different parts of the body, and to perform *en militaire*, the duties which were severally allotted to them. We want only a steady adherence to the same principles, to make us reject systems which rely only on a name, and rules of practice which fashion alone has contributed to establish.

At one time our disorders were all bilious. At another, the nervous system was in fault. In the former case, the apothecary followed close after the heels of the prescribing physician, and poured in his drugs in abundance. It was reserved to the Doctors of the present day, to reduce all diseases to a level—to disregard the causes predisposing, proximate and immediae; and by the universal use of bleeding and mercury, to cure (or kill) all who fell in their hands. They seem to have realised the picture drawn by Miere in his examination of a candidate for the profession, *bleedare, purgare, et—donare*, and if he did not succeed, *re-bleedare, re-purgare, et re-donare*.

Shall we submit to be thus *fatiently* drained of our blood & substance? Shall we look into these things, and enquire on what grounds the practice is founded?

In pursuing this enquiry it may be necessary to use terms which may not be of the most delicate nature; but they will be used as sparingly as the subject will admit.

Without attempting a learned enumeration of the maladies incident to the human frame, it may be safely asserted, that in their treatment, evacuations are generally required: It is within my recollection, that for this purpose, antimonial preparations have been deemed the most efficacious, acting, either as emetics, or secondarily as cathartics; and also by promoting a greater degree of perspiration.

They are now disused, the fashion of them has passed away, and *calomel* has usurped their place. I shall endeavour to prove that they are the best, if not the only medicines that can be used in the disorders which arise in our climate, and that *mercurial* preparations are generally unsafe and often in the highest degree pernicious.

It is, however, but a comparative praise which I mean to bestow, the best medicines are (like the best governments) but necessary evils, and it is only advisable to choose the least of them.

The diseases which most frequently occur amongst us, are, the intermittent, the remittent, and the continued; the latter of which is generally of a malignant nature, and approaches nearly to the yellow fever, with which our large towns have been afflicted, they are frequently denominated the bilious fevers, and are all attended with some deviation from the usual course and quantity of the bile. The stomach appears to be principally affected; and not only ceases to require, but is unable to retain the accustomed food—the remedy for this was formerly an obvious and a natural one—by throwing out at once by an emetic the cause of the disorder, by removing the *paralysis or torpor* of the stomach, and by restoring it to its former tone and vigor. The *emetic tartar* is nearly certain in this operation, and frequently spends its remaining force on the intestinal canal—that, and other preparations of antimony, act powerfully as sudorifics, and even by the shock of their operation, carry off those obstructions which are often the causes of disease.

In favor of *emetics* I contend, that the stomach is affected by bilious fevers to a much greater degree than the intestines, and that it is an organ of much greater strength, and

less liable to be destroyed by the powers of medicine.

It is frequently said that all medicines are poisons, and the observation is a true one, when we contrast them with those productions which are used for our good, and can be assimilated to our substance, and it is necessary to excite a preternatural action in any of our vessels—the attempt should be made upon those which are least liable to injury by it. Those who are acquainted with physiology must know, how much depends on the digestion—which is principally carried on by the *peristaltic* motion of the intestines, and must be satisfied that any derangement of that action is attended with the most fatal effects. But, supposing the several *viscera* to be equal in their strength and liability to injury, it would seem that the readiest and simplest method of ejecting the cause of complaint would naturally be preferred. I, an enemy or troublesome inmate, should be in our houses, we should act more wisely in expelling him by the way that he got in, than by taking him a circuitous route through all the rooms, to effect at last the same purpose.

But, to apply to the test of experience.

I could safely appeal to every man's observation, whether by the use of emetics, the stomach is not more immediately relieved, and the appetite more fully restored, than by the use of purgative medicines.

Those who have felt the effects of a debauch, and have found their stomachs oppressed by excessive diet, or immoderate drinking, must have experienced the most immediate relief from an ejection of this kind of the cause of their disorder—an effect which is sometimes produced by those very causes without the assistance of art; and it will scarcely be deemed improper to follow the course dictated by nature, unless fashion should be sufficiently powerful to usurp her away.

The operation of cathartic medicines, even of the most harmless kind, is not calculated to attain this useful purpose. They weaken the system without lessening the disorder, and they never produce that discharge by perspiration, which is so essential in the cure of fevers. It seems indeed that by an obstinate adherence to such prescriptions, and the free use of the lancet, the unfortunate patients are quickly hurried to that end which they are so likely to produce.

The stomach, for want of being relieved, is unable to take any further sustenance.

There is nothing left in the intestines from which the chyle & blood can be formed.

The blood (for which no renovation can be provided) is sluiced from their veins, and their death is a consequence as natural as it is certain.

When I see one of those dreadful arbiters of fate armed with his lancet and his mercury, it reminds me of the unfortunate Rosamond, to whom Queen Eleanor proffered her choice of the dagger or the bowl. The difference is, that to us no choice is left, and we are obliged to encounter both.

Every fever is accompanied with an increased action of the blood vessels; this, which they denominate the arterial action, is the signal for repeated bleedings, and they bleed till the vessels can act no more. I have been informed (though I will not say how truly) that a young physician, in reporting to his lecturers at Philadelphia, the progress of a disease which had been under his management, boasted that he had, by bleeding and mercury, completely destroyed the fever. A regard for truth, induced him to mention (as a collateral incident) that the day after the fever was removed the patient departed also.

I have as yet formed my comparisons on those cathartics which are of the innocuous nature. I shall proceed to shew that mercury is not attended with the same good effects, which they may in some cases produce, but that it is a medicine of the most dangerous, virulent and destructive kind. A weapon which the

hand of a master only is able to wield, and which in the hands of boys and empirics, is deadly indeed.

It is well known that mercury is peculiarly destructive to insects of all kinds; and the same powers that occasion their destruction, are believed to operate on the fluids of the human body; to destroy their consistency, and to alter their nature, and the effect which it has been found to possess as an antidote to the virus of certain disorders and poisons, may be traced to this cause.

It will be recollected by many, that in the preparatory steps to inoculation, mercury was formerly used with this view, and that whatever the remote consequences might have been, it seemed to deaden the malignancy of the disorder, and to prevent its active effects on the system.

Mercury has also been used, and perhaps to advantage, in other diseases, and particularly in those by which the circulation through the different viscera had been obstructed, and in which a dissolution of the obstructing matter became necessary.

It has been used (though perhaps too freely) in those disorders, which originating in vice, seemed to merit the punishment of such a cure. The patients there might have no just cause of complaint. In the pursuit of pleasure, they had braved all danger, and "from the powdering tub of infamy," they rose to reflect at leisure on the natural consequences of their folly.

To whom no right might be left, to repine at the loss of teeth, the loss of hair, the discoloring of their skin and nails, and a debilitated and shattered constitution. But their betters are now brought to a level with them. The grave and circumspect citizen, and the blooming and innocent virgin, now share the same fate, and are alike the victims of this destructive poison, which in the hands of our modern physicians, stalks about like the Russian Suwrow, and spares neither age, sex or condition.

But, (as the perpetration of vice became hardened by impunity) so our medical gentry have advanced step by step, on the credulity of their patients, and in addition to the use of bleeding, having boldly ventured on salivation for the cure of the most trifling diseases.

"Lancet in this, and pill in 'other hand,  
"They bleed and salivate throughout the land."

I transgress not the bounds of truth, when I say, that a physician has recommended pyalism (the discharge attendant on salivation) as the best method of evacuating the bile in a remittent or bilious fever. I transgress not the bounds of truth, when I say, that another has, in a distension of the abdomen which a dose of salts would have removed, recommended and procured that mode of discharge, to be used according to the military phrase) as a diversion, or drawing to another point the cause of complaint.

We can say with the frogs in the fable, that it may be diversion to them, but it is death to us.

There is an old observation which is frequently a true one, that the remedy is worse than the disease; and it cannot be more fully exemplified than in those cases in which slight bilious fevers are cured by salivation: When I say that by this remedy, the complexion is destroyed, the hair lost, the nails discolored and the teeth loosened and decayed, I say no more than can be attested by hundreds, who bear on them the melancholy and lasting proofs of my assertion; but the frequency of the event seems to have made it familiar and to have rescued it from particular observation.

In one of the papers of the *Spectator* it is stated that in a large company in England during the time of war, an officer was giving an account of an engagement in which many lives had been lost, and was describing those scenes of horror which usually occur in such occasions, and the author remarks, that the audience seemed but little affected with so general a picture of distress; but that he happened to mention an instance where the parties were known, and the particular circumstances of distress enumerated, the

most lively sensations were produced: We find also that Sterne despairing to excite sufficient commiseration for the millions who were born to no inheritance but slavery, took a single captive in order to illustrate the horrors of confinement.

Perhaps, if I can do justice to the subject, the case which I am about to describe will interest the feelings of your readers more than any general observations.

A lady in a neighboring state had been married in early life, and had become early a widow.

Without incurring the reproach of levity, she had recovered from the first emotions of grief, she was in the possession of youth, and beauty; and was in the enjoyment of that kind of cheerful society which might naturally lead to a second connection.

The bloom of health was on her cheek, and the smile of innocence and pleasure on her lips. But, alas, she smiles no more." Going to visit a relation in the country, she was taken with an intermittent fever, and unfortunately met with a disciple of the new school, fresh from his studies at Philadelphia. His mercurial pills were ready and in a short time a salivation was produced, the effects of which can never be removed. The fever indeed was gone, but with it went also her complexion, the appearance of her youth, the strength of her constitution, and every charm which had contributed to make her the ornament of society, and the delight of her friends, and she is condemned to drag out a lingering existence, a hopeless prey to remorse and a victim to the medical fashion of the day.

It is certain, that we ought not to murmur at the dispensations of Providence, by which we are subject to the various maladies which precede our dissolution, and that in endeavoring at a cure, we must submit to the effects which the necessary medicines are calculated to produce; but there is in this respect a choice of evils, and I cannot conceive a situation, in which "man, so noble in reason, so infinite in faculties, so express and admirable in form and moving," becomes so loathsome an object, as when operated on by salivation.

I shall not be satisfied with stating that mercury is unnecessary and injurious in slight complaints, but shall contend, that it is equally so in fevers of the malignant kind; and I shall hazard the opinion, that, so far from being a cure for the yellow-fever, it has occasioned nearly as many deaths as the disorder itself.

I might perhaps rest for proof of the correctness of this opinion on the bills of mortality which have been published where this dreadful fever has prevailed, but I shall bring forward a particular instance in corroboration.

In the summer of the year 1798, in one of our large cities, a letter was published in the newspapers, as coming from two of the most eminent physicians addressed to another of the faculty.

It was stated by them, that in their practice in the city and in the hospitals, upwards of four thousand persons had died; and that they had tried every prescription which their knowledge and experience could suggest, and they conclude with this memorable question, "Perhaps an emetic might be of service?" Gracious heaven! Thousands had died, under the prevailing practice, and yet a medicine which had heretofore been so generally used in fevers of the most infectious kind, had never been tried.

It appeared by the same paper, that the physician to whom the letter was addressed, admitted in his reply that he had found emetics useful, tho' without giving up the efficacy of his favorite remedies, bleeding and mercury.

I shall not here enter into a detail of those symptoms of the yellow-fever, which are so generally known, and which seem so strongly to point out that course of treatment which I have endeavoured to recommend; but shall leave them for the reflection of those whose duty it is to consider the subject, and of those whose situation may expose them to the danger of contracting the disease.