

# ADDRESS IN MEDICINE.

BY

THOMAS RICHARD FRASER, M.D., F.R.C.P., EDIN., LL.D., ABERD., F.R.S.,  
Professor of Materia Medica and Clinical Medicine, University of Edinburgh.

## THE TOXIC ORIGIN OF DISEASE.

When this Association last met in Edinburgh the Address in Medicine was delivered by the accomplished and universally beloved physician, Dr. Warburton Begbie, and notwithstanding the lapse of time, I can still recall—and there are others here also able to recall—the thesis which formed the subject of the address, expressed in the inquiry, Has the practice of medicine made a single step since the time of Hippocrates?

In dealing with this thesis, Dr. Begbie described the history of medicine from its beginnings, as only could be done by one who had not only carefully studied the writings of the Fathers of medicine, but had also made himself familiar with the work of their successors. The doctrines regarding the nature of disease, which successively replaced each other during the twenty-three centuries dealt with, were clearly described, and, as was to be expected from the practical physician, he fully discussed the bearings of these doctrines upon treatment, and pointed to the more conspicuous acquisition in the healing art which had enriched practical medicine.

He had the opportunity of showing how greatly medical doctrine had been transformed by Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood; how the diagnosis of pulmonary and cardiac disease had received an extension and previously unknown definition from Laennec's discovery of auscultation; how the memorable discoveries and courageous applications of nitrous oxide, and chloroform, by Horace Wells, Morton and Simpson, had deprived the knife of the surgeon and the reproduction of animal life of much of their former terrors and anxieties; and how by that vaccination, which will ever be associated with the name of Jenner—the first and still unsurpassed means of restricting the ravages of a fatal infectious disease—an almost incalculable benefit had been conferred upon the human race.

From his elaborate survey of the history of medicine, he concluded that no general doctrine—chemical, physical, humoral or physiological—had been propounded which satisfactorily explained the nature and

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<sup>1</sup> Reprint from the British Medical Journal, July 30th, 1898.