

my advice, would tumble into the voracious jaws of the first unprincipled quack he encountered.

I will freely acknowledge, that did the masses of my countrymen entertain what, in my heart, I believe to be the luminous and comprehensive views which distinguish the Editor of *THE LANCET*, then, indeed, the necessity for my quackery would cease to exist; neither would I be troubled with applications for relief. We have, however, not to deal with some imaginary era of intellectual civilization, but with humanity as it is.

You may be disposed to class my claim to conscientiousness with those of Professor Henderson and Dr. Madden, on whom you have inflicted so terrible a castigation; yet, nevertheless, I will affirm that I never prescribe for any individual unless I believe I am able to afford him assistance.

I would scorn to touch the money of the man to whom I could not return an equivalent; and if any case presents itself of serious aspect, I at once refuse the responsibility of its treatment, and urge on the patient the importance of an immediate application to a legal practitioner.

I hate quackery as much as any man; I have seen its murderous curse blast the lives and happiness of my acquaintance. I have never permitted either old Parr's, Holloway's, or any other universal specific, to enter my shop; if I did so, I should think I lent my name to breathe a simoom of death amongst those who placed confidence in my character.

If any man will show to me that my practice is a breach of moral principle when I prescribe for those cases I believe I understand, and in which there is no probability of their application to a more competent adviser, I will then abandon my quackery for ever.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Sunderland, Dec. 1846.

JOHN YOUNG.

* * We shall offer some remarks on the subjects of this curious letter in the next *LANCET*.—ED. L.

ILLIBERALITY OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In common with many others, I have read with great interest several articles "On the Controlment of Syphilis in the Metropolis," and your comments on the illiberality of certain institutions in refusing admission to persons afflicted with venereal diseases. I thank you for calling public attention to the subject; and allow me to inquire, if you are aware that at the London Hospital such a law still exists, and is not infringed on? as appears to be the case at the Bloomsbury Dispensary, from the letter of Mr. Cooper, which appeared in the last number of *THE LANCET*.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient humble servant,

December, 1846.

SCRUTATOR.

* * We thank Scrutator for directing our attention to the subject; and for the credit of the institution and the medical officers, trust that our correspondent is misinformed. We will, however, make inquiries, and revert to the subject.—ED. L.

DR. LEE'S CHARGES AGAINST DR. SHARPEY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I continue firmly convinced of the truth of all the statements contained in my paper on the ganglia and nerves of the uterus, published in your journal on the 21st of November last. In the number for December 5th, I have preferred four charges against Dr. Sharpey, as a member of the Committee of Physiology and Council of the Royal Society:—

"The first charge is, that he pronounced a judgment at the Royal Society on an important question in science, respecting which he had neglected duly to inform himself."

"The second charge is, that, with several other members of the Committee of Physiology of the Royal Society, he held an illegal meeting, on the 27th Oct., 1845, at which irregular and unconstitutional proceedings took place, which deceived the Council, and have brought the deepest discredit on an institution the honour of which he was under a solemn obligation to defend."

"The third charge is, that he presented a report to the Committee of Physiology containing statements which have been demonstrated to be unsupported by facts."

"The fourth charge against Dr. Sharpey is, that he was a party to the violation of the regulations established by her Majesty Queen Victoria for the award of the highest scientific honours placed at the disposal of the Royal Society."

These accusations imply, not only misrepresentation, but injustice, and an utter disregard of the statutes of the Royal Society and the mandates of the Queen. Unable to refute these grave charges, and to remove the imputations which now rest upon him, Dr. Sharpey is compelled to be silent, and to take refuge under the frivolous pretext, that he does not feel himself "warranted, consistently with the reserve imposed on a member of the Council, and expected of a member of a Committee, to enter into further explanations respecting the proceedings of these bodies."

When Dr. Sharpey has answered these charges, and proved, to the satisfaction of all scientific men, that he discharged the sacred duty entrusted to him by the Council of the Royal Society in an enlightened, honourable, and impartial manner, and that he did not decide in the dark, without investigation, and contrary to the clearest evidence, I will then forgive him for his personal vituperations.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Dec. 1846.

ROBERT LEE.

SIR B. BRODIE ON SPINAL CURVATURES.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In *THE LANCET* of Dec. 12th, Sir Benjamin Brodie publicly declares to the profession, through a lecture delivered in the theatre of St. George's Hospital, on November 25th of the present year, that "when he first became engaged in a considerable private practice, and cases of curvature of the spine were presented to his observation, he was in doubt as to their nature and treatment; that he knew nothing of them from his own experience; that, in this respect, his education had been imperfect; and that he had learned nothing of them from his teachers." In reference to the imputation thus broadly thrown, at this distant period of time, on the character and attainments of those who presided over the school of Windmill-street at the beginning of the present century, I beg to state, that the teacher from whom Sir Benjamin Brodie learned much of his surgery, and nearly all of his anatomy, was the late James Wilson, the immediate successor of Dr. Baillie and Mr. Cruikshank in the school of Dr. William Hunter, and Professor of Anatomy and Surgery, at the time of his death, to the Royal College of Surgeons in London. From this distinguished surgeon and anatomist, with whom he was for some years associated as demonstrator and lecturer on anatomy, and subsequently as lecturer on surgery, it is impossible but that Mr. Brodie must have learned much that Sir Benjamin Brodie might, even now, with advantage remember. It is in the full recollection of the many surviving pupils of my late father, that he taught the spine, like all he did teach, as one who understood what he undertook, and that he directed, on all fitting occasions, an earnest and special attention to the several deviations, by curvature, of the vertebral column, and to their appropriate treatment by surgical or other means. It will likewise be remembered by these gentlemen, that the museum of Windmill-street, formed principally by Mr. Wilson's own hand, was rich in preparations illustrating this very interesting branch of anatomical surgery; and it is, moreover, well known that Sir Benjamin Brodie availed himself to the utmost, during the long period of his connexion with this celebrated school, of the many opportunities which it afforded him for improvement and advancement in his profession. How, then, is it possible that Sir Benjamin Brodie, in cases of curvature of the spine, should have learned from his teachers (I use his own word) nothing! Those who may be at first misled by this declaration of Sir Benjamin Brodie, in disparagement of his former teacher and colleague, will find abundant reason to revise their opinion by perusing the chapter on "Rickets, as affecting the Spine and Pelvis," in "Wilson's Lectures on the Bones and Joints," delivered before the London College of Surgeons, in the summer of 1820, and published in the ensuing autumn. To this chapter of thirty pages, (as to the volume generally,) there is not a surgeon, however worthy, of the present day, who might not, with advantage, refer, for a clear, sound exposition of the diseases affecting the bony and articular structures, for approved and original methods of treatment, and for a manly, generous appreciation of the labours of others in the same department of knowledge. In the voluminous notes of my late father's Lectures, and in his admirable manuscript catalogue of his museum, now in the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, I have further evidence, for those who need it, that in cases of curvature of the spine, there was good anatomical surgery in England, even before Sir Benjamin Brodie "first became engaged in a considerable private prac-

tice;" and that, at least, as far as the late James Wilson, the lecturer, was concerned, the many scores and hundreds of professional men educated at the old Hunterian School of Windmill-street in the war-time, could not have been so utterly weak, and wanting in the very backbone of their art, as one of their teachers, with unconscious forgetfulness, now proclaims himself to have been.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

JAMES ARTHUR WILSON,

Senior Physician to St. George's Hospital.

Dover-street, Dec. 12th, 1846.

P.S.—I subjoin a few remarks, extracted from a little volume published by myself some years back, which will prove that my opinions respecting Mr. Wilson's merit in the treatment of curvatures of the spine have not been hastily adopted.

Weakness of the Spinal Muscles.—"The pathological importance of muscular agency receives its full illustration in the symptoms and treatment of spinal disease. The cure of a crooked back may be often effected by the healthy exercise of its own muscles. My late father, ingenuous and humane in all his proceedings, never failed to enforce this simple anatomical truth, by instruction, as in practice. Many young growing girls (now, it may be, the handsome mothers of healthy families) were by him raised from the horizontal boards, or released from the casing irons, to which, from mere weakness of fibre, and with no just cause of vertebral disease, they had been by others condemned. Placing a light weight on their heads, and desiring them to poise it as they walked, he thus practically taught the equilibrium of the spinal column by the tonic power of its double supporting muscles. The one model that he exhibited for imitation to his young clients of fashion, was the Irish basket-woman, head-laden, yet erect, on her way to market from the garden.

MR. WHITLAW'S "MEDICAL PRINCIPLES."

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—IN THE LANCET of Nov. 21st, you inquire whether any one knows anything of the "medical principles of Mr. Whitlaw"? Some years ago, I had the honour of sailing, or rather steaming, to Edinburgh in the same vessel with that scientific gentleman, and I well remember being highly entertained by an exposition of his views respecting the cause of cancer, which he affirmed to be, the using, as an article of diet, butter made from the milk of cows fed in pastures where ranunculi were growing!

I do not know whether this opinion still constitutes one of Mr. Whitlaw's "medical principles," but I have a shrewd suspicion that it is at least equally deserving, with the rest, of the confidence and support of the profession.

Wishing you every success in your war of extermination against quackery, of every kind and shape, I remain, your obedient servant,

X.

Torquay, Devon, Dec. 1846.

P. S.—I subjoin my name and address for authentication.

ANOTHER correspondent, whose experience seems to have been much more extended than that of the foregoing, says—

It is with no very pleasurable feelings that I proceed to answer your question, "Does any one know anything of the medical principles of Mr. Whitlaw"?—because in doing so I must express myself to have been for a short time one of the dupes in "his sphere of action."

Our correspondent details how, after having acquired a certain amount of medical knowledge, he was induced "to pay Mr. Whitlaw a visit:"—

I found him (he says) to be a man possessed of a thorough knowledge of human nature; and I have no doubt that he at once discovered my inexperience of the world. He began, in a most specious manner, to point out the advantages of his system in the relief and cure of numerous diseases; showed me letters which he had received from noblemen, and even medical men, upon the subject; put into my hands a large volume, entitled "Whitlaw's Medical Discoveries,"—at the same time recommending me to have one of his baths, and offering to sell me the patent right of using it: and with this all the information concerning the new and powerful remedies which he had discovered by his botanical researches in the wilds of America, where he intended to return as soon as he had thoroughly established his nephew in London. I heard his arguments; I saw his dispensary; I conversed with some young men whom he called his pupils. He told me of his great success in New York, where he said he had an establish-

ment—his system of preserving plants for medical purposes; in short, he at length, before I left his house, completely bamboozled me out of a sum of money for his bath, patent right, medicines, &c., and requested me to try the system, and to let him know the results. I began to try it upon some of my patients, and in a few anomalous cases it certainly appeared to do good. I wrote him a letter, informing him of these cases, but finishing with the request, that as I had now tried the remedies, I might know their composition. The first part of my letter he published in one of his reports, with my name attached. The second part he answered by saying, that it would be of no use telling me the composition of the remedies, for that I could not get them except through him, for they were the extracts, barks, and leaves, of American plants, which were only prepared by him. The scales at once fell from my eyes—I saw the position in which I had placed myself; and the mortification at being so easily duped—the disgrace I felt at allying myself with quackery—annoyed and vexed me beyond anything I can describe. I need hardly say I ceased at once to follow a system which had caused me so much mental distress; and I look back to this transaction as a dark blot upon the escutcheon of my professional reputation. My medical friends have kindly forgotten it, but the remembrance of it will always be painful to myself.

The so-called "principles of Whitlaw" consist of—

1st. That all diseases have their origin in vegetable poisons, introduced into the stomach, either primarily, by the vegetable food of man, or secondarily, by the flesh of animals who have partaken of this food. Hence, he inculcates the importance of eradicating all poisonous plants from pastures and cornfields, such as belong to the class *ranunculacæ* &c. I have myself seen one of his disciples go to great expense to dig up all the buttercups out of a field in which a cow for the use of the family was to pasture.

2ndly. That vegetable remedies solely are beneficial in the cure of diseases.

3rdly. That the volatile properties of medicines carried up by the vapour of boiling water, and applied to the skin, and breathed by the lungs, have an extraordinary beneficial effect.

The first of these so-called "principles" is the mere assertion of ignorance without any proof of its truthfulness. That buttercups, and many other acrid plants, when introduced into the human organism, would produce deleterious effects, there can be no doubt, but this very acridity may act most beneficially as a stimulant when received with a quantity of succulent food into the stomach of a quadruped; and as these plants flourish most abundantly in the richest natural pastures, we are reasonably led to infer that, independent of the nourishment they afford, they also serve some useful purpose.

The second principle hardly needs refutation, as all medical experience proves its fallacy; besides which, many of the elements necessary for the growth and wants of the body are of mineral origin, and although entering it in the organism of plants or animals, have still retained their inorganic forms.

Whether the third principle advanced be true or not, there is nothing in it either new or original belonging to Mr. Whitlaw; it has been adopted by medical men from time immemorial, under various forms—such, for instance, as those of inunction, inhalation, &c. &c.

The bath he uses, and for which I believe he had a patent, possesses this difference from other vapour-baths—that the perforations through which the vapour passes are very fine, and therefore the patient breathes really vapour, and not steam.

His bath is a simple vapour-bath, and as such I have often used it, and now use it, in most rheumatic cases.

If the above confession, painful as it has been for me to make it, should be the means of preventing any young man inexperienced in the world from falling into the like error, I shall not have made it in vain.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

CHIRURGIUS.

THE ARMY-SURGEON AN EXECUTIONER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The extraordinary ignorance of the British public on all matters of a military nature is well enough known, and hardly requires being stated; but a letter, signed by "A Looker-on," having appeared in a late number of your valuable periodical, I cannot forbear giving him a little information on the subject, and correcting the false impression under which he seems to labour.

A paragraph is quoted from one of the daily papers, whose knowledge of facts ought to have been greater, in which it is stated, that a deserter had been branded by the surgeon of the