





MORGAN (Jas. E.)

Compliments of the Author.




A Defense of Medicine and of the Medical Profession.



ANNUAL ADDRESS

TO



THE MEDICAL SOCIETY



OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

DELIVERED JANUARY 9, 1884,

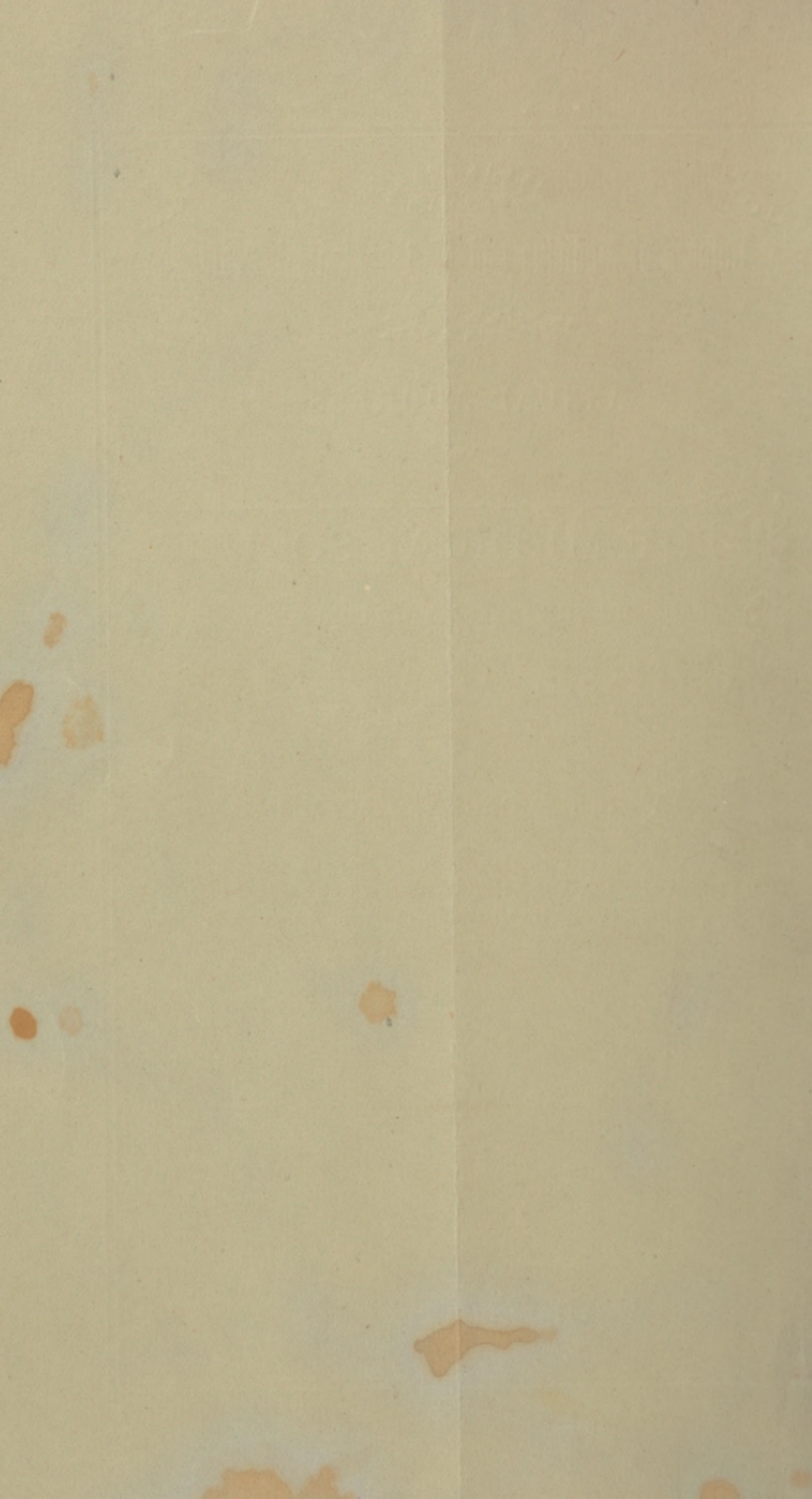
BY

JAMES E. MORGAN, A. M., M. D.,

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MATERIA MEDICA AND THERAPEUTICS, IN THE MEDICAL
DEPARTMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGETOWN,
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ADDRESS.

*Fellows of the Medical Society
of the District of Columbia:*

My first impulse, on receiving your invitation to deliver the annual address before the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, was to decline the honor. I felt that, after nearly forty years spent in the study, the teaching, and the practice of medicine, I should now seek my "*Otium cum dignitate*," and confine my mental labors in the future to obtaining a knowledge of the investigations and discoveries of others. On more mature reflection, however, I felt it to be a duty I owe to my profession, to the public and to myself to take the opportunity, which may never again present itself, to declare my faith in the science of medicine as the greatest blessing bestowed by God on man.

Many medical men, after growing old in the profession, yes, even men who have practiced among us, from causes which I shall not now discuss, have, before death, declared their loss of faith in the efficacy of medicine to control disease, thus, to the extent of their influence, depriving their fellow-men of the consolation derived from faith in medical aid, and at the same time putting weapons into the hands of charlatans and sceptics to use against our useful and beautiful profession.

I shall endeavor this evening to give some of the reasons that impel me to place confidence in a judicious and intelligent application of our science in the treatment of the ills that "flesh is heir to." To show that I do not exaggerate the importance of my theme, I will read a few extracts, which

have been made by the enemies of our profession, from the writings of some of its brightest lights in the past. Dr. J. Mason Good, a standard author in his day, declared: "The science of medicine is a barbarous jargon." Sir Astley Cooper, M. D., F. R. S., says: "The science of medicine is founded on conjecture." The celebrated Dr. Bailey, of London, wrote: "I have no faith whatever in our medicines." Dr. Frank said: "Thousands are annually slaughtered in the sick room." Prof. Evans, of Edinburg, says: "The medical practice of the present day is neither philosophy nor common sense." These extracts have been made from the writings of physicians who, having failed to make the corporal part of man immortal, by the science of medicine, have become disgusted, and, thoughtlessly, and may be unintentionally, cast a blot on themselves and on their profession.

I do not assert that medicines have the direct power to cure disease, but I do say, that they can modify vital functions so as to cause them to cure disease. Every organ, every cell; yes, every cellule of the human body, has its functions; and there are agents in the *materia medica* that will act on each and all of them. 'Tis true this action may be injurious or beneficial, but it is the province of the medical profession, by experience and observation, to make a proper discrimination.

I may be asked how do I know that it was the action of my medicine on the vital functions that has given my patient relief, or, in other words, how do I know but that it was the *Vis Medicatrix Naturæ* that did the work. I answer that inductive reasoning, if nothing else, would satisfy me of the truth of my premises. Lord Bacon tells us that inductive reasoning is more reliable than any other, and that it is founded on the fact that the course of nature is governed by uniform laws, and that things will happen in the future as we have observed them to happen in the past. We know that heat will warm the body, because we have known it to

do so in the past. We know that rhubarb will purge, and that ipecac will produce emesis. We know that Mercury will cure syphilis, and opium allay pain. We know that quinine will cure intermitent fever. We know that these medicines have these effects, because we see them do so every day of our professional lives; thus we lay the foundation of faith in our profession. May we not, then, reason farther that if these medicines will cure these diseases there are other medicines that will cure other diseases, and that it may be possible that there may be remedies or palliatives not yet discovered for diseases now supposed to be incurable? When we practice according to this method of induction a large number of similar results must be obtained from repeated trials. The success that may happen to attend a medicine in a few instances furnishes but a slight presumption in regard to its general operations on the human body. It is the neglect of this well known truth that causes so many new remedies to be for a time popular and then sink into deserved neglect.

A physican uses a certain medicine in a specified disease with apparent success in a few cases; he at once rushes into print and declares that he has discovered a specific for that disease; the other members of the profession try it and the sum total of their testimony is that it is worthless. Thus the profession is often brought into ridicule, and even some of its members lose faith in its efficacy.

Many diseases are self limited; and if the patient's constitution is sufficiently strong he will recover his health in time without the use of a single dose of medicine. This well known fact is the foundation of Homœopathy.

Hahnemann, in his dreamy and visionary philosophy, administered his infinitesimal doses to the sick; he saw them slowly recover and he at once considered his theories confirmed. His followers enthusiastically adopted his views and practice, but they slowly and reluctantly discovered

that their infinitesimal doses exerted no influence on disease, and the more intelligent and rational of them have gradually increased the size of their doses until, in many cases, they are as large as those given by the regular profession. I believe, could Hahnemann live, at the present time, and have the joint experience of his followers as to the efficacy of his infinitesimal doses, that he would do, as many of them are doing now, that is, give medicines in doses sufficiently large to affect the vital powers so as to palliate or cure disease.

He labored under the difficulty of being almost alone in his observations, and, like many an individual Physician in our profession, believed he had made a discovery, which time and more comprehensive observations proved to be fallacious. It requires a great mass of accumulated facts to establish the truths of medicine, and the experience and observations of no one man is equal to the task.

Let us turn to another view of this subject. As I have said before, God has ordained that there shall be order in Nature. He has caused man to suffer with thirst and He has given him water to quench it. He has caused man to suffer with hunger and He has given him food to allay it. He has caused man to suffer with cold and He has given him heat to warm him. He has caused man to suffer with disease and pain, and what can be more rational than to suppose He has given him remedies to cure or palliate them. These conditions of suffering are all incident to the human body, and why should there be remedies for all of them save disease. Such a statement is illogical and irrational, and, I believe, has been uttered by persons of reputation, without reflection.

A plausible argument which has been used against the medical profession with great effect, is its want of stability. It is urged that the science of medicine is changeable, and that new theories, new treatment, new dogmas, and new systems

are constantly being brought forward, adopted for a time and then abandoned as fallacious and useless. This is true; but the fundamental principles upon which the grand structure of our science rests do not change. We may theorize as to the "*modus operandi*" of a medicine, yet we know that it does have a certain effect on the human system. We know this by repeated observations and experiments; and yet we may not know why or how it does have this effect. Physiologists may tell us this year that sleep is dependent upon a *hyperaemia* of the brain, next year they may insist that it is caused by an *anaemia* of the brain, and the year following they may again change their theory and declare that it may depend on either *hyperaemia* or *anaemia* of the brain. Yet the fact exists that we do sleep, and that narcotics will produce sleep. It is of but little importance to the patient what may be his physiological condition when asleep, he is only interested in knowing that we have medicines that will produce sleep. It is of but little importance to the patient to know whether an anodyne allays pain by obtunding the sensibility of the general nervous system or by some specific action on the painful part. What he wants is relief from the pain, and this he gets from his anodynes regardless of theories.

We do not claim that the science of medicine differs from other sciences in being perfect and infallible, but we do claim that, like other sciences, it is founded on truth, and is constantly undergoing change for the better. We do not lose faith in other sciences, because they are not perfect and are susceptible of advancement and improvement, and why should we under similar circumstances lose faith in medicine.

Again, if our profession is to be condemned for its uncertainty and instability, the other two learned professions—Divinity and Law—for the same reasons would have to be abandoned as entirely useless, because their uncertainty and

instability are ten-fold greater than those of medicine. Let us first consider Divinity. All christian sects believe in the Bible, yet each one places a different interpretation on its teachings, each preaches a different doctrine, and their antagonism to each other has been so great as to stain the face of Europe with blood. Nevertheless there is no candid and reflecting mind, it matters not what its faith may be, but will admit that christianity has at least been a blessing to man by civilizing, elevating, and refining his nature, and by giving a resignation, a comfort, and a consolation in his last hours, that no other means can furnish. I therefore believe it to be the duty of every philanthropist to advocate and support religion by every honorable and rational means in his power, for, although its past history has been obnoxious to the charge of intolerance, persecution and bloodshed, at present and in the future, education has and will liberalize the human mind generally, so as to keep the zeal of religious enthusiasts within proper bounds. So much for theology.

But how about the certainty and stability of the law? Simon Greenleaf, in a book of five hundred and forty-eight pages, gives us five thousand five hundred decisions that were overruled, doubted, or limited in their application by a higher court; and William Green, in an address to a class of law students, tells us that these were not one-half of the cases that were overruled prior to 1856. Not only is there no certainty, consistency or fixity among lawyers in their interpretation of the law, but even the great judges of the highest courts differ as to its construction, and in their decisions. Prof. L. S. Joynes, of Richmond, Virginia, states, that he found, while investigating this subject that, out of two hundred and fifteen cases that were carried from the lower courts to the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia, ninety cases were affirmed. One hundred and two were reversed and twenty-three were partly affirmed and partly reversed. So that the judgment on which the appeal was

taken was completely affirmed in only forty-two *per cent.* of the cases, and was reversed wholly or in part in fifty-eight *per cent.* Moreover, in thirty-four of the fifty-eight cases, one or more of the judges dissented from the judgment of the court.

One of the most monstrous examples of the uncertainty of the law is given in the American Cyclopædia. It says, "One very grave question remains in a singular uncertainty; it is: What is necessary to constitute a complete and valid marriage? Are the ceremonies and forms, customarily used for the solemnization of marriage, indispensable, or is the mere consent of the parties sufficient?" The question first came before the court of Queen's Bench in Ireland upon a trial for bigamy. There were four judges, and they were equally divided as to whether forms of marriage were necessary to make it legal. The case was carried to the House of Lords in England. There the question of the validity of marriage by mere mutual consent was fully argued by the most able counsel in England, and the six law peers gave their opinions at great length, and they were equally divided. Almost at the same time the same question came up in the Supreme Court of the United States, and Chief Justice Taney, in deciding the case on other grounds, said: "Upon this point the Court is equally divided, and no opinion can be given." I cannot do better than to quote the language of Prof. Joynes on this subject; he says: "Here we have the singular spectacle of the highest tribunal in Ireland, the highest tribunal in England, and the highest tribunal in the United States, all equally divided upon a fundamental legal question relating to the institution of marriage." Certainly no consultation of doctors, professing different systems, and neutralizing each other's counsel with equal opposing forces, could be more discordant, and more barren of results.

"After this presentation of facts may we not ask, what su-

periority the law can rightly claim over medicine on the score of certainty? With what consistency can any follower of the law hold the disciples of medicine to account for their differences, and complain of the difficulty of eliciting from any given number of medical men opinions in perfect accord on grave and nice questions presented for their consideration."

Nothing has done more harm to the medical profession than the authority of great names. Thirty odd years ago Prof. Dunglison, who was a physician of eminent ability declared that "the time had passed away when the human mind is to credit the mere *verba majestri*, or to place implicit credence in a scientific assertion because it proceeds from a physician of great reputation;" and yet there are some physicians in this room, of only ten years practice, who have lived to see new systems and new theories promulgated by so-called great men of our profession, adopted, practiced and abandoned, because they could not stand the test of practical application. Dr. Abercrombie has truly said that "in receiving facts on the testimony of others we require to be satisfied, not only of the veracity of narrators, but also of their habits as philosophical observers and of the opportunities they have had of ascertaining facts."

Some men are anxious for notoriety and are not particular as to its character. When the Ephesian youth was asked why he set fire to the temple of Diana at Ephesus, he replied that by doing so he knew his name would become as famous as the temple itself. When Hughes Bennett, in 1868, was appointed chairman of a committee of the great British Medical Association, to investigate the action of so-called cholagogues on the liver, and reported, after a series of experiments on dogs, that the whole medical profession and mankind generally had been mistaken in believing that calomel, podophyllin, taraxacum, &c.; increased the secretion of bile, and that, on the contrary, they diminished it, the

whole medical world stood aghast. Hughes Bennett's name became familiar to those who had never heard of it before, and but few dared question the high authority. Professors were compelled to teach it to their classes or take the risk of being called laggards in science. Yet the great mass of the profession continued to use cholagogues as before, believing, in their hearts, that they did act upon the liver. At least, five years after Hughes Bennett's report (that is, in 1873), Röhrig, the great German investigator, summoned courage to repeat Bennett's experiments on dogs, and found they were not correct, and, with others, confirmed the truth of the experience and observation of generations of mankind that cholagogues do increase the flow of bile from the liver.

The so-called germ theory of disease and antiseptic surgery are receiving some hard blows and undergoing the crucial test of the experience and observation of skillful clinical observers, and it is now feared that their fate will be the same as that of Hughes Bennett's report on the action of cholagogues.

But, should the germ theory of disease be verified, then, at the same time, will be verified the wonderful curative powers of mercury, so much insisted on by the older members of our profession, and now much deprecated by modern practitioners and popular clamor. Kummell, Schede, Es-march, Neuber, Bergmann, and others have proved that mercury is the best and most powerful of all germicides; and that its potency is in proportion to the quantity used. Thus the large doses of mercury used by physicians in the past will be justified by the experiments of the most learned and best qualified of modern observers. In the meantime our glorious old profession stands firm and unshaken on the rock of ages, and its practice is sustained and endorsed by ninety-nine hundredths of the civilized world.

Here, I will take occasion to call your attention to the opinions of some of the wisest and best-informed men the

world has produced as to the value of our profession,—men who, although belonging to other learned professions, could yet look with impartiality upon ours. The great lawyer, Sir Wm. Blackstone, declared “the medical profession to be pre-eminent for general and extensive knowledge.” The learned and Rev’d Dr. Samuel Parr says: “While I allow that peculiar and important advantages arise from the appropriate studies of the three liberal professions, I must confess that in erudition, science and habits of deep and comprehensive thinking, the pre-eminence, in some degree, must be assigned to physicians.” Jean Jacques Rousseau declares, “there is no condition which requires more study than theirs; that in every country they are the most truly useful and learned of men.” Voltaire says, “the man who is occupied in restoring health to his fellows, from pure benevolence, is far above all the grandees of the earth, he belongs to the divinity.” And the great, but often prejudiced critic, Samuel Johnson, although he defined the medical profession to be “a melancholy attendance on misery, a mean submission to peevishness and a continual interruption to pleasure,” was, nevertheless, compelled to admit that “every man has found in physicians great liberality and dignity of sentiment.”

In this connection, I will digress for a few moments to refer to the fact that Cicero, the great Roman orator, has often been quoted as likening a physician, when he restores his fellow-man to health, to a god. While it would be gratifying to our professional pride to have such an opinion expressed of us by so great a man, truth compels me to say that Cicero expressed no such opinion. Among the last sentences of his celebrated speech in defence of Quintus Ligarius, is to be found the following: “*Homines enim ad deos nulla re propius accedunt quam salutem hominibus dando.*” This has been translated to read thus; “Men resemble the Gods in nothing so much as in giving health to their fellow-men.” That Cicero had no reference to Doctors in

this instance will be apparent to any one who reads his speech. He was pleading before Cæsar for the life of Quintus Ligarius, who had rebelled against his authority, the word "salutem," which has been translated *health*, means, in this instance, "safety," and the sentence, therefore, should be translated: "For in nothing do men more nearly approach the gods than in giving safety to men."

The investigation of the physiological action of medicine is comparatively a new field, and bids fair to add much to the efficacy and usefulness of our profession. Time and a large number of accumulated observations will, however, be required to place it on a basis to be available and used by the profession with confidence. Many difficulties present themselves at the outset. The action of medicine on man in health often differs from that in disease. The circumstances that modify the action of medicine, such as age, sex, climate, mode of life, etc., will have their influence in preventing accurate conclusions. Experiments upon animals are known to be often uncertain, unreliable, and not to be placed upon the same footing with observations made upon man. Man can describe the sensations produced on him by medicines, but we can only judge of their action on animals by their demonstrations and functional disturbances.

Again, some medicines are poisonous to man while they form food for other animals. For instance, *Conium Maculatum* and *Cicuta Virosa* are eaten with impunity by cows and are poisonous to man. Ten grains of pure morphia has been given to a rabbit without producing any effect; in another case, twenty grains of opium were given to a rabbit with similar results. Albers tells us that he gave 10 grains of morphia and 60 grains of opium to a rabbit, it gave no signs of narcotism and lived. The same writer tells us that horses can take large doses of arsenic, so large as to kill as many men as would weigh twice as much as the horse, without doing him any injury. Quassia, which will kill dogs and

flies, is to man one of the best of the bitter tonics. Gamboge, jalap and colocynth, which act as powerful cathartics on carnivorous animals, man included, have but little effect on herbivorous animals. In herbivorous animals vomiting never occurs, while in carnivorous animals it is easily produced. Articles, therefore, which would have no effect on herbivorous animals would produce emesis in man. It is therefore evident that great circumspection is necessary if we wish to make our experiments on other animals useful in treating the diseases of man.

These facts are well illustrated by a story told of an old German monk named Basil Valentine. He was an alchemist and lived in what we are accustomed to call the dark ages. He was bent on discovering the transmutation of metals, or, in other words how to change the baser metals, such as copper, tin, antimony, etc., into silver or gold. His laboratory was in the back part of the convent, and overlooked the yard in which were kept a number of hogs. He had been using antimony to promote the melting of other metals, and he threw the dross in the back yard. The hogs eat it and, although it purged them, they grew fat. He at once made a note in his memorandum book, "Antimony fattens hogs." His lean brothers in the convent, who were not over well fed, observed the note and came to the conclusion to fatten themselves by similar means. They eat heartily of the antimony and were all killed. The old gentleman, seeing the result of the experiment, coolly made another note stating that, "Although antimony fattens hogs it kills monks." Hence the name *antimoine*.

It is admitted by those competent to judge, that to the medical profession may be attributed to a great extent, the wonderful prolongation of human life at the present time when compared with the past. In England, at one time, the death rate was one in thirty per annum, now it is one in

sixty-five. In England in 1680, one in forty cases of obstetrics in the Obstetrical Hospital died, now only one in one hundred and twenty die. Statistical tables show that during the twenty years of the French revolution more lives were saved by the profession than were destroyed by the guillotine and the implements of war.

It has been truly said that by a law of nature we are destined to live for a time in health, to experience a certain amount of enjoyment, to suffer from disease, and ultimately to die. As old age or disease comes on, useless or deleterious agents are generated within the system, which in consequence of the enfeebled condition of the organs or the want of proper medical aid are not eliminated and death must follow. Now the effects of old age we cannot control, but it is upon medical aid in disease that I so much insist. The first thought that enters the mind of the most untutored and uncivilized savage when stricken with disease, is of a medicine to cure it, and his instinct and unaccountable appetites sometimes indicate the remedy necessary to the restoration to health. I believe all diseases are either curable or susceptible of palliation. Our senses demonstrate the truth of this proposition, our reason confirms it, and our instinct impels us to a practical application of it. I, therefore, gentlemen, in conclusion, reiterate that I have the strongest faith in the science of medicine, and that my confidence in it has increased with age, experience and observation, and farther, I believe it should be used without hesitation to the utmost extent of its curative power.



