

ADVANCES IN MEDICINE

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The lugubrious Descartes it was who maintained that the scientific forward movement is greatest where the opposition to such a movement is greatest. This gentleman was afterward confined in an asylum and died gloriously. But at the time he made the remark he spoke true, if bitter, words, and they were utterly and indubitably sane. If you don't believe it, consider for a moment the history of medicine.

When the healing art was sacred and impeccable—when the physician was half necromancer and half priest and a doubt of his skill was an impiety—people were dosed with golden elixirs and bled to death, and a prescription was esteemed in direct ratio to its antiquity, orthodoxy, and absurdity. To-day, with ten thousand vociferous foemen upon each flank, the doctors of the world are getting ahead. Every day they abandon some old method and invent a better one. Every day they save more human lives.

Christian Scientists, faith healers, devotees of the "new thought" (whatever that may be), and compounders of patent medicines—all of these enthusiastic faddists are doing the race a real service. In the first place, they are helping the law of natural selection to stamp out the unfit—which means the ignorant and credulous, and, in the second place, their incessant and telling criticism is ridding medicine of its barnacles. Their objection to every specific and lotion is the same: "But it doesn't cure!" When this objection happens to be true, it sends the embarrassed pathologists searching for something that does cure. When it is false, it does no harm—except to the critics themselves.

For this reason, an earnest lodge of anti-vaccinationists in a community often makes that community proof against smallpox. These persons refuse to be vaccinated. They publish pamphlets showing that vaccination causes leprosy, measles, and appendicitis. When the official vaccinator comes around they set their dogs on him. When they are haled into court they fight like fiends and go to jail like martyrs. Everyone else in the community submits to arm-scraping, but these rebels defy the law and emerge from jail with whole skins.

The row is forgotten and a couple of years go by. Then one day a sailor comes ashore from an East Indiaman with certain