

# THE UNFETTERED CANADIAN.

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## ROBINSON'S LECTURES.

### LECTURE. III.

#### AN HISTORICAL VIEW OF THE MODERN SYSTEMS OF MEDICINE.

We have already taken on a former evening, a short and rapid view of the most celebrated physicians of antiquity; of Egypt, Greece and Rome. They were distinguished into Theorists and Methodics; as at the present day, we have the different sects of Empirics, Dogmatists, Nosologists and Brunonians, as they may be the followers of Brown or Cullen, or their predecessors.

The Methodics still adhered to the original forms of practising by rule; while the Theorists united in argument and observation, after the example of Hippocrates and Galen; having still in mind the profound maxim of the former; "to enlighten experience by reason, and to rectify theory by practice, belonged to men in the pursuit of knowledge, endowed with sense and dignified with soul."

The torch of Prometheus was not all a fiction; it expressed a profound philosophical truth. The ancients were fond of having their sentiments wrapped up in metaphor and enigma. That holy light so feelingly apostrophised by Milton,

"Hail, holy light, offspring of heaven first born!

Or of the eternal co-eternal beam!"

That light was indicated by the flaming torch of Prometheus. For the ancients, however they had obtained a knowledge of the fact, knew well that light was the first born of heaven. Revelation or tradition might have taught them this truth; but it was held sacred in their mysteries. They conceived light to be the

grand pabulum of life, and the great agent which the Deity employed to spread organization, sensation and thought, over the inanimate mass of rude and restive matter. It was also applied to the superior splendors of majestic intellect. *Cui mens diviniior atque os maga sanatarum.*"\* Hippocrates had the high privilege and distinguished honor of having first introduced the torch of Prometheus into the leaden temple of medical knowledge—*scientific investigation.*

After the days of Celsus and Galen, medical science became stationary. In the agitation and decline of the Roman empire, all learning was arrested in its progress; and when it fell, the arts and sciences perished in the shock. The few fragments that remained, were concealed amongst the fraternities of priests and monks, and a secular clergy. But a dreary desolation and dark decay spread over the universe of mind. *Pro dolor!* The knowledge of a few simples answered all the wants of the common people. The dressing of wounds was committed to the ladies; the cure of fractures, luxations, and broken bones, the knights took upon themselves. All was simple and soon despatched. In those awful scenes of broil and battle, when nothing was to be heard or seen, but the alarm of war, and garments rolled in blood; there was no time to die of disease. No! it was on the bloody field of martial strife, that death reaped the harvest of his millions! All the finer sensibilities, and causes of disease, were absorbed and swallowed up in the vortex of war! Thus, through the long and dreary night of a thousand years,

\*Whose mind was endued with divine wisdom, and whose generous and open countenance imported health.