

older members of the present generation; and well, I think, would it be for the younger members of the profession if they would add to their attainments at least a general knowledge of the history of medicine. Said a doctor to me yesterday on this subject, "It is only a matter of curiosity." But would not a knowledge of its past strongly conduce to a proper appreciation of its status to-day? I find amongst my medical acquaintances very little knowledge or interest in this direction. For their enlightenment and of many others I respectfully submit the following from an abler pen than mine. I quote from a famous article written by John Forbes, M.D., F.R.S., widely known as the editor of the *British and Foreign Medical Review*, and one of the editors of the *Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine*. His subject was "Homœopathy, Allopathy and Young Physic." It was written in 1846 and was an attempt to stay the frightful doings of the doctors of his day. His reward was the usual one meted out to those who have the hardihood to call in question dominant sentiment, for, no matter how often it has been proven that mere dominance in a sentiment is no evidence of its truth, it is still held up as an infallible test! Dr. Forbes lost his official head as editor of the *Review* mentioned, in consequence. Perhaps it is well for myself just now that I am minus that s t of adornment.

Dr. Forbes' statement is as follows: "What, indeed, is the history of medicine but a history of perpetual changes in the opinions and practice of its professors respecting the very same subjects—the nature and treatment of diseases? And amid all these changes—often extreme and directly opposed to one another—do we not find these very diseases, the subject of them (with some exceptions), remaining still the same in their progress and general event? Sometimes, no doubt, we observe changes in the character and event obviously depending on the treatment, and, alas! as often for the worse as for the better."

With reference to the comparative merits of the medicine of his day with previous methods, he says: "We do not deny that medicine has made progress, or that it can cure diseases and *save* life; we merely assert that the *superiority in the proportion* of the instances in which it does so in the present day is most lamentably small when placed

side by side with the amount of any former day. In several of our commonest and most important diseases it is hardly to be questioned that the proportion is little, if at all, on our side, and in others it is manifestly against us.

"This comparative powerlessness and positive uncertainty of medicine is also exhibited in a striking light when we come to trace the history and fortunes of particular remedies and modes of treatment, and observe the notions of practitioners at different times respecting their positive or relative value. What difference of opinion; what an array of alleged facts directly at variance with each other; what contradictions; what opposite results of a like experience; what ups and downs; what glorification and degradation of the same remedy; what confidence now, what despair anon, in encountering the same disease with the very same weapons; what horror and intolerance at one time of the very opinions and practices which previously and subsequently are cherished and admired!"

After a masterly and exhaustive discussion of the whole subject, he most deliberately draws the following inferences:

1. That in a large proportion of the cases treated by allopathic (*id est*, "regular") physicians the disease is cured by nature and not by them.

2. That in a lesser, but still not a small proportion, the disease is cured by nature in spite of them; in other words, their interference opposing instead of assisting the cure.

3. That, consequently, in a considerable proportion of diseases it would fare as well, or better, with patients in the actual condition of the medical art as more generally practised if all remedies, at least all active remedies, especially drugs, were abandoned.

We repeat our readiness to admit these inferences as just, and to abide by the consequences of their adoption. We believe they are true. We grieve sincerely to believe them to be so; but so believing their rejection is no longer in our power, we must receive them as facts until they are proved not to be so.

Now I submit that the medicine of experience, otherwise called "rational" medicine, is not a safe reliance to cure our patient. To decide other-