ON RODERICK MACLEOD'S

"NECESSARY SYSTEM OF THINGS."

"Evil, be thou my good."—MILTON.

TO JAMES JOHNSTONE, ESQ., M.D.

MY DEAR DOCTOR,—Time, in his varied progress, brings no hours to me more agreeable than those in which I occasionally communicate to you my opinions on passing events, in one of these epistolatory oïos. Free from the labour of studied composition, and the fear of criticism, the correspondence passing between us is but a relief from more serious avocations; for though some of these bagatelles have passed, I perceive, through your partiality, from the port-folio to the press, still I must persevere in looking on them as private communications, and indulge in that freedom of style and sentiment which have characterised their predecessors. This short explanation I think due, for the past, to some persons who were pleased to take offence at the levity of my former remarks, and as a preventive against any future surprise that might be felt, should any more of these papers be made public.

The paucity of interesting occurrences in the medical world, during the interval of my late silence, has been amply compensated by a discovery in ethics, which promises to immortalise the name of its author, and to set at rest, for ever, the controversy which has so long and unhappily disturbed the peace of our profession. Taken in its true and comprehensive sense, it completely refutes every argument advanced against it, and satisfactorily justifies the hitherto supposed imperfections of our medical institutes. You, who have so zealously combated the supporters of reform with such indifferent success, can readily estimate the value of a controversial weapon of this kind, which, like the arrows of Philoctetes, places victory in the hands of the possessor almost without exertion. Henceforward, indeed, I expect you will draw no more on public commiseration, by complaining of the "morbid sensibility" of your stomach, nor pine away under the consciousness that your endeavours to support the dignity and integrity of the profession, have been productive only of obloquy to yourself, and ruin to your constitution. If you do not find, in this invention, a tonic more potent than ever herb or mineral yielded, the hopelessness of your case strikes me with a melancholy prescience. But, not to deprive you longer of the restorative pleasure which you must derive from this wonderful discovery, or to injure its authority further by withholding his name, I shall proceed to put you in possession of

both; and here, I am sure, its merit will be enhanced, when you learn that it emanates from your beloved friend and fellow-labourer, Doctor Roderick Macleod. As it is probable that, like all important revelations, the origin of this will form an era for his disciples, I regret, extremely, my inability to add the date and circumstances of its promulgation; for, in matters of this description, one is anxious to be acquainted with every little particular, even the colour of the night-cap, and the side on which the author of so splendid a discovery rested during its conception and delivery. I find it announced, however, in one of the leading articles, in Roderick's Journal, as follows. I must request of you not to decide, at first sight, on its merits, for it is only by study and mature reflection, that these become manifest:—"Our present aim," says Roderick, "is, that on one point, which we select from a thousand other topics, it is unreasonable to expect any thorough alteration in what must be considered *the necessary system of things*, and that, therefore, a mere change of agents would not go to the root of the supposed evil. The subject on which we would argue, is the objection which has been frequently made to the interested motives of physicians and surgeons to public establishments. Now, in the common cry which has been raised against this circumstance, there is something, to a man who knows the world, so utterly contemptible, that he would not have bestowed a word on it, had he not been aware that it is not to the intelligent, but to the ignorant, that this sort of declaration is addressed."—Such is the substance of the doctrine, on the truth or falsehood of which depends the question, whether you and I are ever again to meet in hostile collision, and whether (which is of scarcely less importance) the profession is to suspend its endeavours to improve its institutions, and remain, forevermore, content with their present defective condition. You will please to observe, that if the allegations of this statement be correct, there is at once an end to the efforts which have been making to regenerate those bodies from the errors into which they were imagined to have fallen. The facts, the reasoning, and the prospects of amelioration founded on them by the Reformers, all vanish before this "new light;" and the only consolation left them is, that they have not succeeded, because, according to their first apologist, Roderick, they could not perform impossibilities. As I understand this proposition, it admits that our present system is bad, but declares that it cannot be remedied, because mankind are so incorrigibly selfish, that the removal of one set of bad agents would only make way for another. Specious, my dear Doctor, as this sweeping

sylogism appears, it does not entirely satisfy me; it strikes me, that a most important consideration has been omitted in its composition. While the author of it invests the whole human race with one common attribute, he confines its operation to a few only; in other words, while he arms the multitude with a powerful defence against aggression, and for the attainment of the general good, he, by some confusion of ideas, permits the minority alone to use it to their advantage. What the selfishness of the remainder permitted them to be at all this time, does not appear, and I fear there must be some mistake here. To me, at least, it seems, that the property of humanity on which Roderick builds his "necessary system of evil," is precisely the one which, like the sword of Telephus, should afford a remedy for the injury it occasionally inflicts. For, as the self-interest of the many should be more powerful in action, and more consulted in the ordinances of any given portion of society, one would think that the good of the multitude, instead of the aggrandisement of a few, should follow from the influence of this great preservative against the evils which it sometimes originates. Besides, the question is not what self interest has done, or will do; it embraces another serious item, and that is, what it will be permitted to do. There can be no doubt, that if it were allowed to work unrestrained, as Roderick takes for granted that it ought, it would achieve wonders; but its miracles cease with the permission for their performance. The moment this license is withdrawn, there is an end to its operation. You will perceive that a very different view is here taken of self-interest from that taken of it in the proposition we are analysing; and that a totally opposite conclusion is drawn from Roderick's premises. So far, indeed, is this quality of human nature from being necessarily productive of evil, that it is the source of most of the good which man enjoys; for, as Mr. Pope very justly and philosophically observes, "social and self-love are the same," which of course they could not be were they incompatible with each other; it is only when it is allowed to exceed its legitimate ends, as in those institutions which Roderick takes under his patronage, that it becomes injurious to society, through its own negligence. It was probably from an observance of its excesses in these bodies, without considering the cause of the aberration from its proper course, that led Roderick to fall into the mistake which I humbly suggest he has committed, by inferring the perpetuity and justification of a particular evil from its mere existence.

After the partial glance which has just been taken at the physiology of self-interest,

it will not be difficult to understand the folly of making it the basis of any "necessary system" at all, much less of an evil one. To talk of any ordinance established by man himself as necessary or immutable, is a palpable contradiction, and what is still worse, to deprive him altogether of the little free-will which he possesses. A higher authority than either of us, Doctor, states, in a disquisition on political systems, that—"No usage, law, or authority whatsoever is so binding, that it need, or ought, to be continued, when it may be changed with advantage to the community." Observe, that the expediency of change established in this rule, supposes the power of execution, for Paley never dreamed that men could not govern themselves in what manner they pleased. If a whole nation may, and can, thus alter a constitution, or any part of it, it is hard to find any just ground why a less complex system might not be amended. In society in general, or in any specific department of it, some scheme is certainly "necessary" for its government; but what that system is to be, entirely rests with the community who compose it. The "necessity," merely extends to the existence, not to the quality of the system; Roderick, however, goes a step further; he talks of man as he would of matter, by subjecting him to invariable laws, and confounds final with efficient causes,—general obligations with the particular details of their fulfilment. The error seems to have arisen from Roderick's not discriminating between what is necessary and what is not so. A multitude of examples might be selected to prove this confusion on his part, but one will suffice. The rigour of our climate renders clothes necessary, yet we have not heard of Boreas turning a dictator in fashions, as we have been left the poor option of selecting the shape and shade of our raiment, precisely as we may cut out a constitution for our own government, according to our fancy or our judgment. Roderick's argument supposes a still greater absurdity than even those which have just been noticed. Were systems inviolable, and men incapable of altering them, in what condition would the world be now? Precisely in the same state in which it commenced. How a gentleman, clothed in broad-cloth, and comfortably lodged even in a garret, could reason thus, is to me, my dear Doctor, a matter of amazement; for, were his principles true, instead of enjoying these luxuries of life, he would be domiciled in a "wigwam" and habited in nothing less elegant than a "sheep-skin." "Advance," cry reason and experience, "to the utmost limits of your capability, and improve your condition." "Stand at ease," exclaims corporal Macleod, "you have not

capabilities for improvement, nor have you progressed a single degree beyond your original state ; but, like the culprit on the treadmill, imagine you are advancing with the motion of the machine."

Adieu for the present.

ERINENSIS.

Dublin, Sept. 23, 1829.

REMARKS ON DR. CLANNY'S THEORY OF
TYPHUS.

By ———, M. D.

FOUR-AND-TWENTY years devoted to the exercise of the medical art, furnish a fair and legitimate reason for receiving practical opinions with respect, and all hypothesis with extreme caution ; with your permission, therefore, I intend offering a few brief comments upon Dr. CLANNY'S Theory of Typhus, promulgated in your last number ; not I trust, in the spirit of captious objection, but in that of a sincere admiration of the talent and industry displayed in his research, and a hearty concurrence in his *practical* views, however much I may differ from him in concurring that the speculative doctrines by which they are attended, either form a connected theory, or are capable of accounting for the symptoms of the disease to which they are applied.

If I correctly understand Dr. Clanny's theory, it is simply this : that a cessation of the actions producing chyle, and a consequent cessation of the actions producing blood ; or, a suspension of digestion and sanguification ; constitute the first link in the chain of morbid phenomena, displayed by typhus fever, and are, in fact, the proximate cause of the disease. While the facts on which this deduction rests, are the gradual approach of the blood to a lymphatic character during the increase of the disease, and the gradual approximation of that fluid to what may be termed a fibrinous or albuminous character during its decline. The facts themselves I have, of course, no reason to doubt ; the inference drawn from them I conceive by no means warranted by the premises on which it rests.

In all severe constitutional diseases, and particularly in all attended by the state called fever, each individual function of the body suffers an interruption proportionate to the intensity of the cause in operation. In common with the rest, the whole process of nutrition throughout the extensive series of actions which intervene between the reception of the food by the mouth, till its final assimilation, are unquestionably interfered with, and hence the blood is deprived of that nutritive supply upon which it depends for

the due performance of its important duties. But are we on that account entitled to assume that the pre-existence of some impediment to the act of chyliification has been the cause of the general or constitutional symptoms ; or is it not at least a more probable supposition, that the general affection has given rise to the impediment existing in the individual organs ; that the cessation in digestion is, in fact, an *effect*, not a *cause*, of the general disease ?

I will not say that Dr. C. is called upon to show how the *remote* causes of fever act in originating that suspension of the digestive function which he supposes to constitute its *proximate cause* ; in our inquiries into the origin of many diseases, this link must, perhaps, be for ever wanting, and certainly has never been supplied, at least adequately supplied, by any theory of fever, from Cullen down to Broussais. But I do say he is called upon to show why the known and appreciable existence of the state referred to, namely, an interruption of the actions producing chyle, is not at all times followed by the *same* effects ; how it happens that persons for a time cut off from a supply of nourishment, are not affected with symptoms similar to those displayed during the continuance of fever, and why such do not occur in a degree proportionate to the existing intensity of their presumed cause in those local affections of the digestive organs which are of such continual occurrence.

The gratuitous nature of the assumption on which the theory rests, is likewise strongly marked in its application to account for the varying intensity of the symptoms at different times. The morning and evening paroxysms are stated to depend upon the want of a new supply of blood at such periods ; now, if suspended chyliification be the cause of the disease, what reason have we for supposing that this act is interrupted to a greater extent at such times than at others ? And above all, what proof is afforded that in intermittents it is suspended only at stated and determinate intervals, resumed during the intermissions, and again and again suspended and resumed in regular alternations for an indefinite period.

May I be permitted to add that Dr. C.'s theory does not seem even to be true to itself. I need scarcely remark that two doctrines have obtained on the subject of respiration ; the one, which originated with Priestly, and which has, with some modifications, been successfully supported by Crawford, Allen and Pepys, Ellis and others, conceives the carbonic acid given out during the process to be generated in the lungs themselves ; the other, advocated by Le Grange and Hussenbratz, and subsequently by Dr. Edwards, maintains, that the formation of this compound gas is effected during circulation,