supervision of the Excise, used ten years since to be most extensively and scandalously adulterated, and the Cayenne especially, in ways detrimental to health.

Of the first batch of peppers examined by us in 1851, one-half were adulterated, this no doubt being attributable to the circumstance that the microscope had not at that date been employed for the discovery of adulteration. Consequent upon the application of that instrument to the detection of the many ingenious frauds practised upon nearly all articles of consumption, it is obvious, from the foregoing analyses, that the adulteration of pepper and of Cayenne, amongst many other articles, has greatly diminished.

SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE ON HOMŒOPATHY.*

(A LETTER TO J. S. S., ESQ.)

DEAR SIR,—You desire me to give you my opinion of what is called Homœopathy. I can do so without any great labour to myself, and without making any exorbitant demand on your patience, as the question really lies in very small compass, and what I have to say on it may be expressed in very few words.

The subject may be viewed under different aspects. We may inquire, first, whether Homœopathy be, of itself, of any value, or of no value at all? secondly, in what manner does it affect general society? and thirdly, in what relation does it stand to the medical profession?

I must first request of you to observe that, whatever I may think at present, I had originally no prejudice either in favour of or against this new system: nor do I believe that the members of the medical profession generally were in the first instance influenced by any feelings of this kind. The fact is, that the fault of the profession for the most part lies in the opposite direction. They are too much inclined to adopt any new theory or any new mode of treatment that may have been proposed; the younger and more inexperienced among them especially erring in this respect, and too frequently indulging themselves in the trial of novelties, disregarding old and established remedies. For myself, I assure you that, whatever opinion I may now hold, it has not been hastily formed. I have made myself sufficiently acquainted with several works which profess to disclose the mysteries of Homœopathy, especially that of Hahnemann, the founder of the Homœopathic sect, and those of Dr. Curie and Mr. Sharpe. The result is, that, with all the pains I have been able to take, I have been unable to form any very distinct notion of the system which they profess to teach. They all indeed begin with laying down, as the foundation of it, the rule that "*Similia similibus curantur*;" or, in plain English, that one disease is to be driven out of the body by artificially creating another disease similar to it. But there the resemblance ends. Hahnemann treats the subject in one way, Dr. Curie in another, and Mr. Sharpe in another way still. General principles are asserted on the evidence of the most doubtful and scanty facts; and the reasoning on them, for the most part, is thoroughly puerile and illogical. I do not ask you to take all this for granted, but would rather refer you to the books themselves; being satisfied that any one, though he may not be versed in the science of medicine, who possesses good sense, and who has any knowledge of the caution with which all scientific investigations should be conducted, will arrive at the same conclusions as myself.

But, subordinate to the rule to which I have just referred, there is another, which, by some of the homœopathic writers, is held to be of great importance, and which is certainly the more remarkable one of the two. The doses of medicine administered by ordinary practitioners are represented to be very much too large. It is unsafe to have recourse to them, unless reduced to an almost infinitesimal point; not only to the millionth, but sometimes even to the billionth of a grain. Now observe what this means. Supposing one drop of liquid medicine to be equivalent to one grain, then, in order to obtain the millionth part of that dose, you must dissolve that drop in thirteen gallons of water, and administer only one drop of that solution; while, in order to obtain the billionth of a grain, you must dissolve the aforesaid drop in 217,014 hogsheads of water. Of course, it is plain that this could not practically be accomplished, except by successive dilutions; and this would be a troublesome process. Whether it be at all probable that anyone ever undertook to carry it out, I leave you to judge. At

any rate, I conceive that there is no reasonable person who would not regard the exhibition of medicine in so diluted a form as being equivalent to no treatment at all.

But however this may be, I may be met by the assertion, that there is undoubted evidence that a great number of persons recover from their complaints under homœopathic treatment, and I do not pretend in the least degree to deny it. In a discourse addressed by myself to the students of St. George's Hospital, in the year 1838, I find the following remarks:—"There is another inquiry which should always be made before you determine on the adoption of a particular method of treatment: what will happen in this case if no remedies whatever be employed, if the patient be left altogether to nature or to the efforts of his own constitution? * * * * The animal system is not like a clock or a steam-engine, which, being broken, you must send to the clockmaker or engineer to mend it; and which cannot be repaired otherwise. The living machine, unlike the works of human invention, has the power of repairing itself; it contains within itself its own engineer, who, for the most part, requires no more than some very slight assistance at our hands." This truth admits, indeed, of a very large application. If the arts of medicine and surgery had never been invented, by far the greater number of those who suffer from bodily illness would have recovered nevertheless. An experienced and judicious medical practitioner knows this very well; and considers it to be his duty, in the great majority of cases, not so much to interfere by any active treatment, as to take care that nothing should obstruct the natural process of recovery, and to watch lest, in the progress of the case, any new circumstance should arise which would make his active interference necessary. If anyone were to engage in practice, giving his patients nothing but a little distilled water, and enjoining a careful diet, and a prudent mode of life otherwise, a certain number of his patients would perish from the want of further help; but more would recover; and homœopathic globules are, I doubt not, quite as good as distilled water.

But this does not account for all the success of homœopathy. In this country there is a large proportion of individuals who have plenty of money, combined with a great lack of employment; and it is astonishing to what an extent such persons contrive to imagine diseases for themselves. There is no animal machine so perfect that there may not at times be some creaking in it. Want of exercise, irregularity as to diet, a little worry of mind—these, and a thousand other causes, may occasion uneasy feelings, to which constant attention and thinking of them will give a reality which they would not have had otherwise; and such feelings will disappear as well under the use of globules as they would under any other mode of treatment, or under no treatment at all.

What I have now mentioned will go far towards explaining the success of homœopathy. But other circumstances occur every now and then, from which, when they do occur, it profits to a still greater extent. *Humanum est errare*. From the operation of this universal law medical practitioners are not exempt, any more than statesmen, divines, lawyers, engineers, or any other profession. There are cases in which there is a greater chance of too much than too little being done for the patient; and if a patient under such circumstances becomes the subject of homœopathic treatment, this being no treatment at all, he actually derives benefit from the change.

In a discourse to which I have already alluded, I thought it my duty to offer the following caution to my pupils:—"The first question which should present itself to you in the management of a particular case is this: Is the disease one of which the patient may recover, or is it not? There are, indeed, too many cases in which the patient's condition is so manifestly hopeless, that the fact cannot be overlooked. Let me, however, caution you that you do not in any instance arrive too hastily at this conclusion. Our knowledge is not so absolute and certain as to prevent even well-informed persons being occasionally mistaken on this point. This is true, especially with respect to the affections of internal organs. Individuals have been restored to health who were supposed to be dying of disease in the lungs or mesenteric glands. * * * * It is a good rule in the practice of our art, as in the common affairs of life, for us to look on the favourable side of the question, as far as we can consistently with reason do so." I might have added that hysterical affections are especially a source of error to not very experienced practitioners, by simulating more serious disease; seeming to resist for a time all the efforts of art, and then all at once subsiding under any kind of treatment, or, just as well, under none at all. Now, if it should so happen that a medical practitioner, from want of knowledge, or from a natural defect of judgment, makes a mistake in his diagnosis, and the patient

* From *Fraser's Magazine* for September, 1861.

whom he had unsuccessfully treated afterwards recovers under the care of another practitioner, it is simply said, "Dr. A. was mistaken;" and it is not considered as anything very remarkable that the symptoms should subside while under the care of Dr. B. But if, on the other hand, the recovery takes place under the care of a homœopathist, or any other empiric, the circumstance excites a much larger portion of attention; and we really cannot very well wonder that, with such knowledge as they possess of these matters, the empiric should gain much credit with the public.

So far the practical result would seem to be that homœopathy can be productive of no great harm; and indeed, considering it to be no treatment at all, whenever it is a substitute for bad treatment, it must be the better of the two. But there is great harm nevertheless. There are numerous cases in which spontaneous recovery is out of the question; in which sometimes the life or death of the patient, and at other times the comfort or discomfort of his existence for a long time to come, depends on the prompt application of active and judicious treatment. In such cases homœopathy is neither more nor less than a mischievous absurdity; and I do not hesitate to say that a very large number of persons have fallen victims to the faith which they reposed in it, and to the consequent delay in having recourse to the use of proper remedies. It is true that it very rarely happens, when any symptoms show themselves which give real alarm to the patient or his friends, that they do not dismiss the homœopathist and send for a regular practitioner; but it may well be that by this time the mischief is done, the case being advanced beyond the reach of art.

That the habit of resorting to homœopathic treatment which has prevailed in some parts of society should have occasioned much dissatisfaction among the mass of medical practitioners is no matter of wonder. It cannot be otherwise than provoking, to those who have passed three or four years of the best part of their lives in endeavouring to make themselves well acquainted with disease in the wards of an hospital, to find that there are some among their patients who resort to them for advice only when their complaints have assumed a more painful or dangerous character; while they are set aside in ordinary cases, which involve a smaller amount of anxiety and responsibility, in favour of some homœopathic doctor, who very probably never studied disease at all. But it cannot be helped. In all times there have been pretenders, who have persuaded a certain part of the public that they have some peculiar knowledge of a royal road to cure, which those of the regular craft have not. It is homœopathy now; it was something else formerly; and if homœopathy were to be extinguished, there would be something else in its place. The medical profession must be contented to let the thing take its course; and they will best consult their own dignity and the good of the public by saying as little as possible about it. The discussions as to the evils of homœopathy which have sometimes taken place at public meetings have quite an opposite effect to that which they were intended to produce. They have led some to believe that homœopathists are rather a persecuted race, and have given to the system which they pursue an importance which it would never have had otherwise; just as any absurd or fanatical sect in religion would gain proselytes if it could only make others believe that it was an object of jealousy and persecution. After all, the harm done to the regular profession is not so great as many suppose it to be; a very large proportion of the complaints about which homœopathists are consulted being really no complaints at all, for which a respectable practitioner would scarcely think it right to prescribe.

There was a time when many of the medical profession held the opinion that not only homœopathy, but all other kinds of quackery, ought to be put down by the strong hand of the law. I imagine that there are very few who hold that opinion now. The fact is, that the thing is impossible; and even if it were possible—as it is plain that the profession cannot do all that is wanted of them, by curing all kinds of disease, and making men immortal—such an interference with the liberty of individuals to consult whom they please would be absurd and wrong. As it now is, the law forbids the employment in any public institution of anyone who is not registered as being a qualified medical practitioner, after a due examination by some of the constituted authorities; and it can go no further. The only effectual opposition which the medical profession can offer to homœopathy is by individually taking all possible pains to avoid, on their own part, those errors of diagnosis by means of which, more than anything else, the professors of homœopathy thrive and flourish; by continuing in all ways to act honourably by the public; at the same time, never being in-

duced, either by good nature or by any motives of self-interest, to appear to give their sanction to a system which they know to have no foundation in reality. To join with homœopathists in attendance on cases of either medical or surgical disease would be neither wise nor honest. The object of a medical consultation is the good of the patient; and we cannot suppose that any such result can arise from the interchange of opinions where the views entertained or professed to be entertained by one of the parties as to the nature and treatment of disease are wholly unintelligible to the other.

I am, dear Sir, yours, &c.,

B. C. BRODIE.

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

CONSERVATIVE SURGERY.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The case of Conservative Surgery detailed by Dr. Nichols in your journal of the 24th ult. is, in my estimation, very important, and merits a niche in the memory of every surgical reader. It clearly shows that the *vis vite* is not, in many cases, destroyed by separation of one part of the living body from another. Two instances of this nature which have occurred in my own practice have been brought vividly to my recollection.

A boy, about twelve years of age, came running into my surgery, stating that in chopping wood he had cut off the top of one of his fingers, at the same time presenting me with the detached part, having a portion of the bone in it. I immediately replaced the part, and secured it by means of strips of plaster. To my great surprise, perfect adhesion took place, and in a very short time he was enabled to use it as though nothing had happened.

In another instance, a gentleman's valet, suffering from very severe facial pain, requested me to remove one of his under molars, and though I assured him the tooth was free from disease, it was extracted early in the morning. He put it in his waistcoat pocket, kept it there all day, and in the evening came again, requesting me to replace the tooth. With some little trouble I did so, and in about ten days it was as perfectly united by gomphosis as though it had never been removed.

I am, Sir, yours truly,

Ilfracombe, Sept. 1861.

JOHN JONES, M.R.C.S. Eng.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Having read the instances of Conservative—or, as I should prefer to term it, "Adjunctive" Surgery, in your impressions of the 24th and 31st ultimo, I am reminded of two cases in particular, amongst others, which came under my notice when house-surgeon at King's College Hospital, and which, with your permission, I beg to place on record.

In 1859, a man of about forty years of age was brought to the hospital in a state of intoxication. His companions informed me that he had been drinking at a public-house, and had fallen forwards, his nose coming violently in contact with the edge of the fender. On examining the injured part, I found the cartilaginous portion of the nose with its coverings cut off, and hanging by a minute thread of skin, this slender attachment being twisted several times on itself, so as effectually to arrest, for a time at least, any vascular supply to the separated part, which was already very blue, and much below the natural temperature of the body. I made no delay in adjusting the raw surfaces, using eight or ten sutures of fine silver wire to keep the edges in apposition. This patient made a rapid and excellent recovery. I saw him a month ago (in August), and found that there existed but very slight indications of the original accident.

The second case is that of a printer's boy, aged twelve, possessed of more than ordinary courage, who presented himself at the hospital, and said, "Please, sir, I've cut the top of my finger off." I inquired, "Where is the piece?" He replied, "I gave it to the porter." The porter accordingly produced, from a dirty bit of paper, the part alluded to, which proved to be the whole of the soft tissues of the ungual phalanx of the index finger of the boy's right hand. Neither the bone nor the adjacent joint was implicated. I adjusted the parts, using silver-wire sutures as in the former case, and encircled the finger and hand with cotton wool. The result was most satis-