

Newton (R.S.)

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Eclecticism in Medicine.

AN ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE ECLECTIC MEDICAL SOCIETY OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK, JUNE 8, 1864,

BY

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1864.

AN ADDRESS:

ON ANCIENT AND MODERN ECLECTICISM IN MEDICINE—THE OLD
FATHERS IN MEDICINE—THEIR WORKS CONTRASTED WITH
YOUNG PHYSIC.

*Delivered before the Eclectic Medical Society of the State of New York, at Cooper Institute,
June 8th, 1864.*

BY ROBERT S. NEWTON, M. D., OF NEW YORK.

Among the occult sciences of Egypt, which country may be said to be the cradle of all the sciences known to antiquity, we find the science of medicine, under the custody of the Thaumaturgists or priests of the mysteries, in the temples of Isis and Osiris. Medicine, with the various other arts and sciences then known and practiced, was kept as a sealed mystery, only to be revealed to the initiated. In the healing art, charms, incantations and magic were resorted to, and we may remark in passing, that history in this particular has been found repeating herself in the incantations of the medicine men among the Indians, and the revelations of the medical clairvoyants of modern times. Nor, indeed, has medical science, in the astonishing progress it has made, entirely separated itself from the mystery and superstition which originally invested it; witness the technical terms given to medicine, and to the prescriptions for their use. One would think that all the other sciences which were veiled in mystery and hidden from the public gaze, were only worthy of being brought to light and popularized, but the science of medicine.

Outside of the grim iron barrier which concealed in its mystic darkness all that was known of the healing art, there was nothing until the days of Chiron, a Grecian who had been initiated into the Egyptian mysteries about thirteen hundred years before Christ, and who bore the sacred treasure as Cadmus did the letters from the hiding place in Egypt to Greece. Among the number of his pupils was Esculapius who for his wonderful attainments and distinguished services was deified after his death. With the death of Esculapius and his sons Machaon and Podalarius, there occurred a total blank in the history of medicine, comprehending an interval of many centuries. Pythag-

oras, a Grecian, from the tomb of medical science which had been buried for centuries, in the six hundredth year before the Christian era, evoked the spirit of therapeutics and devoted his attention to the study of anatomy and physiology. He visited Egypt and was initiated into its mysteries, and from the priests of the temples availed himself of all the knowledge pertaining to the occult sciences, more however with a general view to philosophic enquiry than to perfect his acquaintance with medicine, as he had no design of making it a profession. The great advantage derived from these investigations, was the awakening of a spirit of research among Grecian philosophers, and divesting the science of medicine, with that of other sciences, of the mystery and superstition with which they were beclouded.

One hundred years later Hippocrates appeared as a cultivator of medical science. He was the first Eclectic. Setting himself to work to the abolition of superstitious errors, he introduced a new method of investigation, effected a total revolution both in theory and practice, and maintained a transcendent authority over the minds of his successors for many centuries, so much so, that by the unanimous consent of posterity he was dignified with the title of "Father of Medicine." He was a cotemporary of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, Herodotus and Thucydides, and hence lived in the golden age of Greece. His works formed the basis of after investigation in the science of medicine, and the world is indebted to him for valuable contributions to science.

Among the immediate successors of Hippocrates, we may mention Diocles, Praxagoras, and though not exactly in the medical line of succession, Plato and Aristotle, both of whom devoted a portion of their researches to the investigation of those branches of science that are nearly connected with medicine. We have not the time to trace the progress of medical science from year to year, nor to mention the distinguished names of the profession; suffice it to say, that the profession continued a unit both in theory and practice until the establishment of the School of Medicine in Alexandria, Egypt, when there arose a dissension, and the faculty were divided into what were called dogmatists and empirics, the former making the treatment of disease to depend upon the structure and functions of the

animal organism, and the changes produced in the same by morbid causes, the latter denying the possibility of such knowledge, contending that the sole guide in the treatment of disease, must be experience either derived from personal observation, or the testimony of others.

In this rapid and necessarily imperfect sketch of medicine, we must not omit to mention Celsus, the Roman, who may be justly dignified with the title of the "Father of Medical History." In the second century of the Christian era, however, there arose a man more celebrated than any that had preceded him, not excepting the father of medicine himself—Galen of Pergamus. After having received a thorough education in all the philosophic schools of Greece, he entered upon the study of Medicine. After receiving instruction from various medical preceptors and traveling extensively into foreign countries he became so famed for his attainments in medical science that the Roman Emperor Aurelius induced him to take up his residence in Rome. Rome had been for centuries without any medical science, and at the entrance of Galen, possessed no physicians of any value compared with him. So powerful were the impressions made upon the minds of all in relation to the superior talents and medical skill of Galen, that his theory prevailed over all competitors, and he was regarded as an oracle for many centuries after his death. He remained without a successful rival as the greatest physician until the beginning of the eleventh century, when Avicenna arose—one of the most enthusiastic of students, and whose canon of medicine obtained the highest celebrity and became the principal text book in the different medical schools. Then followed Albucasis, Avenzoar and Averroes. With these went out the light of medical science, and every other science in the gloom of the dark ages. After this period of darkness three lights arose in the persons of Stahl, Hoffman and Børhaave, the latter of whom was the Eclectic of that day. Then followed Cullen, Darwin and Brown, together with others of less note, until the distinguished Bichat arose, who with Van Sweiten gave an impulse to medical Eclecticism of the most salutary kind. Our limits will not permit us to go any further into the history of medicine. The revival of letters brought about by the Reformation extended the domain of medical sci-

ence side by side with that of other sciences, and furnished the world with a list of worthies in the medical profession equal to those in any other department of science.

As all theories will have their followers, it is not to be wondered at that the medical profession has been divided into sects, nor indeed is it to be regretted, as independent investigation would thereby have been arrested and an end put to progress.

There never can, and there never will be, unanimity of opinion in any science not embraced in the circle of the exact sciences. This is true in relation to the lowest and highest branches of knowledge. The Roman Catholic Church may issue her decrees and send forth her bulls for the purpose of arresting the earth in her flight around the grand central luminary, and she may hurl her anathemas against the fiery messenger whose near approach creates dismay, but regardless of all these, the world moves on, and the comets pursue "the tracks of their roaming." In matters of faith regarding theological dogmas, she may add decree to decree for the purpose of preserving unity, and she may enforce belief by the rack and torture, but a Luther and Melancthon will break their fetters, and nail the theses of their investigations to the open doors of the Reformation. The writings of the fathers of medicine may amuse, they no longer instruct, the primer has given place to the elaborate scientific treatise, just as the monkish legends have given place to sound and truthful theology.

The French Institute counted eighty systems of Geology which had been exploded by modern investigation. How many systems of medicine have passed away, and how many more are yet to be given to the moles and the bats, who can tell?

No man is a friend to science in any department of investigation, who would attempt to throw an iron barrier around his dogmas. The only possible sense in which he may be considered as a contributor to science, is furnishing a fossil remain for the cabinet of some future antiquarian.

If medicine, as it has been practiced, were not more uncertain than the "glorious uncertainties of law" itself, if as a science it could become fixed and definite, like the science of mathematics, then would there be some propriety in guarding its temple and blazoning upon its portal, "*procul! O procul!*"

este profani." But there is nothing fixed, definite or certain about it. The modes of disease and the modes of treatment are constantly varying, and he only is the honest and valuable physician who adapts his knowledge and skill to the ever varying circumstances.

Eclecticism rejects nothing of the past that is worthy of a place in the domain of true medical science, it adopts everything of the present that thorough investigation, and experimental tests, demonstrate to be valuable. While extracting the tares it is careful not to disturb the wheat. In its practice it does not destroy one disease by implanting another; by removing the tares it does not substitute dragons' teeth. Its *Materia Medica*, all embracing, professes to have remedies which exhaust themselves upon the diseases to which they are applied, so that when the disease is removed the remedy goes with it.

Hence it is that all agents that cannot be taken into the circulation of the various fluids, and assimilated without deleterious effects and leaving the system infected after the original disease is removed; are discarded by Eclectic physicians—of these agents we may mention Mercury, Lead, Arsenic, Antimony, &c., &c.

No Eclectic physician who has taken a regular course in all the departments of medical science, and none others should presume to practice, should for a moment rest satisfied with the examinations through which he has successfully passed. He should have constantly before him a course of thorough and critical study, and bend all his energies to patient and protracted investigation in all the departments of medical science. It is essential that the public should have confidence in the medical faculty, and that they may, every practitioner should be a thorough scholar and perfect gentleman, moral and upright in all his habits and deportment. It would be better to open the doors to the pestilence than to invite to the confidence and sanctity of home a reckless and vicious physician; ignorance were better than skill associated with moral depravity.

The position occupied by the profession is such that physicians can exert a wonderful influence for good upon the community, and it behooves them to be true to the trust reposed in them and meet like men the vast responsibilities by which

they are surrounded. These considerations should rest with special weight upon those who claim to be reformers of medical science and medical jurisprudence, and they should labor most zealously to convince the world by superior medical skill, and the exposure of mal-practice, that they are worthy of the name. In this age of progress and conflict of thought, when most of the sciences are in a transition state, it becomes every man of science, and especially every member of the liberal professions, to be constantly on the *qui vive* of enquiry, and to prosecute the work of investigation, pushing principles to their ultimates, until the absolute truth if possible is reached in every thing connected with human knowledge and human happiness.

Can it be, should it be, that in the science of war, when a nation taxes its utmost energies to arrive at the greatest perfection in all things pertaining to the arts of warfare, and all other nations send deputations of military men to examine into the modes of attack and defence, and all the dreadful paraphernalia of the battle field, where the object is to find how most effectually human life can be destroyed—can it be, we repeat the question with tenfold earnestness, that more effort is put forth to destroy than to save human life? The engines of destruction are planted in open and disguised batteries in our midst and all around us, and shall not we labor unsparingly to find out means by which these batteries of death can be silenced, and their guns for ever spiked. The world is full of compensations, evil exists, but good may predominate; vice stalks abroad, but virtue is equal to the task of meeting it in its bold open defiance and its hidden retreats, and vanquishing the hidden monster; disease openly or insidiously attacks, but remedies may be found for its prevention and eradication; the bane is here, but the more powerful antidote is at hand. To find and apply these agencies for good is the work of the philanthropist and the physician, and he is a quack who doubts or denies their existence and potency.

It ought in justice to be said that no reform within the last thirty years has made greater progress than medical reform, and while it has acted directly in developing the truth and correcting abuses in practice, it has reflexly, in a silent but power-

ful manner, like the leaven in the meal, permeated the entire profession, as the modes of treatment and the remedial agents now openly or stealthily employed afford abundant evidence. Much however remains yet to be done. Reformers must act in concert. In union only is there strength, and nothing but a solid and persistent combination will enable them to succeed. The prestige of antiquity, of high sounding titles, of regal and influential patronage and social position, can not be overcome by the occasional announcement of correct principles, and their silent and unostentatious practice. The one and the other must be brought prominently, fearlessly and frequently before the public, in lectures and essays, in pamphlets and books, until the true system shall be brought in contact with the thoughtful masses, and they shall be able to realize its importance and value. The ten thousand Eclectic physicians scattered over the continent, while they show how great has been the progress of reform in this school of medical science, are not a tithe of what should be in the field. "The harvest is great, but the laborers are few." The Eclectic Medical College located in the West, is adequate to meet the wants of that vast and growing region, but what shall we say of the East with its "hub of the universe," and the metropolis on its rim? An Eclectic Medical Institute, liberally endowed, should be in existence to day in this great center of commerce, art and science, eclectic as the Cooper Union, and as munificently furnished in all its appointments. The friends of reform must do more than wish well for its success, they must be willing to labor and make sacrifices of time and money to carry forward the grand enterprise in which they are engaged. We have already an Eclectic Medical Library and text books on the theory and practice of medicine materia medica, therapeutics, surgery, obstetrics, diseases of women and children, pathology, a dispensatory equal to any extant, besides many other collateral works and ably edited Eclectic medical journals.

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PROF. R. S. NEWTON'S

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NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

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NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

This is one of the most valuable medical works that the American press has yet given to the world. The editor has, with much tedious toil and labor, compiled and arranged with great care, the complete works of Syme into one volume, and presents to the public in this book all that that celebrated surgeon has issued through the press. This of itself is invaluable to the medical profession. But the peculiarity of the work which certainly adds to its interest, is the fact that the author and the editor, though both surgeons of wide-spread reputation as successful operators, belong to different schools of medicine. Syme undoubtedly stands at the head of his profession in Scotland, and probably has no superior as a surgeon in the world, and is a medical writer of unusual ability. His works always command an extensive sale among the profession in Europe. Newton is at the very head of the Eclectic school of medicine in the United States, a lecturer of high standing, and is universally accorded a position among the most successful and reliable surgeons of the country. In pathology, therefore, they differ materially, and in this work, more than any other, are the excellencies of the two systems compared.

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This is a new American edition, with notes and illustrations by R. S. Newton, M. D., Professor of Surgery in the Eclectic Medical Institute of Cincinnati, and, for several reasons, must be an attractive as well as useful work to the medical profession. *Syme's Principles and Practice of Surgery* is too well known to need particular reference in this connection, and the author has held too high a position in Europe to admit of his skill, as an operator, to be questioned for a moment, nor could the task of laying it before the surgeons of the United States have been intrusted to a more competent pen than that of Dr. R. S. Newton. In pathology, Mr. Syme and his editor differ materially; and on this fact, and the difference of the therapeutic agents employed, depends the real merit of the work. The editor is evidently not afraid of a comparison of the merits and claims of the Allopathic and the Eclectic

systems, for in this work they are compared throughout, permitting every surgeon to judge for himself. The remedies of both systems are presented, together with very appropriate comments on the value of each, rendering it one of the most desirable works now before the profession, which must attain a large circulation among surgeons of all schools.—*Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*.

Having been permitted to examine Syme's Principles and Practice of Surgery, edited by Prof. Newton, I beg to express my opinion of the work, as far as read by me. To call in question the ability of Mr. Syme as an operator, in this enlightened age, would be equal to avowing ones ignorance of the science. This remark is, of course, to have a general application, for no man lives who may be said to have attained excellence in every particular. In pathology, Mr. Syme and his editor differ very materially; and on this fact, and the difference of the therapeutic agents employed, depends the real superiority of the work. The editor is evidently not afraid of a comparison of the merits and claims of the Allopathic and Eclectic systems for in this work the two systems are compared throughout. Mr. Syme stands at the head of his profession in Scotland, and Prof. Newton at that of his in the United States; so that every surgeon need no longer be undecided as to the merits of the two systems, from inability to compare them. The remedies of both systems are presented, together with very appropriate comments on the value of each. My own impressions are, that this is the best work now before the profession, and will no doubt attain a very large circulation among surgeons of all schools. It will do more to elevate the Eclectic branch of the profession, in my estimation, than any work yet issued by that school. I speak of the work thus plainly, because I wish to see both the editor and author receive that credit which this great work shows them to each deserve.—*Press*.

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ROBT. S. NEWTON, ESQ.,
Prof. of Surgery,
Cincinnati,
Ohio, U. S. A.

2 RUTLAND STREET, EDINBURGH, 30th Sept., 1856.

My Dear Sir: I feel much obliged by your kind intention, and may refer you to the last edition of my "Principles of Surgery" (1856), for an expression of my matured views. In the Clinical Lectures published in the *Lancet* you will find more detailed explanations in regard to some particular subjects.

I am, my dear sir, yours very truly,

JAMES SYME.

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NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

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"To the adherents of the Eclectic School we can cheerfully and warmly recommend the work of Professors Powell and Newton; and to those who heretofore had no respect for this school, we may hint that a perusal of this work might change their opinions and suggest some new views."—*Cincinnati Daily Gazette*.

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