

Vagaries of the Imagination.

"Fancy it Burgundy," said Boniface of his ale, "only fancy it, and it is worth a guinea a quart!" Boniface was a philosopher: fancy can do much more than that. Those who fancy themselves labouring under an affection of the heart, are not slow in verifying the apprehension; the uneasy and constant watching of its pulsations soon disturbs the circulation, and malady may ensue beyond the power of medicine. Some physicians believe that inflammation can be induced in any part of the body by a fearful attention being continually directed toward it; indeed, it has been a question with some whether the stigmata (the marks of the wounds upon our Saviour) may not have been produced on the devotee by the influences of an excited imagination. The hypochondriac has been known to expire when forced to pass through a door which he fancied too narrow to admit his person. The story of the criminal, who, unconscious of the arrival of the reprieve, died under the stroke of a wet handkerchief, believing it to be the axe, is well known. Paracelsus held, "that there is in man an imagination which really effects and brings to pass the things that did not before exist; for a man by imagination willing to move his body, moves it in fact, and by his imagination and the commerce of invisible powers, he may also move another body." Paracelsus would not have been surprised at the feats of electro-biology. He exhorts his patients to have "a good faith, a strong imagination, and they shall find the effects. All doubt," he says, "destroys work, and leaves it imperfect in the wise designs of nature; it is from faith that imagination draws its strength; it is by faith it becomes complete and realized; he who believeth in nature will obtain from nature to the extent of his faith, and let the object of this faith be real or imaginary, he nevertheless reaps similar results; and hence the cause of superstition."

So early as 1462, Pomponatus of Mantua came to the conclusion, in his work on incantation, that all the arts of sorcery and witchcraft were the result of natural operations. He conceived that it was not improbable that external means, called into action by the soul, might relieve our sufferings, and

that there did, moreover, exist individuals endowed with salutary properties; so it might, therefore, be easily conceived that marvellous effects should be produced by the imagination and by confidence, more especially when these are reciprocal between the patient and the person who assists his recovery. Two years after, the same opinion was advanced by Agrippa in Cologne. "The soul," he said, "if inflamed by a fervent imagination, could dispense health and disease, not only in the individual himself, but in other bodies." However absurd these opinions may have been considered, or looked on as enthusiastic, the time has come when they will be gravely examined.

That medical professors have at all times believed the imagination to possess a strange and powerful influence over mind and body, is proved by their writings, by some of their prescriptions, and by their oft-repeated direction in the sick-chamber to divert the patient's mind from dwelling on his own state, and from attending to the symptoms of his complaint. They consider the reading of medical books which accurately describe the symptoms of various complaints, as likely to have an injurious effect, not only on the delicate, but on persons in full health; and they are conscious how many died during the time of the plague and cholera, not only of these diseases, but from the dread of them, which brought on all the fatal symptoms. So evident was the effect produced by the detailed accounts of the cholera in the public papers in the year 1849, that it was found absolutely necessary to restrain the publications on the subject. The illusions under which vast numbers acted and suffered, have gone, indeed, to the most extravagant extent; individuals, not merely singly, but in communities, have actually believed in their own transformation. A nobleman of the court of Louis XIV. fancied himself a dog, and would pop his head out of the window to bark at the passengers. Rollin and Hecquet have recorded a malady by which the inmates of an extensive convent near Paris were attacked simultaneously every day at the same hour, when they believed themselves transformed into cats, and a universal mewing was kept up throughout the convent for some hours. But of all dreadful forms which this strange hallucination took, none was so terrible as that of the lycanthropy,