

Gentlemen,—It is a great thing to know how much or how little we really know ; for not only shall we be led to supply our acknowledged want, but we shall be able to apply what knowledge we have much more effectually to useful purposes. When we are in ignorance, we are very apt to allow prejudice to usurp the place of wisdom, and fostering our delusion so as to oppose an effectual bar to our improvement. How many evils and follies and crimes have originated from this cause ? Medicine has not been free from them. It was from the prejudice of an erroneous theory that it was once customary to treat a case of small pox with blankets and heated air and drinks. It was from a similar erroneous prejudice that the cure of wounds was sought by cramming them with lint, the treatment of all others most detrimental to them. You will often, probably, be asked to give the reason of occurrences ; nor will this inquiry always be kept within reasonable bounds. Nothing is more easy to ask than, What is the reason of a thing ? yet, often, nothing is more difficult than to give a proper answer. A child may puzzle a philosopher, and it is often the ignorant who are most pertinacious in requiring an answer ; but their very ignorance makes them contented with the most superficial reasons, and often the most flimsy are quite satisfactory. The Hindoo believes the earth rests on a tortoise, without asking what supports the tortoise ; so, in our practice, we find that a mere learned name will often set at rest many difficult inquiries, and this is both fortunate and unfortunate—fortunate, because it often saves the labor of cogitation, and the often unpleasant confession that you do not know ;—unfortunate, for it often prevents us from being candid with our patients, because we feel that our candour in declaring we do not know (perhaps what no one else knows) may be interpreted as if we were improperly ignorant of what it was our duty to know.

There are two errors to be avoided : an overweening prepossession that we are very wise, which leads to dogmatism and quackery ; and a want of self-reliance, which leads to inefficiency. In our approaches to one or other of these errors, a great deal will depend on temperament ; both of them, however, lead to one result, a system of routine—the one asserting the supremacy of its knowledge, will not condescend to alter ; the other, fearful of untried consequences, prefers the beaten track. Routine is not the part of a scientific physician, whose decisions and directions should always have a basis of reason ; it is manifestly unfitted for emergencies, and frequently injurious in ordinary cases ; it leads to the treatment of mere symptoms, or is guided by mere names. I have often endeavoured to impress upon you that the inferiority of the physician over the quack existed chiefly in his acquaintance with the various phases of disease incident upon the differences of constitution,