

professors. Byron, indeed, anathematised it as "the destructive art of healing," and when writing to a friend the details of a fever from which he had suffered, he tells him, "I got well by the blessings of barley water, and refusing to see my physician!"—Gentlemen do you think that all these great men were inferior in observation and reflection, to the herd of doctors and apothecaries who swarml in these times?

But so completely at variance with each other are even the greatest medical authorities on every subject in medicine. That I do not know a single disease in which you will find any two of them agreeing. Take the subject of Pulmonary Consumption, for example: "The celebrated Stohl attributed the frequency of consumption to the introduction of the Peruvian bark. The equally celebrated Morton considered the bark an effectual cure. Reid ascribed its frequency to the use of mercury. Brillonet asserts that it is only curable by this mineral. Rush says, that consumption is an inflammatory disease, and should be treated by bleeding, purging, cooling medicines and starvation. With a greater show of reason, Salvadori maintained the disease to be one of debility, and that it should be treated by tonics, stimulating remedies, and a generous diet. Galen, among the ancients, recommended vinegar as the best preventive of consumption. Dessault, and other modern writers, assert that consumption is often brought on by a common practice of young people taking vinegar to prevent their getting fat. Dr. Beddoes recommended foxglove as a specific in consumption. Dr. Parr with equal confidence, declared that he found foxglove more injurious in his practice than beneficial! Now, what are we to infer from all this?—Not, as some of you might be tempted to believe, that the science is deceptive or incomprehensible throughout, but that its professors to this very hour have neglected to make themselves acquainted with the true principles upon which remedies act, and know as little of the true nature of the disease whose treatment they so confidently undertake. And what is the daily, the hourly result of this terrible ignorance and uncertainty? In the words of Frank, "thousands are slaughtered in the quiet sick room." "Governments," continues the same physician, "should at once either banish medical men and their art, or they should take proper means that the lives of people may be safer than at present, when they look far less after the practice of this dangerous profession, and the murders committed in it, than after the lowest trade."

"If false facts," says Lord Bacon, "be once on foot, what through neglect of examination, the countenance of antiquity, and the use made of them in discourse, they are scarce ever retracted." The late professor Gregory need often to declare in his class-room,

that ninety-nine out of a hundred medical facts were so many medical lies, and that medical doctrines were for the most part little better than stark-staring nonsense;—and this, Gentlemen, we shall have some amusement in proving to you. In the mean time, we may observe, that nothing can more clearly explain the difficulties which beset the student of physic—for who can understand nonsense, and, when clothed in phrases which now admit one sense, now another, what so difficult to refute? "Nothing," says Sir Humphrey Davy, "has so much checked the progress of philosophy, as the confidence of teachers in delivering dogmas as truths, which it would be presumptuous to question. It was this spirit which, for more than two centuries, made the crude physics of Aristotle the natural philosophy of the whole of Europe. It was this spirit which produced the imprisonment of the elder Bacon and the recantation of Galileo. It is this spirit, notwithstanding the example of the second Bacon assisted by his reproof, his genius, and his influence, which has, even in later times, attached men to imaginary systems,—to mere abstracted combinations of words, rather than to the visible and living world; and which has often induced them to delight more in brilliant dreams than in beautiful and grand realities."

Imposed upon by these abstracted combinations of words, we find it difficult to divest ourselves of the erroneous and mystical distinctions by which our teachers have too often endeavoured to conceal their own ignorance;—for in the "physical sciences," I again quote Sir Humphrey Davy, "there are much greater obstacles in overcoming old errors, than in discovering new truths—the mind in the first case being fettered; in the last perfectly free in its progress." "To say that any class of opinions shall not be impugned—that their truth shall not be called in question, is at once to declare that these opinions are infallible, and that their authors cannot err. What can be more egregiously absurd and presumptuous? It is fixing bounds to human knowledge, and saying man cannot learn by experience—that they can never be wiser in future than they are to day. The vanity and folly of this is sufficiently evinced by the history of religion and philosophy. Great changes have taken place in both, and what our ancestors considered indisputable truths, posterity discovered to be gross errors. To continue the work of improvement, no dogmas, however plausible, ought to be protected from investigation."

In the early history of every people, we find the priest exercising the functions of the physician. Looking upon the throes of disease as the workings of devils, his resource was prayer and exorcism; the maniac and epileptic were termed by him *demoniacs*, and where a cure was accomplished, the demon was said to be cast out. Even now, the traces of

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