

## ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS.

## THE TREATMENT OF DISEASE.\*

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AS true to-day as when Celsus made the remark—"the dominant view of the nature of disease controls its treatment." As is our pathology so is our practice; what the pathologist thinks to-day the physician does to-morrow. Roughly grouped, there have been three great conceptions of the nature of disease. For long centuries it was believed to be the direct outcome of sin, *flagellum Dei pro peccatis mundi*, to use Cotton Mather's phrase, and the treatment was simple—a readjustment in some way of man's relation with the invisible powers, malign or benign, which had inflicted the scourge. From the thrall of this 'sin and sickness' view man has escaped so far, as no longer, at least in Anglo-Saxon communities, to have a proper saint for each infirmity. Against this strong bias towards the supernatural even the wisdom of Solomon could not prevail; was not the great book of his writing which contained medicine for all manner of diseases and lay open for the people to read as they came into the temple, removed by Hezekiah lest out of confidence in remedies they should neglect their duty in calling and relying upon God? And the modern book of reason, which lies open to all, is read only by a few in the more civilized countries. The vast majority are happy in the child-like faith of the childhood of the world. I am told that annually more people seek help at the shrine of Ste. Anne de Beaupré, in the Province of Quebec, than at all the hospitals of the Dominion of Canada. How touching at Rome to see the simple trust of the poor in some popular Madonna, such as the Madonna del Parté. It lends a glow to the cold and repellant formalism of the churches. In all matters relating to disease credulity remains a permanent fact uninfluenced by civilization or education. From Hippocrates to Hunter the treatment of disease was one long traffic in hypotheses, variants at different periods of the doctrine of the four humours. As dominated by some strong mind in active revolt, it would undergo temporary alteration. The peccant humours were removed by purging, bleeding, or sweating, and until the early years of the 19th century there was very little change in the details of treatment. To a very definite, but entirely erroneous pathology was added a treatment most rational in every respect, had the pathology been correct! The practice of the early part of the last century differed very little from that which prevailed in the days of Sydenham, except perhaps that our grandfathers were, if possible, more ardent believers in the lancet.

In the past fifty years, in the memory, indeed, of some present, our conception of the nature of disease has been revolutionized, and with a

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