

He next combats the objections which have been raised to the use of the ergot; and, in reply to those who are adverse to its medicinal employment, from the deleterious effects produced by bread containing portions of this grain, he says that many individuals have eaten for twenty days of bread into which the diseased grain entered in the proportion of an *eighth*, or even a *sixth* part, and yet have experienced no ill effect. Further, that Parmentier took every morning on an empty stomach, during eight days, half a drachm of the ergot, without any ill effect; and M. Goupil states, that he has taken two drachms and a half; vomiting, colicky pains, and headach, being the only bad effects experienced. It is unquestionably the fact, however, that in very large doses the spurred rye is a poison, and its effects, as a poison, are most remarkable on the nervous system, and on the abdominal viscera generally. But admitting this, it forms no argument against the use of the medicine; or we must, on the same ground, exclude all the important agents from the *materia medica*. Broussais, whose name entitles an objection to a respectful consideration, has stated that he is apprehensive this remedy must produce painful consequences to the nervous system, and thereby occasion a rupture of the uterus; but, as he has adduced no facts to substantiate this opinion, we must be allowed to deem the objection fanciful.

The strongest objection which has been made to the ergot, has been on the ground of its proving detrimental to the foetus; this assertion is met by the fact, that, in many hundred cases, the rye has been used with no injurious effect to the child. With respect to one of the heaviest charges brought against the ergot, namely, that of its being improperly employed to produce abortion, Dr. Neale expresses his belief that it has no action upon the uterus, "except when this organ, charged with the product of conception, tends to get rid of it."

From its peculiar effect in inducing contraction of the uterus, to which all our efforts, whether by pressure, the use of cold, or other means, are directed in cases of uterine hæmorrhage, the ergot has been given. Dr. Chapman, after considerable experience, pronounces it to be "highly beneficial" in such cases, and such is the opinion of various accoucheurs in America. Where the placenta is retained from *inertia* of the uterus, as also where there are clots of blood remaining in the womb, the ergot may be given with much advantage.

In conclusion, we may say of Dr. Neale's book, that we are of opinion it will be read with much interest by every obstetric practitioner. The author has taken great pains to collect all the scattered information extant, upon a highly important and practical question. At the end of the work a table is appended, which affords a view of more than 700 cases, in which the ergot of rye has been administered.

SKETCHES
OF THE
MEDICAL SCHOOLS OF SCOTLAND.
No. IX.
—
DR. ALISON.

PHYSIOGNOMISTS by impulse and habit, yet are we often deceived in the application of what appears to be one of the general laws of our disposition. We can scarcely meet an individual in the common intercourse of life, of whose character we do not instantly presume to form an opinion; and yet to judge in this precipitate manner, experience must have taught most persons, is, in the majority of instances, to come to a false conclusion on the subject of our scrutiny. There is, however, when rationally examined, nothing contradictory in the propensity which leads to these critical conjectures, though they so frequently fail in the attainment of their object. For purposes obvious and useful, a desire to be acquainted with the qualities of those with whom he communes has been implanted in

the breast of man ; but the reciprocal advantage of society required, that the signs from which this knowledge might be inferred, should be doubtful, and faintly expressed. For could we behold the operations of the mind through its index, the face ; penetrate the sanctuary of thought, through the mask of matter, and see the fearful mysteries which it conceals, man would then turn from his brother with the same horror as he now does from the tyger or the snake. Yet, taken in connexion with other circumstances, the countenance is a mirror to many in which they find a corroboration, and when facts are added, a demonstration of their suspicions. The information which we seek may be, and indeed often is, present in the page which we contemplate, though the letters are too indistinct to be deciphered by transitory inspection ; nature in this, as in other cases, having given the power and the means of accomplishing her designs, but wisely leaving the rest to our own exertion. Of these remarks, and at once of the truth, error, and difficulty of estimating men correctly by exterior indications alone, our theme affords an excellent illustration. Should you meet, for example, in the vicinity of the Royal Infirmary, about the hour of twelve, rather a tall, youthful, cross-made, plain-faced sort of personage, dressed in a black coat, blue trowsers, with, perhaps, the addition of a pair of gaiters, and his neckcloth worn in a style that would have thrown Brummel into hysterics, you might, very pardonably, mistake him for an overgrown schoolboy, who had run to seed in the wilds of Perthshire, before his growth had been checked by town air and college discipline. If along with these marks of personal identity, however, you perceive that he is surrounded by a group of supplicants, each pressing on his attention some tale of real or feigned distress, you may dismiss all doubt from your mind, for the gentleman who stands before you can be no other than the accomplished and philanthropic subject of the present sketch. Unacquainted with his rank, calling, and disposition, you might well be at a loss to discover the cause of one, whose appearance, at first sight, seems so little favourable to the supposition of his being an object of charitable and professional solicitation, being attended by such a levy of claimants on his bounty. But, informed of these particulars, how different will be the feelings with which you view the subject of your undiscerning curiosity ? Imagination, ever ready to exercise its wand in the composition of a harmonious system, out of the most discordant elements, will find a thousand properties in his person to correspond with those of his mind. In the plainness of his apparel, you will detect the

simplicity of the philosopher ; the seeming awkwardness of his figure, vanishes in the light of the smile hovering round his lips ; and, in the assemblage of wretched suitors who seek his services, you will recognise a homage to his talents and his virtues, more honourable than ever graced the thrones of princes. Follow him to the ward, to the lecture-room, and the house of mourning, where fancy fears to tread, and, as he applies the resources of his art by the bed side, explains the principles and results of his practice to an audience, and dissipates the cloud which lowers over the couch of indigence and suffering, each successive scene of his active existence will but reveal new charms in his person, while you will be unable to determine whether his skill as a physician, his excellence as a teacher, or his humanity as a philanthropist, shines the brightest in the splendid aggregation of his moral and intellectual attributes.

Reposing too much confidence in my own sagacity of measuring men by "externals," I confess I went to hear Dr. Alison with some doubts of his reputed qualifications. From a superficial observation, I found it difficult, with the doctrine of physiognomy haunting my mind, to reconcile popular opinion with so few indications to justify report. My theory, however, was not so much disproved as confirmed, when applied under the circumstances necessary to the success of the experiment. Having corrected my anticipations by a studious attention to his character, I may be permitted to offer the fruits of my observation, and to explain the grounds of their justice by describing him in the discharge of those duties in which he appears to me to warrant the conclusions come to on his merits. The miscellaneous nature of these duties, being a sort of "actor of all work" in the University of Edinburgh, without, perhaps, being the cause, develops one of the most remarkable features of his learning. Each of these offices claiming an equal share of his attention for its fulfilment, his energies have been expended, and with success, in reducing the various collateral sciences, of which medicine is composed, to his command. The exigencies of the situations which he holds, seem to have harmonised well with the cast and compass of his intellect. Without that concentration and enthusiasm, which carry men through the toils of extending the boundaries of science by discovery, it possesses the requisites of judgment for the selection of proper objects of study, perseverance for their attainment, and the faculty of skilful combination in applying to the cure and elucidation of disease, all that diffused information elaborated by individual enterprise and labour from the recesses of nature, but which often re-

mains useless, like ore separated from the mine, until depurated and united by the hand of industry and art. To be a discoverer in any one of these branches of medicine, which he wields with so much effect, he seems neither to have aspired nor to be qualified for the task; his reading and observation have, consequently, been directed to the single but important end of becoming a practical and scientific physician—that greatest and most useful consummation of medical, perhaps of all human study and science. The ward is, therefore, the dominion where his sovereign command over scientific agents may be witnessed producing their most salutary effects, and the clinical chair, the throne from which may be heard the principles of his therapeutical administration expounded with most advantage—to both which I shall now, for a few minutes, introduce the reader.

In advancing from the entrance to the rostrum of the clinical lecture-room, even one unacquainted with Dr. Alison might discover, in his deportment, a clue to an understanding of those peculiarities which the professor is about to disclose. He picks his way to his seat with as much collectedness of ideas, and caution against a false movement, as if he had been ascending a complicated chain of reasoning in his closet, where the fear of losing one link of the series steadied each feature, and confined every motion within the limits of logical precision. He neither evinces the breathless impatience and boisterous good humour of one of Dr. Graham's *exordia*, nor the asthmatic pomposity of one of Dr. Home's introductions, after gaining the summit of one of those interminable staircases of our University, of which it might be said, in more senses than one :—

“ Oh ! who can tell how hard it is to climb
The steep where Fame's proud temple shines
afar.”

His gown, which effects a most favourable metamorphose in his appearance, falls over his lusty limbs in folds as graceful and regular as the lineaments of his face are destitute of all signs of agitation. Without the slightest effort at a dignified composure, he is as calm and collected as if the eyes of an audience had not been fixed on him, and the responsibility to confuse him, of settling an account of some half dozen of cases with studious creditors, many of whom are competent judges of the process. The most delightful part of the picture is its freedom from insensibility of temperament and indifference to the circumstances in which he is placed. He is composed, but conscious. By any observer of common discernment, it must be perceived, that the confidence which he assumes is the result of a know-

ledge of the difficulty of the duty which he is called on to discharge, and of his own power for its performance. Such self-possession, regulated by the most exquisite perception of propriety, and tempered with his natural modesty, communicates to his countenance an inexpressible charm of serious meekness, in which the light of benevolence is harmoniously blended with the severer ray of studious austerity :—

“ A certain tender gloom o'erspread his face,
Pensive, not sad ; in thought involv'd, not
dark.”

In the mere outlines of his face there is nothing more remarkable than their regularity, its beauty obviously depending more on the emanations of the mind than on any physical properties of matter or form ; it is lengthy, elliptical, usually pallid, its component parts of the due proportion, and but indifferently filled up with muscle, which, from the consequent prominence of cheek bones, might incline some observers to include him within the pale of national beauty. The forehead is by no means of that order which man, in his audacity to penetrate the secrets of nature, has alone associated with the presence and even the causation of the higher degrees of genius. Its capacity, indeed, is less in all directions than what is commonly observed among the big-headed blockheads of the multitude, distinguished by not one particle of the talents which he possesses. The whole head is so devoid of those masses of brain and bone, which are said to be the laboratories of thought, that I doubt if any one of the organs, corresponding to his palpable qualities, could really be discovered by the most expert cranioscopist. The contour of the whole, indeed, is a much more excellent illustration of the doctrine of Lavater than of Spurzheim ; the expression arising more out of the harmonious groupings of the features of the face, than the deeper-seated indications of talent belonging to the skull. To these it is indebted for that fascination which it exercises over the spectator, who, if he do not feel, on looking into that eye, the light and heat of benevolence beaming on him, like an evening glow of sunshine, blessing and blessed by all on whom it falls, can have no perception of those signs by which kindred minds hold communion with the external world. His voice, as might almost *a priori* be expected from his equanimity, is rather feeble, and modulated in delivery, at the sacrifice of animation and emphasis, to nearly one key ; it is slightly nasal in its quality, smacks slightly of the “ Doric” accent, and, from the extreme slowness with which it is evolved, might to many seem monstrous ; it is never, however, the medium of infractions of grammar, or of infelicitous diction,

the speakerscrupulously observing that custom of his countrymen, to arrange his ideas before their utterance.

He is, of all the medical reasoners whom I have ever heard, the most impartial, and least influenced by any feeling save the desire of discovering naked, abstract truth. Others preface their discourses by professions of impartiality—affect extreme candour, and all that sort of thing—Dr. Alison does nothing of this; for, not suspecting himself, he never thinks of warning others of a deception, of which he himself is totally incapable. He proceeds direct to his subject; states its relations fairly and fully; selects for the object of his criticism its acknowledged import; allows for the feasible reasons by which it may have been supported; combats it by facts and arguments of a stronger and more convincing description; and condemns by legitimate deductions alone. There is no effort to overreach an author—no exertion to amuse a class by the sound of a doctrine broken by excessive tension—if it give way, the fault is in the tissue, not in the test by which it is tried. He would seem, indeed, to take it for granted, on those occasions, that every writer is as honest in writing as he is in the analysis of the composition; a mistake which must excite the smile of all who are aware that authors, in general, are as seldom in error from ignorance as from design; the fertile points of their production being better known to themselves than to their readers. In his critical comments on authors, he does not, like Dr. Monro, “forbear to mention names,” the most malignant and contemptible species of attack; nor, after consigning a writer, for the length of a lecture, to a sort of logical purgatory, relieve him from his torments, like Dr. Hamilton, by a final damnation; nor track him through the field of discovery, in all languages, from Moscow to Misenum, like Dr. Duncan, merely to arrive at the ultimate idea or germ of his opinion; nor overturn his statements by a sublime burst of indignant negation, like his colleague, Dr. Graham.—Nothing, indeed, can exceed the painful accuracy, with which he goes through the ritual of logical sacrifice to the divinity of abstract truth, without inflicting a wound on the victim. A theoretical structure, which he proposes to abolish, is taken asunder atom by atom, and its substitute built up with the same scrupulous precision. With the art of blasting in criticism, by which the members of a system, or an author, are rent to pieces by a single explosion, and with that secret of medical architecture by which fairy fabrics are suspended in the air, he seems perfectly unacquainted. His progress in the transmutation of one of these elegant but evanescent creations, resembles

the process of petrification, in which the perishable materials of animal and vegetable productions are removed particle by particle, while others of a more permanent consistence are deposited in their place. He is pains-taking and punctilious in this respect, perhaps to a fault; explaining the simplest proposition with as much attention to its perfect intelligibility, as if he were demonstrating the mechanism of a toy to an audience of children. Notwithstanding the extent of the sources from which he draws the substance of his lectures—sources which include whatever is to be found in the works of every country enriched by much original observation—his disquisitions seem tedious, because from the slowness and perspicuity with which they are arranged, his conclusions are anticipated by the more acute portion of his class, many of whom I have seen smile at his minuteness as a supererogation for their understandings. He might, consequently, with a reasonable hope of an increased popularity with his class, confide a little more in their quickness of perception—enliven his discourses occasionally with a few of Dr. Graham’s sentimental vollies, instead of letting his ideas off, in one of his lectures, like the slow but steady scintillations of a schoolboy’s devil.

It is perhaps in the ward, in his intercourse with a class of persons whose condition unhappily renders them anything but objects of sympathy, that his manner assumes its utmost charm, and his talents may be witnessed to most advantage. There, day after day, without an instance of irritability to interrupt the suavity of his manner, may be seen the very personation of philanthropy, his genial presence composing into repose the haggard heart-broken looks of disease and despair. In his melancholy duties towards these unfortunates, the fine halo of light illuminating his serene brow, and fed by the mild pure rays issuing from an iris floating in its own transparent fount of mercy, like the soft azure of the Turkois seen through a carriage of crystal, never suffers one moment’s obscuration. Unmoved by the trying but pardonable querulousness of the sick, his voice, sweet as the faint echoes heard in the secret recesses of the benevolent heart alone, during its aspirations for universal happiness, is even ready to sooth, if it cannot promise more to the last lingering tortures of humanity. There is a balminess in its tones, a witchery in its gentle felicitating modulations, which, falling on the agonised senses of the afflicted, seems like the notes of Orpheus in another world, capable of making

“The furies sink upon their iron beds,
And snakes, uncured, hang listening
round their heads,”

which haunt the last hours of torture and of life. He never forgets that these wretches, whom fortune has cast in his way, are beings as delicately organised as himself, are endowed with the same sensibility, and that all those weaknesses of man, which, even in a state of health, he is often unable to command, are rendered still more ungovernable during disease. The unbounded gratitude and respect of all who happen to come under his care, are best measure of his amenity of demeanour to the sick, many of whom I have heard unite his name with their last aspirations to heaven. The confidence of the patient—that metaphysical drug, of which so much has been written, but available by so few—is with him as manageable as any article of the *Materia Medica*. It forms a necessary adjuvant in all his prescriptions; for, having nothing to conceal from the sick, their suspicions are not roused by that affectation of sincerity, which awakens instead of allaying distrust. They do not detect the bitterness of the pill through its gilding; his medicine is administered in a more agreeable medium than can be commanded by the disguise of art. In all his actions, may be seen the benevolence of his motives, and the goodness of his heart, as distinctly as if he had been formed after the mythological model of man, with a window in his breast, or as if he had been one entire vitrification. His practice, though seconded by whatever aid confidence in its correctness can impart, stands in no need of the magic influence of imagination. Its character is, probably, most strongly marked by the negative quality of being regulated by the axioms of no particular theory or established empiricism; “*nulius addictus jurare verba magistri*,” being its fundamental principle. In the reputable sense of the phrase, he is a symptomatologist, without rejecting speculation merely as such, or depriving his patients of the benefits of empirical practice, merely because he cannot, like some sages of the day, understand the connexion between the properties of a drug, and its salutary effects on disease. No such theoretical horror of theories haunts his mind, or absurd fear of appearing ignorant of an unintelligible species of agency. He is a Cullenian, as far as he finds the doctrines of that celebrated individual correspond with more recent discoveries; but his adoption of the better parts of that system, does not prevent him, as it has done with many others, keeping an eye on John Brown. He bleeds, for example, in fever, but does not substitute pounds for ounces, like some of his colleagues, in his scale of depletion; he stimulates too in the same affection, but without reducing the “febrifuges” to a box of opium, and a bottle of brandy. His treat-

ment, in short, as might be expected from his tolerant spirit, and the tendency of his mind to decide every question by dispassionate reflection, is the application of the most rational and approved principles of every writer to the exigencies of the particular case, in the detection of which he evinces an exquisite tact. The morbid dissections, in the theatre of the Royal Infirmary, during his attendance in the clinical wards, have verified as many of his predictions as were ever proved to be correct in the practice of his most celebrated predecessors. To his prognostications I am partly indebted for my belief, in the possibility of predicting with so much accuracy during life, the organic lesions which destroy it. So many instances of this kind have come under my observation, that were minute details consistent with these pen-and-ink outlines, in which the more prominent features alone of the figure can be given, they would be too numerous to be particularised; but while on the subject of prognosis, I must observe, by way of appendix, for the consolation of my friend and admirer Dr. James Johnstone, that Dr. Alison has a fine ear for the stethoscope, but that his admiration of that instrument ends, when the question of its utility is started.

If the example of a Tully, being blessed with a Mark, did not disprove the principle of the hereditary descent of talent, and the influence of education alone in the formation of character, there would be little difficulty in finding the origin of those abilities and moral qualities by which Dr. Alison is distinguished, in his being the son of the benevolent and celebrated preacher of that name in Edinburgh, author of a well-known work on taste, and a book of much admired sermons. Educated within the sphere of so much paternal virtue and genius, it is not surprising his natural disposition should have produced such fruits, under favourable cultivation. From the indications of general reading, evinced in his prelections, his extra-professional acquirements would seem to be equal to his proficiency in the purely medical sciences. Yet, it is extraordinary, that with so many qualifications, he should not have succeeded in private practice in proportion to his deserts, his time and talents being, for the most, expended in attendance on the poor, into whose loathsome habitations he may be daily seen entering, with the same cheerfulness as when visiting the inmates of a palace. Though the friend of humanity can scarcely regret such an expenditure of science and benevolence, yet must he regret, that there is no retributive principle of action in the conduct of the public, to remunerate the possessor of so much merit, with some more substantial reward than the reputation for

abilities, and their exercise for generous ends. In this respect, however, he is not a solitary instance of public caprice, which has not unfrequently paid the penalty of its own want of discernment, by giving to the pallet of straw an exclusive monopoly of the first-rate genius ; while it has added to the tortures of the bed of down, by its patronage of imbecility and ignorance. As yet, he has afforded the profession but few opportunities of estimating him as a writer ; but the cause may be found, not in his incompetency to make himself known through such a medium, but in his notions of what books ought to be. He is one of those who, struck with the doubtful propriety of publishing large works, without perhaps a single novel idea, and with the practicability and expediency of condensing much information into short essays, has assisted, by his example, to introduce that system of communicating new facts through periodical journals and the records of societies, which, at present, prevails among most men of taste and sound judgment. The age, indeed, of big books, is rapidly expiring ; octavo and quarto advertisements no longer answer the ends of their publication. Men have, at length, come to the rational opinion, that the discoveries of few individuals can be of sufficient extent and importance to justify the imposition of a general book-tax on the profession ; and that the structure of medical science may be raised at a cheaper price, and in a more durable manner, by small contributions from the talents and experience of the multitude, than by the single exertions of a few, however valuable or voluminous. The few productions which have as yet emanated from his pen, have been executed in this prudent spirit, and will serve as illustrations of the remarks which have been hazarded on his information and style. They breathe of that candour and elegance of manner, which have made him the general favourite of all with whom he happens to come in contact. What he may do hereafter to realise the expectations of those best acquainted with his character, remains to be seen ; but, at present, he is justly looked upon by all, as the most promising scion of the old stock of the university, in the management of which, as far as he is concerned, he acts in the most liberal and upright manner. In his classical taste and accomplishments as a practical physician, many recognise the blossom which may ripen into the reputation of a Gregory ; but even with an equality of talent to warrant the prediction, there are many reasons against his ever attaining to the celebrity of that gifted individual. As science grows older, she becomes like the miser, more tenacious of her treasures ; and each succeeding discovery is disbursed to her vota-

ries, with a more penurious hand. The difficulty of invention seems to grow with the advanced date of the exertion, and the necessary increase of its intrinsic value ; first, from the more general pre-occupation of the field ; and, secondly, from the higher degree of excellence demanded in the product of labour. As man, in the audacity of his enterprise, raises each year a portion of the veil of Nature, she appears to become more jealous of her charms—to shrink into her mystic sanctuary from his intrusive curiosity—and to permit every subsequent glance to be obtained only by greater vigilance and perseverance on the part of her lovers. Her first admirers had, in this respect, a manifest advantage over their successors ; they gained with comparative facility a knowledge of her more palpable and general qualities, and secured a reputation extensive and permanent in proportion to the magnifying ignorance of the times in which they lived. They stood in the same relation to her modern suitors, as the first settlers in a country to future colonists. To the former, the face of nature was open. The hill, the mountain, the plain, the valley, the river, and the ocean, were all subject to their selection ; they might take the most fertile provinces, without the interruption of competitors, or their right of appropriation being contested. To the latter, antecedent possession has limited the sphere of choice, and renders the exercise of industry difficult, where every acre maintains its man. Whether these disadvantages will be overcome by Dr. Alison, his friends have yet to learn ; whose character I cannot conclude better than in the words of Pope :

“ Of manners gentle, of affections mild,
In wit, a man—simplicity, a child.”

SCOTUS.

Edinburgh, May, 1828.

LITHOTOMY ON THE HORSE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I understand you have been gulled into a belief that lithotomy was performed on a horse in Liverpool ; neither I nor any other person present saw either the stone extracted, or the stone after extraction. It is pretended, by some of the parties concerned, that a Mr. Bickerstaff, Surgeon, carried the stone away. This case ought to be cleared up a little, since it is said by some of the best informed of the veterinary faculty, to be impossible to tell whether a horse has stone or not, seeing that no instrument can be passed into the bladder along the penis.—Yours, &c.

ANTHUMBUG.