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EFFECTS OF THOMSONIAN MEDICINES.

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THE capsicum annuum, the lobelia inflata, and the myrica cerifera, are the medicines most commonly used by the Thomsonian class of practitioners. Not forgetting the mighty power of steam, the two first may be called their *Sampson* and *Goliath*; while the last, with a few minor articles, are subalterns in their crusades against the learning and experience of physicians, from Hippocrates to the present day. "If," say they, "we succeed in our warfare against the Faculty, and establish the use of these pure and *harmless* medicines, disease of every form will be deprived of its power, and death cheated of every victim till the decay of old age shall wind out the thread of human life." It has generally been thought that *silent neglect* on the part of scientific men was the best mode of treating such kind of ignorant and absurd medical pretensions. The fundamental and peculiar notions of Thomson are deistical in their character, and cannot bear the searching light of truth. Reason, revelation and science, as well as the common experience of mankind, if candidly applied to those notions, at once refute them. Its malign spirit assails all that is lovely and of good report in religion, literature and science. Its temper and claims can only find a full response in the minds of the weak and credulous, or the ignorant, passionate and superstitious. Openly denouncing all the learned professions, the system has thus won for its disciples a way to notoriety and fortune, by appealing to the worst passions of the human heart, and by catering to the most vicious, low, and groundless prejudices of mankind. This is perfectly apparent throughout the writings of its notorious author. Thomson is dead, and his system already shows internal signs of being brought to nought, by the disagreement of his votaries. They forget, that in their ambitious aspirings, each to become a leader in the great battle against science, they are unfolding to the world the humbuggery, selfishness and dishonesty of the whole scheme. Like Mormonism, its counterpart in theology, a full exposure of its character tends quickly to annihilate the delusion; and the day cannot be far distant, when, as *systems*, both will only be remembered with wonder at the successful cheat. Thomson's numerous followers, in order still longer dishonestly

"to patch the rents in their fortunes," are assuming other forms of medical absurdity, and make easy changes from folly to foolishness, and weave new and varied features in their web of deceptive medical pretensions. Hence we find the Thomsonian changing his name to "root doctor," "botanic physician," "eclectic," "analytic," or "mesmeric" curer of *all* disease.

There has been a great reluctance on the part of the medical profession to condescend to appear as the public exposers of the evils resulting from the use of Thomsonian medicines. Ten years ago there were several families in this vicinity that made very free and exclusive use of Thomsonian medicine. Their number has now dwindled almost to a unit. The writer watched with intense interest the systematic use of these medicines in numerous instances. While studying this kind of pathology, and availing myself of the somewhat rare opportunity of making clinical and *post-mortem* observations in these cases, I have sometimes been shocked at the unnatural and homicidal treatment. A few cases are here briefly stated from my note book; from which, with numerous others of a similar character, the toxicological inferences are made.

A case of strongly-marked pneumonic inflammation, in a lady aged about 50, had been treated for seven days by "courses" of Thomsonian medicine, administered by her own sister—and *of course* terminated fatally. The *post-mortem* appearances were, an almost entire adhesion of the pulmonary and costal pleuræ in both cavities of the chest; while gray hepatization had taken place throughout nearly every portion of the substance of the lungs. The mucous membrane of the fauces and œsophagus was intensely red, dry and corrugated; while that of the stomach and intestines had become thickened, livid and wrinkled with the same inflammatory agents. In this case a dark and foetid diarrhœa, with paralysis of the limbs, occurred a few days before death.

A case of cyanache trachealis in a child, terminated fatally the third day, treated with cayenne tea. A *post-mortem* dissection showed a very strong adventitious membrane extending from the top of the larynx below the bifurcation of the bronchia. The sufferings of this poor victim were said to have been almost terrific. His constant cries were for cold water—till death came to end his sufferings and rebuke such ignorant and barbarous treatment.

Several cases of acute pulmonary inflammation could be mentioned, where, under the Thomsonian practice, delirium, coma, and partial paralysis, occurred the second or third day—and were promptly relieved by a change to the appropriate antiphlogistic treatment.

A case of colic, in a female, from vitiated biliary secretion and immense quantities of scybale in the colon, had well nigh terminated fatally, treated by steam and lobelia. The patient was assured by her "botanic physician" that "she had gall stones as large as chestnuts," and that the continued use of lobelia would enable her to puke them up—on the assumption that the interior of the human body was one continuous cavity. The suffering of this patient was most intense for several

days. She would, however, occasionally obtain freedom from pain several hours by the narcotic and paralytic effects of the lobelia. The use of an infusion of the seeds by injection would produce extreme prostration, cold sweats, and complete paralysis of all the voluntary muscles. This perilous condition would usually last four or five hours, when the colicky pain would return with increased severity. These hazardous experiments were continued for several days, aggravating her malady, till, apparently in *articulo-mortis*, her monomania left her. She dismissed her quacks, and eagerly swallowed the proper cathartic remedies. She quickly recovered. This patient had been accustomed, during her ordinary state of health, frequently to take a heaped tablespoonful of pulverized cayenne, with a sprinkle of lobelia, at a single dose—by way of cordial. She usually complained more or less of indigestion, constriction and hardness of the bowels, and incipient paralysis.

This woman died a year ago of uterine hemorrhage—from retained placenta after abortion at the fourth month. Her treatment, according to the neighbors, consisted of cayenne injections and hot drops by the mouth, to arrest the hemorrhage. She became faint, and in this state lobelia was given her. She soon became paralytic—more was given to carry out the *theory*—she grew cold, and died—the quacks standing aghast at the bed-side, and affirming that “she could not take enough to cure her”!

A woman, aged about 50, wife of a very ignorant man who had paid Thomson \$20 for the “right” to administer as much lobelia and cayenne to his family as he chose, died after taking more than fifty “courses.” At first she had only slight dyspeptic symptoms, which steadily increased under such acro-narcotic and heating treatment—till at last severe abdominal disease was induced, attended with diarrhœa and permanent paralysis of nearly all the voluntary muscles.

Another equally ignorant fellow, who had paid the same bonus for the good of his own family, often declared, in the spirit of the unholy delusion, that with the use of Thomson’s medicine “he would defy the Almighty to take one of his children by disease, if they had never taken “*mineral poison*”!! He tried his prowess on three of his children attacked with slight dysenteric symptoms; their distressing and speedy deaths soon rebuked his ignorant and blasphemous pretensions.

A few years since a case occurred in this town, attended by the following circumstances. A young man, about 20 years of age, living with a family that was perfectly monomaniac on the utility and harmlessness of Thomsonian medicines, had an attack of the prevailing influenza. He took “courses” of medicine under the direction of a Thomsonian quack from Fitchburg. For three weeks he was drugged with lobelia and bayberry bark—every increase of bad symptoms only requiring, according to the “theory,” an increase of those harmless medicines. Under this treatment he became insane, and paralytic in his lower extremities—and probably would under that treatment have remained incurable. The Selectmen of the town were applied to for his removal to the State Lunatic Hospital. This led to a proper medical

investigation of the case: and under the authority of the town, the patient was temporarily removed from the *moral* and *physical* influence of such a *theory* and *practice*. All Thomsonian medicines were prohibited—he took purgatives and anodynes, and in two weeks was perfectly well.

In chronic derangements of health, the morbid effects of the occasionally-repeated use of Thomsonian medicines are much less conspicuous than in acute diseases. Their deleterious effects, however, are not less certain—and the toxicology and pathology of such cases are worthy of more extensive clinical and *post-mortem* observations. The stomach, of course, must suffer primarily from the acrid and burning compounds it is made to receive. The mucous and muscular coats generally assume a very chronic and often incurable form of inflammation; sometimes becoming highly irritable, but most commonly exhibiting extreme atony. The mucous membrane of the small intestines becomes thickened; the muscular coat contracts very feebly and unequally, producing a constricted, tense and indurated feel of this portion of the bowels. The large intestines, though generally torpid and oppressed with distressing flatus and scybalæ, yet sometimes become highly irritable, attended with colic or diarrhœa. The secretions from the lining membrane of the alimentary canal become greatly vitiated—generally excessively acid with mucus. All the collatitious viscera also become greatly deranged in their secretory functions. The countenance of such patients generally becomes sallow and cadaveric, and of such a peculiar expression as bespeaks serious abdominal disease, often attended with paralysis or partial insanity. The pretension of Thomsonians that their remedies are perfectly inert in health, and cannot possibly do harm in disease, is in itself a ridiculous absurdity, and bears *prima facie* evidence of deception and knavery in those who advocate it. That they do induce lasting morbid changes in the solids and fluids of the human system in chronic disease, and that they always goad on to alarming effects, or fatal termination, all truly acute, sthenic inflammatory diseases, has been abundantly shown by clinical observation, as well as by the disclosures of the dissecting knife. The more prominent toxicological and pathological effects thus shown, are, a diseased state of the mucous membrane of the alimentary canal; a torpid, constricted and indurated condition of the several intestinal tunics; and partial or general paralysis of the voluntary muscles—accompanying, or alternating with, a degree of insanity. Such is evidently their combined effect; the particular or special influence of each article in producing these results, cannot be so clearly shown; and it is not improbable that the *moral effect* of a long-continued belief in Thomson's absurd and irrational theory, may, like *fanaticism in religion*, often result in partial insanity.

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