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SPECIALISM,

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RELATIONS TO PRACTICAL MEDICINE.

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SPECIALISM IN ITS RELATIONS TO PRACTICAL MEDICINE.

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"Were it not better for a man, in a fair room, to set up one great light, than to go about with a rush-light into every dark corner?"—BACON.

WITHIN the last twenty or thirty years practical medicine in this country has made greater advance in all its departments, than in the two generations previous; in consequence, as I believe, of the superior quality and wider range of the medical education afforded, and the greater demands made upon medical men by a higher civilization—but mainly because of the assiduous cultivation of distinct sub-divisions of medical science, by men who, in greater numbers, have devoted themselves exclusively to the study of them.

The mature results of their labors, have been freely given to the profession in systematic treatises, monographs, and papers of less pretension, and as freely appropriated and assimilated by us, until they have become a very large and important portion of the common stock of professional knowledge. Nearly all the important improvements in operative surgery, the accepted methods of treating diseases of the eye and ear,—the skin, the kidneys,—diseases of the nervous system, and of the thoracic organs,—diseases of the male and female generative organs,—the best means of exploring cavities, and indeed nearly our entire knowledge of the structure and physiology of the organs themselves, we owe to the labors, often unrewarded, of a class of men, who, having devoted themselves to the study of a single department, or a sub-division of it, are properly called "*specialists.*"

The *ideal specialist*, as he exists in the imaginations of some men, is a superficially educated person whose medical studies have

been limited to the narrow boundaries of a single organ, and who, knowing nothing of the laws of life, or of the influence which disease in one organ exercises over the functions of all the others, is incompetent to treat intelligently the local affections which he professes to understand.

It would seem to be unnecessary to assert in this presence, as I do, that a *specialist* of this ideal type, does not exist in the ranks of the profession in any civilized country. It is entirely a figment of the imagination. In a few instances, perhaps, the delusion may be honestly entertained and believed; but with the majority of men who declaim against specialism in medicine as a great and overshadowing evil, to be got rid of at any cost—and as such, having no claims on the respect of the profession, it is a mere stalking-horse behind which individual plans may be more effectually concealed, or it is a straw-image of their own creation, set up for the purpose of enjoying the cheap amusement of knocking it down. In a brief paper presented to this society in 1866 and published with the Proceedings of that year, the writer seems to view this subject from a peculiar standpoint; and assumes, what I believe has no foundation in fact, when he says more than once, and in varied phraseology, that the *specialist* is so narrowed in the scope of his intellectual vision, by treating much the diseases of one organ, that he takes no cognizance of the morbid condition of the general system, which may be either the effect or the cause of the organic disease which he is specially treating. And he adds, "Shall we deal then with the eye, or the lungs, as independent organs, bound by no laws except those regulating their peculiar functions? Yet, this is what the specialists propose."

As the writer is evidently in search of information, I will endeavor to answer his question, and show that specialists propose nothing of the kind; and moreover, that the highest interests of practical medicine require that the labors of specialists, from which general practitioners have derived all the knoweledge they possess of the diseases of certain organs, should be continued; not only this, but that these labors should be fostered, encouraged and appreciated by the profession, as freely and openly as their results have been appropriated.

That they are already so appreciated by the leading minds in the profession, I am well aware; yet it is important that the unjust and groundless prejudice against specialists, which still exists, to some extent, among the mass of practitioners, whoever

may be responsible for it, should, if possible, be dissipated by a better understanding of their aims, as well as of the basis on which they rest their claims for full professional recognition.

We sometimes hear it alleged as an argument against the necessity for specialists, and even against the propriety of their existence, that some of the early fathers of medicine were able to master, and write intelligently upon, not only the various branches of medical science, but general science; and the fact that Hippocrates and Aristotle were able to discover and elucidate the laws of all science, to an extent that was remarkable even in that early period of the world's history, has been offered in proof of the assertion, that the medical mind of the present day is of an inferior order.

"When scientific phenomena were scarce, and scientific observers still more rare, when science had hardly any laws, doubts or contradictions, generalization was easy; and if, among such conditions, a highly intelligent mind sprang up, the difficulty would not be great of grasping, in one comprehensive mental view, all the divisions of the most extensive science, or indeed the entire horizon of existing knowledge."

"It was thus easy for Hippocrates to extract the essence of every branch of medicine, and even on some points of medical philosophy to write profoundly. And in the same manner, Aristotle became the very symbol of every science."

But observers increased in numbers, facts multiplied, and gradually as science extended, universal knowledge remained no longer the possession of a single individual. In medicine, which as a science is extraordinarily complex, and as an art, altogether indefinable, and hitherto uncertain, a similar evolution may be traced, and is still in progress. Step by step, as experimental induction advanced, and took the place of conjecture, definite diseases, brought to the test of analysis, were resolved into their constituent elements; and what was before regarded and treated as a single, distinct disease, a morbid entity, was divided into many, and served to concentrate upon themselves such a measure of attention and study as formerly would have sufficed for the whole nosology.

So that, even in Hippocrates' time, and still later, men made choice of special departments of medicine, and were recognized as specialists by the public, who believed that by concentrating their labors, these men were able to accomplish results which were practically beyond the reach of those great minds which could be satisfied with nothing less than universal knowledge, and mistakenly supposed they had acquired it.

By some of the most eminent men among medical teachers of our own time, the opinion is held that, owing to the wonderful progress of medical science in later years, and the rapidly extending boundaries of its domain, the curriculum of studies in medical colleges cannot properly be condensed within four years of tuition; that at least *ten* years of hard study would be required for the student to attain a competent knowledge of all branches of medicine, in their present state of development. Whoever has for the last twenty years, or even less, attempted to acquaint himself with the daily growth of medical science, will readily concur in this opinion, and I think, will admit that, in his own efforts to keep himself abreast of the front line of scientific progress, he finds the work too much for him, and unconsciously or by compulsion, he ultimately confines his daily study to those branches of the profession which he is most frequently called upon to practice, or which his taste, or a just estimate of the situation leads him to select. In this way it is that men have become *specialists.*

Matured in mind, educated by years of self-culture, they bring to bear upon their chosen subject the full force of disciplined powers, and the accumulated wisdom of other fields, with an intensity of mental concentration, and sublimity of devotion, equaled only by the transcendent importance of their results. Every day, the general practitioner makes more or less use of these results without knowing to whom he is indebted, and often without spending a thought upon, or caring to know the immense cost of time, labor, money, health, and even of life itself, at which they have been produced.

I have said that Practical Medicine is indebted for its present advanced stage of development as a science, mainly to the labors of specialists. To this our minds must yield assent, whenever we glance at the books that fill our libraries, or follow out the train of reflection suggested by the sight of our standard authors. When we would examine the literature of any department, whether in book or periodical form, who would think of looking for reliable information except in the works of those who had in special cliniques, devoted to it years of special observation and study?

Who can fail to remember that for our knowledge of the physical signs, diagnostic of the diseases of the lungs and heart, and for the invention of the *stethoscope*, we are indebted to Laennec—a specialist—who extended and improved upon the labors of Avenbrugger, Corvisart and other specialists who had preceded him?

For the most approved treatment of the diseases of the throat by topical applications, we are indebted to an American specialist, Green;, one of the earliest innovators in this country upon the old and indefinite methods of treatment of the diseases of special organs. As might have been anticipated, his brilliant discovery brought upon himself, as a specialist, an amount of envy, obloquy, and detraction, from the men of "broad views" and "comprehensive knowledge" in the profession, which is without a parallel in this country. Yet, he lived long enough to witness the substantial adoption of his views and practice, notwithstanding their early crudeness, by all men everywhere, who could recognize and appreciate scientific progress.

Starting from this point, and investigating the principles involved, Richardson and others have given us a still higher development of therapeutic science, in the treatment of diseases of the air passages by the atomization of medicated fluids.

The laryngoscope, for which we are indebted to another specialist—Czermak—enables us to diagnosticate and to cure diseases of the larynx and vocal chords, which had previously been beyond our knowledge, and thus beyond the reach of human skill.

Another specialist, Désormeaux,* has given us the endoscope, an important means of exploring cavities by direct vision, as yet but little known in this country, but which promises to be an instrument of great value.

In what a hopeless labyrinth of confusion and mortifying helplessness should we be, in our attempts to treat diseases of the kidneys, were it not for the labors of Bird, Beale, Roberts and other specialists?

Who among us is not familiar with the writings of Erasmus Wilson—an honored specialist, who has devoted a life-time to the study of the diseases of the skin?

What should we know about the treatment of syphilis, that most loathsome scourge of the human race, were it not for the labors of specialists?

In ophthalmology, a branch of medicine now as much a science

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* Although to Désormeaux is generally credited the invention of the endoscope, he himself awards it to M. Segalas in 1826. But truth requires that it should be known that it was first invented by Barrini of Frankfort in 1806; and that in 1824, Dr. J. D. Fisher, of Boston, devised and actually used an instrument indentical in principle, and similar in construction with that at present recommended by Désormeaux.

in itself, as Astronomy or Mineralogy, almost *everything* that has given it character and definiteness, nearly all the most important recent additions to our knowledge of the physiology, pathology and therapeutics of the eye, has been accomplished by the observations and investigations of specialists. Much of that which is most valuable in it, and which has placed it almost on a level with the exact sciences, has been gained within comparatively a recent period, by the labors of men like Mackenzie of Edinburgh, Bowman and Critchett of London, Von Graefe, Arlt, Jager, Stellwag, and others of Germany, Donders of Utrecht—all specialists—not to mention the valuable contributions of American ophthalmologists.

Previous to the invention of the ophthalmoscope, the most important means of diagnosis ever given to the science, the pathological conditions of the deep structures of the eye had never been demonstrated on the living subject. Although this instrument was the invention of Helmholtz, a professor of physiology in the University of Heidelberg, and not a practitioner, it was applied to the study of disease, and its powers were fully developed by such specialists as Graefe, Jager, Liebreich and their coworkers, who have by its means contributed very much that is of the highest value, not to their own specialty only, but to general medicine, by teaching us how we may usefully apply it to the study of diseases of the general nervous system, and of the circulatory system, and even of the affections of the kidneys.

All who are familiar with Aural Surgery, and know much of its history, progress and present scientific status, will most freely acknowledge that nearly all that is of any value in it, is due to the labors of such specialists as Wilde of Dublin, Toynbee of London, Politzer, Gruber, Von Tröltsch, and many others of Germany, who have especially labored to relieve this department of the opprobrium which until a recent period has rested upon it.

It would be easy to extend our inquiries in this general direction to very great length, if it were necessary; but it must be too apparent to require further proof that, had it not been for the enlightened and honest labors of specialists, the claims of Medicine to be ranked among the sciences of the nineteenth century would be beneath contempt.

Without disparaging what has been done by specialists in other sciences, candor compels us to acknowledge a weight of obligation to *medical* specialists, which will remain undiminished by the lapse

of time, or the brilliancy of future discoveries. Specialism holds the same relation to definite progress in all other departments of science; and to its existence there we are also equally indebted. If illustrations of this fact were needed, we have only to turn to Chemistry and Physics. We should be ignorant of the constitution of the blood, and of course of its pathology, and therapeutic indications, but for this special branch of chemical and microscopic investigation. And we owe to the same source our knowledge of the constitution of the urine and other fluids of the body, both in their physiological and pathological relations. Our pharmacopœia could never have been enriched by the large class of alkaloids and resinoids, so indispensable to the modern physician, except through the labors of specialists; and to-day, the salts of Opium and Cinchona would be unknown to us, had not Sertuerner, or some other chemical specialist, examined the bitter principles of those substances. The same is true of Strychnine, Atropine, Aconitine and all the proximate principles of the crude drugs which formed the staple of the Materia Medica of the last century.

For the discovery of Chloroform, we must bear in grateful remembrance the independent labors of three chemical specialists; Guthrie of the United States, Soubeiran of France, and Liebig of Germany. And to the latter distinguished specialist we are also indebted for another no less remarkable and perhaps important medicinal agent, the Hydrate of Chloral, which, although discovered forty years ago, we have only recently appropriated to ourselves on the suggestion of Liebreich, another specialist of Berlin.

How much do we not owe to the labors of specialists, for our knowledge of Physiology and Physiological Chemistry, Botany and Toxicology? The results of these investigations in special departments of science, frequently extended through a life-time, have been freely given to the world, and have become an inseparable portion of medical science. In like manner, the discoveries of *medical* specialists, the inventions of new instruments and operations, new modes of treatment, with the development of new principles, which admit of a great variety of applications in other general and special departments, are all brought generously into the common stock, and laid at our feet as trophies from the domain of the unknown.

How do we receive these pioneer workers, as they come back to us, laden with treasures from the very frontiers of science? And what acknowledgement do we offer them, as we coolly appropriate

to ourselves their invaluable additions to scientific knowledge—the very blood and brains of their lives? Do we point at them in derision, as visionary dreamers, characterized only by "narrowness;"—as "men of one idea," who spend their lives in the investigation of diseases which exist only in the imagination of the observer?

Every department of science that is successfully cultivated, has its specialties; and to this fact, in an eminent degree, is due the remarkable progress that has been made within the memory of most of us, in Chemistry, which has for its special departments, Chemistry applied to the arts, Commercial Chemistry, Analytical Mineral Chemistry, Analytical Organic Chemistry, and Organic Chemistry proper, with perhaps others. The numerous Astronomical observatories of the world, are in the care of observers who are well versed in all the sciences pertaining to their profession, and are capable of turning their attention to any investigations which are required. If they were all to give their attention alike to general astronomy, the accumulations of observations would be immense but comparatively limited to the ordinary phenomena of the heavens, while the progress of discovery would be very slow.

And so, recognizing it as a governing principle of practical life, as expressed in the maxim—"*Omnes non omnia possumus*"—"We cannot all do everything that has to be done in the world," these astronomers devote themselves to special work, special lines of investigation, and thus all are enabled to carry their researches far beyond what would be possible under the first named general plan; and thus have resulted the wonderful discoveries of the present century in relation to the constitution and laws of the heavenly bodies. Is Schwabe any the less an astronomer, because he has devoted more than forty years of his life to the investigation of the sun's spots? And because it was not until recently that his observations were utilized by others, and found to prove the periodicity of return of the spots, and led to still further discovery of the constitution of the sun, shall, therefore, the full meed of praise be denied him, as an eminent scientific explorer?

The same sub-division of labor exists, to a considerable extent, in the legal profession; and it is the position we see taken by many members of the bar, by distinguishing, every day more completely, between the civil and the criminal lawyer, the writers and students of commercial law, the law of patents and international law. The same sub-divisions, and consequently higher

results, are noticed among engineers, who devote themselves by preference to mechanics, architecture, hydraulics, rail-roads, or mining. But with these same distinctions, thoroughly practical as they are, shall any man say that the Chemist, who devotes himself to any of the specialties of his science, is therefore any the less a chemist? Tuckerman may give his life to the study of lichens, and Dewey to the grasses of America, and Michaux and Nuttall to our forest trees. Are they any the less botanists? Indeed, are they not more than others, by thus penetrating the inner circles of science, likely to make a nearer approach to the central thought and principle of a scientific classification?

Could it ever be conceived that an advocate, or a judge, who devoted himself to the trial of civil or criminal cases, would be for that reason less familiar with the entire science of jurisprudence? With still less reason could it be supposed that a physician should be less accomplished in his art, who understood more thoroughly than his neighbor, some specialty in medicine? And that, because he bestowed particular attention and study upon mental alienation, diseases of the eye, or of the skin, or upon diseases of women, he should no longer be recognized as a physician, in the fullest and highest sense of the word?

To affirm this, would be equivalent to denying the mutual dependence, every day more clearly revealed, of the various organs of which the human body is composed. And yet the idea, as applied to one branch of practical medicine, meets us at every turn; confronts us in strange company; and compels our attention by endless reiteration of the same stereotyped platitudes.

By a certain class of medical men, the term *specialist* is used as one of disparagement; and applied with that purpose to any who, by natural taste, peculiar circumstances, or a desire for higher professional culture, have been led to practice particularly in any one of the many departments of professional labor. It has even been assumed by the unwise and unthinking among them, that the study and practice of a *specialty* unfit a man for everything else; and that excellence in any special department is *prima facie* evidence of deficiency in all other departments of practical medicine. I say the unwise and unthinking, because it is difficult to believe that others could possibly be so unacquainted with the extent and exacting nature of the demands for comprehensive knowledge, which must be met by specialists, as to compare them to men who have "spent their lives in the rounding and polishing of needles," or to the incompetent "general, with armies to lead, cam-

paigns to plan, and victories to win, who understands only the science of fortification "; and because no others would assume that the division of professional labor, by which, alone, practical medicine has been brought to its present elevated position as a science, leads to the same intellectual narrowness as does a minute division of labor when applied to cheapen production in the mechanic arts.

If one of you were suffering from a disease of the eye, which threatened the loss of vision, to whom would you instinctively turn for relief? To the general practitioner, who has spent his life in diversified labors, and whose very "comprehensive powers," and " broad views," have prevented him from acquiring any special knowledge whatever? Or would you seek the services of a professed surgeon and oculist?

If one of you were the subject of a tumor (possibly malignant), in a situation dangerous to life, you would apply to a surgeon for its removal; and if it were important to determine its exact pathological character, would you be likely to refer it to the general practitioner, who might be unable to distinguish between a cancer-cell and an air bubble, or to a pathologist, who makes microscopic study a *specialty?*

If your wife or daughter were the victim of any of those serious and insidious diseases which are peculiar to her sex, would you take for her the advice even of the most eminent general practitioner in your vicinity, or that of some one whose special studies and practice had better qualified him to treat her case successfully?

Of course, if these supposed contingencies should ever become, to any of you, matters of actual personal experience, your practical answers to these interrogatories would be in every instance the same. You would each choose for yourselves, or your dearest friends, the opinion and treatment of a qualified specialist, or of some one who is constantly seeing and treating cases of the kind. How does it happen then, I ask, that we so frequently see in our periodical literature, even in Reports to the American Medical Association, and hear spoken, the language of inuendo and detraction, as applied to men who devote particular attention to special classes of disease? In some instances it may be accounted for, on the supposition of a want of general professional knowledge, without which there cannot be an honest disbelief in the existence of the special diseases treated. In other instances it can only be accounted for on a supposition which I prefer not to mention, and would not willingly entertain. Whatever may be the real reason,

there can be offered for such a course no apology which is not at the same time the condemnation of those who indulge in it.

Let us pause for a moment, and inquire who are the men against whom this storm of dust and wind is raised? What is their standing at home and abroad? Are they found among the inert mass, or even among the average members of the profession? Are they violators of the Code of Ethics, or regardless of the honor and the dignity of the profession, more than others? Do they, more than others, give themselves to extra-professional pursuits? Do they from entire loss of interest in medical practice, or for other reasons, prostitute their professional characters to the level of a trade, and sell their wares in open market to the highest bidder? Have they so conducted as to forfeit the respect of the public, professional or otherwise?

Let the opponents of "Specialism" make out their catalogue of offenders, that we may learn their numbers, their standing as physicians and as men, and become acquainted with their personal history, and principles of action; and if they are found to have injured the profession, or degraded themselves below an average rank in it, sustaining no other relation to it than as barnacles on a ship's bottom at the close of a voyage, it will then not be too late to denounce them and visit them with penalties. But until this is done, is it too much to hope that this puerile clamor and declamation will cease?

But to return to the examination of the paper to which early allusion was made, let us see if there be even a grain of truth in its assumptions. The writer says:—"The tendency of local prac-"tice is to magnify the importance of local disorders, and of local "remedies. In evidence of this, we need only refer to that nu-"merous class of uterine disturbances, a class of troubles from "which the females of a former age were happily exempt. Here, "as elsewhere, narrowness leads to errors of diagnosis. With all "the light that the speculum has shed upon this inviting and "thoroughly explored field, not a tithe of the diseases claimed to "be there discoverable, do exist, other than in the eye of the "observer."

Such reasoning is incompatible with any adequate acquaintance with the writings of specialists, as such,—or with the profundity of knowledge in general science and literature, combined with the widest and most critical knowledge in every department of practical medicine, which some of these "men of one idea" have shown themselves to possess.

Can Sir James Simpson be accused of "*narrowness*" because for more than thirty years the best energies of his mind, stored as it was with vast treasures of medical lore, both ancient and modern, were devoted to the alleviation and cure of the diseases of women? Can we find any evidences of "*narrowness*" in his many and valuable contributions to practical therapeutics,—in his writings on public hygiene,—in his researches in archæological science,—in his work on Acupressure,—in his very voluminous Obstetric Memoirs, or in his investigations of the action of new remedies? And lastly, is there any evidence of "*narrowness*" in that remarkable series of experiments with anæsthetics, which have culminated in the greatest discovery of the age, and conferred upon suffering humanity (especially on woman) that priceless boon, "the thrice blessed chloroform"?

Yet he was pre-eminently a *specialist*, and as such, received the honor of knighthood; bestowed solely as a public acknowledgment of the distinguished services that he had rendered to science and to humanity, but which can add nothing to the lustre of a name so gratefully cherished in every portion of the civilized world.

Examine critically the writings of any other specialist—of Churchill, West, Spencer Wells, Wilson, Beale, Roberts; of Matthews Duncan, Keith, Graily Hewitt, Bowman and McClintock; of Byford, Emmet and Peaslee; Sims, Thomas and Storer, with scores of others whom I might name, and if you detect in them evidences of "*narrowness*," I beg to inquire by what standard have they been measured?

Narrowness of mind is confined to no class of men; nor is it the peculiar result of any form of intellectual labor. It is peculiar to the individual, and is more or less pronounced in proportion as the man is more or less educated, or more or less highly endowed with natural gifts. Intellectual powers, while they are capable of increase by cultivation, are also in so great a measure due to inheritance, that the most laborious efforts are in many cases insufficient to enlarge the mental horizon beyond the narrowest limits. Such minds are congenitally narrow; and whatever their surroundings, or the advantages enjoyed, or in whatever calling they are found, "narrowness" is their most distinguishing characteristic.

If artizans, they may spend their lives in the "rounding and polishing of needles." If physicians, they have the most limited knowledge of the general principles which underlie the science and art of medicine, and still less acquaintance with the isolated

facts and discoveries of those patient, self-denying workers in all the special departments of knowledge, the aggregation of whose labors forms the very foundation of all science, and the materials from which, by wise generalization, the great principles of practical medicine have been gradually evolved. What evidence is there to suppose, as this writer declares, "that the females of a former age were happily exempt" from diseases of the uterus?

Let us see. The causes of the diseases peculiar to women are of infinite variety. Some of them have been in operation ever since the fall of our first parents, and are still active through the functions of menstruation and child-bearing, of course with increased force and frequency, as the race has progressed in civilization, and in the cultivation of æsthetic tastes. There are still other causes, incidental to the more artificial and unnatural style of female education, and modes of life common to modern society. So that, in addition to those which have been in operation from the beginning, and which, being inherent in nature, must always continue, we have a still larger class of causes now in operation, and to the preponderance of which must be referred, if it exists, the greater frequency of uterine diseases now than formerly.

Four hundred years before the Christian era, Hippocrates wrote largely on this subject, and his writings, as well as those of Galen and Aretæus who came after him, and all of whom practiced in Rome, afford positive evidence that there existed at this early period a very advanced state of knowledge of the diseases of women. For example, the writings of Galen contain the earliest allusion to the vaginal speculum, while Aretæus describes "ulceration of the womb," with a precision that leaves no room for doubt that he also employed this instrument as a means of diagnosis.

But the vaginal speculum has, perchance, even an earlier history than this, for a three bladed instrument of the kind has been exhumed in the excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum!—Cities founded in the time of unknown antiquity, but destroyed, as we all know, in the reign of Titus, A. D. 79. With the writings of Hippocrates, began the literature of medicine in this department; and if we may judge from his voluminous writings upon the subject, uterine diseases must have been very common in his day. To diseases of women alone, he devoted three volumes, in which he discussed Metritis, Induration, Fibroid Tumors, Menstrual Disorders, and Uterine Displacements. Then, as now, the knowledge of these special diseases was not in the possession of the entire

profession; for, so limited had been the diffusion of knowledge, that more than four hundred years afterward, physicians generally were ignorant of what had been already known. Witness the New Testament narrative of the "woman which had an *issue of blood twelve years*, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." Either the faculty were ignorant of the treatment of uterine hemorrhage, or refused to attend after the patient's money was exhausted, or perhaps they were afraid of incurring the charge of "*narrowness*" by attempting to remove the polypus from which the woman had so long and so terribly suffered. Besides the authors already mentioned, Archigenes and Celsus, who probably lived in the second century, also wrote on the diseases of women. The first, accurately described the "vaginal touch," the varieties of leucorrhœa and ulceration of the womb;—while the the last, gives an excellent description of pelvic-cellulitis.

For centuries afterward the study of the diseases of women was pursued with great vigor, but unfortunately for us, many of the writings of the authors of that period are destroyed or in fragments, so that now, reference is almost exclusively made to the compilation by Aetius, showing the state of medical science in his own times, and an abstract of the existing writings of men who had preceded him. In describing his own practice, as well as that of his contemporaries and predecessors, he treats of the diseases of women in such a way as to render it certain, that he had a thorough knowledge of many of them; also of many of the means of investigation and treatment which are in use at the present day, and which have in many instances been regarded by us as new; and very properly so, inasmuch as they have been re-discovered more than thirteen hundred years afterward. This industrious compiler devoted 112 chapters of his 16th Book, to diseases of women. Thirty-seven of these treat of pregnancy, parturition and suckling. There are six chapters on "Ulcers of the Uterus," three on Abscesses, two on "Displacements," two on "Obstructed and Imperforate Uterus," seven on growths occuring in the vagina and uterus, and *eighteen* on menstruation and its disorders.

If further evidence is needed to show the excessive "narrowness" of the fathers, and that they described diseases which existed only "in the imagination of the observer," I will add that Aetius particularly described nearly every disease of the uterus that is

recognized by the best observers of modern times; and the treatment he advises, includes most of our modern appliances, with frequent mention of the use of the speculum. His directions for the preparation and use of sponge tents are almost identical with those commonly followed to-day; and he clearly sets forth the uses of medicated pessaries, for which he gives more than a hundred formulæ; the use of vaginal injections; caustics for ulceration of the cervix; dilatation of the cervix by tin tubes; the treatment of inflammation of the various tissues and appendages of the uterus; and lastly of the modern uterine sound.*

I have repeatedly inquired of the wives of our Foreign Missionaries whether the native women are exempt from uterine diseases, and in all cases they have assured me that the native women do suffer from a considerable variety of uterine affections, for which they are treated by native physicians by sorcery and otherwise. I could quote from the historical literature of this special department, at still greater length if it were desirable; but I think I have satisfactorily disproved the charge that uterine diseases are a modern invention, "from which the females of a former age were happily exempt"; and which are limited in number only by "the imagination of the observer"; and that any degree of excellence in a special department of medical practice is followed as a necessary sequence by "narrowness" of mind. Moreover, is it not clear, from what has been said, that we actually owe to "specialism" not only all the definite, permanent progress which the science of medicine has hitherto made and is now making, but that the rate of progress and discovery in every department of scientific knowledge, depends on the numbers and faithfulness of the "specialists" who cultivate them?

It is charged that "the tendency of local practice is to magnify the importance of local disorders, and of local remedies;" and the special treatment of uterine diseases is cited as conclusive proof of this. As the treatment of diseases of females is thus made the scape-goat for all the imaginary sins and evils of special practice; and is held up as a typical example of the disastrous effects of specialism in medicine, thus revealing more clearly the purpose of

* I am indebted for the historical data of the subject, to papers in the Dublin Quarterly Journal by Dr. Wright,—also to the Medico-Chirurgical Review, and other modern sources of information.

the writer, I have confined my remarks more particularly to that branch of the subject. For, although I am not myself a *specialist*, in the strict sense of the term, being largely engaged in general practice as well, my daily treatment of this class of diseases permits me to speak of them from personal knowledge; and I believe that an experience derived from the special treatment of many hundreds of cases of uterine disease, and a general practice of nearly thirty years combined, qualifies me to express an unbiased opinion, not only as to the merits of the special department to which I attend, but also, as to the value and relations of "specialism" as an element of substantial progress in medical science.

And I wish distinctly to say here, that I disclaim all desire or intention of being personal in my remarks in any direction. I am combatting and criticising *opinions*, not persons; and I desire particularly to dislodge from your minds what I believe to be an error, and to substitute for it what I know from ample experience to be the truth.

To any one who is practically familiar with uterine pathology and therapeutics, and to the best informed among those who are not, it may appear almost an unnecessary labor to controvert such statements. For every one knows that, to attempt to treat a serious disease of one organ, without giving particular attention also to the condition of all the others, especially to those with which the suffering organ is in most intimate relations and sympathy, would be as unsuccessful as it is unphilosophical. To such a mind, nothing can be more illogical—than to say that, the special treatment of uterine diseases tends to magnify unduly the importance of this organ and its diseases to the female economy. For the sympathies of the uterus with every other part of the female organism are so evident, and the sympathetic relations of all the organs of woman with the uterus are so numerous and complicated —so intimate and often so distant, yet pervading her entire being, that it would almost seem, to use the expression of another, "as if the Almighty, in creating the female sex, had taken the uterus *and built up a woman around it.*"

When we consider the important functions of the uterus, and the wonderfully complicated processes carried on within it, and the fact that, the peculiarities of woman, as well as her happiness in health and disease, depend upon, and are in a great measure controlled by, the condition and sympathies of the uterus—the

great central, *pivotal* organ of her existence—is it not strange that any well informed, intelligent physician should persistently close his mind against the evidences of this sympathy, and against the patent fact, that the functions of the most distant organs may be so perverted or destroyed by uterine disturbances, as to deceive the very elect, and lead physicians otherwise skillful, to suppose that these organs are themselves the seat of serious disease? Yet instances of this kind are of daily occurrence. And I am certain that I only state what many of you know perfectly well, when I say that women are often most actively treated during weary months and years, for various diseases which have no existence whatever, except in the obtuse imaginations of the observer—*but are simulated by the reflex sympathies of a diseased womb.*

I could cite to you numerous cases coming under my own observation, which remarkably illustrate this fact, but I prefer to postpone to some other occasion any more particular allusion to them, and will only say in this connection, that such is the mutual dependence of every special branch upon every other department of medicine, that in my judgment, no man can be successful in a special department, without being well informed in all the others. And further, that there is no department of practical medicine which requires such a concentration upon it, of all the accumulations of medical knowledge, or makes such exhausting draughts upon the resources and powers of the physician, and tests so severely his qualities as a careful, painstaking and patient observer, and skillful prescriber, as that of the diseases of women.

Two classes of medical men have, in opposite modes, contributed not a little to bring undeserved odium and disrepute upon the scientific treatment of uterine diseases. In the one class, we see those few, who, having never given particular attention to the subject, are without adequate knowledge of its pathology, etiology and therapeutics, providing themselves with a speculum and a piece of lunar caustic, and with a rashness as frightful as it is criminal, "rushing in where angels fear to tread," carrying fire and sword into the most innocent localities. They find uterine disease in every woman; and the track of their fiery raid can be distinctly traced for years afterward, by the scarred, distorted, narrowed and sometimes obliterated cervical canals which they have invaded. It is these rash and ignorant men—men with as

little conscience as learning—and still less of delicacy than of either, who have been, and are, mainly instrumental in bringing unmerited reproach upon the scientific treatment of the diseases of women.

The unwarrantable and disastrous procedures of this class of superficially educated men, are used as the basis of the indictment of specialism at the bar of public opinion, by another and more respectable class of physicians, who are, doubtless, excellent general practitioners, but who, having long ago abandoned habits of study and reflection, find themselves behind the age; and in casting about to find the reasons for their changed relations, they are quite willing to charge upon "specialism," results which really have their origin in the congenital or acquired conditions of their own minds. The representatives of each class are, I am happy to believe, comparatively few in numbers, (and some may think them too few to require notice) yet such is the nature of their peculiarities, the tendencies of their misguided efforts, and the persistency of their attacks, that they cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged.

It would be out of place in this paper to allude particularly to the "errors of diagnosis," and the results of treatment, made by either of these classes of physicians; yet they are continually coming to notice, and are in some cases exceedingly ludicrous; but in many the consequences are of the utmost seriousness, and not very seldom even fatal to life. Is it any wonder, then, that the public mind is unsettled respecting the value and propriety of special treatment of uterine diseases, when the subject is seen only in the false lights cast upon it from these two extremes of error?

It would be too much to expect the non-professional mind to be able to distinguish the true from the false, respecting a subject which is so variously regarded by the profession itself, and therefore we cannot wonder that suffering women, who have been disappointed in the results of treatment of these affections by their ordinary medical advisers, should finally, in their desperation, seek relief at the hands of male or female quacks. I could easily show that it would promote the highest interests of the public and of the profession, both individually and collectively, to encourage and everywhere commend the labors of "specialists," instead of meeting them with words of ridicule and disparagement; but it is unnecessary, for the line of argument is so plain that it is already anticipated.

Science is a unit. Its multiplied facts are so closely related, and each is so indispensable to the full force and effect of all, that the attempt to ignore or remove from the structure a series of facts, or to cast odium upon the laborers by whom these blocks in the foundations have been wrought and placed in their proper order, would, if successful, utterly destroy the entire fabric. It is an act of sacrilege. It is *treason*, alike against the interests of humanity, and the civilization of the age.

In all countries, the estimation in which specialists and their labors are held, is the best index of the existing standard of medical education, as well as of the degree of individual culture in the profession. Wherever that standard is highest, there specialties are most assiduously cultivated, and the labors of specialists most highly appreciated; and everywhere, the dependence of general medicine upon *Specialism*, for all that gives it vitality and precision; for all that renders it self-sustaining and progressive, is freely acknowledged by the profession, just in proportion as its members are enlightened, and just in proportion as we have been able to free ourselves from the bondage of prejudice, jealousy, and *narrowness*.