

it is uncomplicated with organic lesion of the *muscles* of the heart, is often so latent, as to be undiscoverable without physical examination, is one of the great truths for which we are indebted to the genius of Laennec. And *it is not yet* sufficiently insisted on that valvular disease, even to an extreme degree, may affect the heart without there being any thing in the previous history or existing symptoms, which could lead us to suspect the existence of such a lesion. Years may pass by, the patient fulfilling without inconvenience all the duties of anxious, active and energetic life.*

Dr. Stokes adds the very practical remark "that an error too generally made is to believe disease of the valves to be necessarily progressive," and adduces cases where individuals had for a series of years (in one case 12), presented the phenomenon of valvular murmur without any obstacle to strong exertion.†

Notwithstanding, ther fore, the undeniable fatality of heart-disease, facts such as have been adduced must tend to show that the same gradation that is so generally met with in most severe diseases, may be allowed in cases of cardiac constriction.‡ We may hope, even, when informed by physical signs that the heart is affected, that they do not sound the death-knell of the individual who presents them, but, though menacing and cautioning, that the case may allow of the expectation of a freedom from suffering and danger for a prolonged period.

If, then, we so frequently find cases of valvular diseases entailing upon those affected but very little if any inconvenience, it is a question of much importance to point out, if possible, why after a long time such cases often suddenly, as in case V., or more slowly, as in case I., assume a formidable character, conducting the patient with much distress to certain dissolution. Difficulties, no doubt, involve the solution of this question, which it would not be easy always to clear up, but the following quotations will throw a great degree of light upon the subject, and have a practical bearing upon it of the highest importance.

"The study of cardiac pathology leads irresistibly to the conclusion, that in valvular disease the source of irregular and excited action is to be sought for less in the condition of the valves than in that of the heart itself," p. 161. "A slow organic change of one or more orifices of the heart may go on without exciting any symptom which leads to the suspicion of disease; and the heart by some power of adaptation seems to

* "I knew a gentleman who was advanced in life, and who had, to my knowledge, a loud and rough mitral murmur for four years, yet during each season he rarely missed a day's hunting, and was a bold and fearless rider."—Stokes.

† For instance, between distinct and confluent small pox; between scarlatina so mild as scarcely to be recognized, and scar. maligna; between common cholera morbus and the fell ravager which has lately carried off myriads, &c.