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M. BROUSSAIS' ACCOUNT OF HIS OWN DOCTRINES.

In a Letter to the Académie des Sciences, dated August 6, 1832.

GENTLEMEN,—A physician who has passed the best part of his life in laboring for the advancement of the science which he cultivates, formed long ago the design of laying before the Académie an account of his labors, and of the changes which he has seen effected in the healing art.

It was blameable, no doubt, to have deferred till now the accomplishment of that design ; nor can any better apology be offered for the delay than the desire which the author had of rendering those propositions more convincing which he wished to infer from his observations, and the changes of which he is about to speak. He comes, in short, gentlemen, to request a brief audience ; for he has felt the want of your support in seconding his efforts, and those of his co-operators, in a work which he believes to be useful to society. Anxious not to waste the time which you so usefully devote to the progress of knowledge, he will at once broach the subject upon which he is desirous of your consideration.

Medicine, as every one knows, is the science which teaches us to recognize and to treat the diseases of living beings ; but we shall confine our remarks to those of the human species. Medical men, then, are, as it has been said, the ministers of nature ; men devoted to acts of benevolence and mercy ; men whose great object is the doing good to their fellow-creatures. Nothing, consequently, is more natural than that they should be ever desirous of the means.

While yet a youth, filled with these ideas, the individual who has the honor to address you felt himself (even from the year 1804) unpleasantly affected, from his imperfect ability in the military hospitals, to perform the delicate duty which the government had imposed on his conscience. Was it his fault that he was not more successful in the practice of his profession, or the fault of the system in which he had been brought up ? He worked incessantly for five years, and in 1809 appeared his *Histoire des Phlegmasies Chroniques*.

Remote from Paris, where, indeed, he was little known, and a stranger to all manner of intrigue, he had no opportunity of setting forward this work at the time of the *concours* for the decennial prizes, in 1811. He obtained, however, an honorable notice on the occasion—an encouragement which had a powerful effect in supporting his zeal and redoubling his exertions.

The history of Chronic Inflammations is a work wholly experimental. At the time it was written those diseases were scarcely known. Pugol de Castres (of whom scarcely any one dreamt, but who was speedily exhumed upon the appearance of this work) had treated only of suppurations of the visceral cavities : those slow and insidious inflammations which have their seat in the membranous tissues in the chest and abdomen were completely overlooked by the physicians of the age. Pinel had given them no place in his Nosography—there was nothing in lieu of them but certain *organic derangements*. Corvisart, who so eminently possessed the art of exploring disease in the functions, had arrived at no correct notion of them. He knew how to determine the seat of a tumor in the viscera, but he could give no account of its nature, if it was not connected with pulmonary consumption, or malady of the heart ; he paid no attention to what was commonly called organic derangement, while he saw no cause for the slow but gradual decay of the patient, except in a state of debility or cachexy—terms which conveyed to the mind nothing, but which at the same time, unfortunately, supplied wrong indications for the treatment.

The History of Inflammations threw light upon all those points hitherto obscure ; it showed how inflammation was principally instrumental in the origin of those adventitious masses which developed themselves among the viscera ; it exhibited how, under another form, the same inflammation invaded insensibly the tissue of their membranes, and brought on that state of emaciation which was usually attributed to the feebleness of the solids and the depravation of the liquids. It did more ; it proved that those weaknesses and depravations were often curable ; it determined the period of their being so, and the mode of subduing them.

From that moment, science had a new face : *organic diseases*, so vaguely understood before, had now a sense that every medical person could comprehend. The great business, then, was to palliate their direful effects—to prevent them, when their germs became visible ; and practice assumed a rational form in respect to this important section of our physical ailments.

The History of Inflammation was, however, merely the first step towards that reform of which practical medicine stood so much in need. The class of fevers was in no more satisfactory condition to the understandings of men of sense, than those of the cachexies had been. Continued fevers presented themselves in general to practitioners under two very different aspects : the one they attributed to the inflammation of some particular organ ; the other, which they called *essential*, was deemed independent of all local affection. The cause of the first was found in inflammation of the brain, and went by the name of *encephalitic* ; or in that of the lungs, or of the abdomen, with a phlegmonous form—that is to say, with a pulsating tumor and burning heat ; or in that of the peritoneum ; or, finally, in any or all those inflammations which their situation at the surface rendered appreciable to the sight and touch of the practitioner. I say that all these febrile movements accompanying palpable inflammations were apprehended as they should have been—being attributed to their true cause. But *essential* fevers were supposed to have no *locale* : nobody knew to what to refer them ; and in this state of

ignorance it was attempted to characterize them, either after their predominant symptoms, or other data still more obscure. Was the serosity of the bile predominant, they were called *bilious fevers*: was there apparently a superabundance of mucus in the fecal matter, they were called *mucous*, or *pituitous* fevers: was the heat remarkable, they were called *hot fevers*: the body cold—*cold fevers*; and if the patients at the same time complained of a raging heat within, they gave them another name.

When the powers were sunk in fevers, they were called *asthenic* or *adynamic*: if the body exhaled a repulsive *ætid* odor, they were styled *putrid fevers*, although many physicians of the best sense rejected with contempt such a denomination, aware that putridity was incompatible with life. Other fevers were *nervous* or *ataxic*, and others called after the country or place where they most prevailed: thus we have had the camp, the prison, the hospital, the Hungarian, the Low Country, fevers: we have had, in short, from the skin affections also, the fevers denominated the *petechial*, the *miliary*, the *nettle-rash*, &c. &c.

In some instances the name and character were derived from a supposed unknown and perfidious agent, which was ever deceiving the vigilance of the physician, and throwing him out of his calculations. Hence the *insidious* form. And when a better name could not be found to describe the danger of the complaint, we had the *pernicious* fever.

Let us not be misunderstood as attempting to depreciate the labors of those who have given us these results, for of such are the materials employed by modern writers for the structure of the evidence of science; and our gratitude and veneration are due to the laborious men who have supplied us with them. Our object is simply to show in a brief sketch the progress of the human mind in the acquisition of medical knowledge, and to describe the actual state of our art at the period in question. But we may offer our opinion.

And what, gentlemen, can you see of philosophy in the proceedings of the old school regarding these supposed essential fevers? Can you see in them a *science*? Alas! there is nothing there but a chaos and confusion; nothing but an exhaustless source of controversy, not merely on the nature, but, what is far more serious, on the treatment of disease. In fact, anything like agreement was rare; for in one and the same disorder, some would take their indications from the biliary or mucous secretion, while others would have recourse to the nervous system, or the debility, or putridity, of the patient.

Such was the state of medical science when, in 1816, was published the first edition of the *Examen des Doctrines Médicales*. This work, the fruit of a more extended experience, went far beyond its predecessor the *Histoire*: it inveighed strongly against the vagueness, the contradictoriness, and the insufficiency of the prevailing doctrines. It preached up the necessity of following another method in appreciating the symptoms of disease, both chronic and acute: it counseled not to proceed any longer in medicine by the formation of groups of symptoms. It showed, in short, that nothing was less reasonable than to call a group of ten or twelve symptoms the *cause* of the material alterations which were found in the organs after death.

The work in question proposed to consider fevers, as inflammations

are considered ; to determine the seat of the latent irritation which gives rise to the febrile state—a state which is itself but an excess of irritation, caused principally by the heart ; it traced fever to that latent local irritation in the viscera, as its cause, and suggested to take for the basis of the proper treatment, the influence of external agents on the *mobile* of the febrile condition, and consequently on the fever itself.

This method was eminently simple, unique, and consequently philosophical. Its novelty could not but raise a violent storm against it ; but, entrenched behind an imposing mass of facts, it stood its ground, and the history of the latter periods of French medicine can give a good account of its success.

One very remarkable circumstance deserves to be mentioned. In 1812 began that work which was presented to the world as a monument of French medical science—the great *Dictionnaire des Sciences Médicales*. Up to 1817 it bore the uniform coloring of Pinel's doctrine. From that time forth it became mottled with a mixture of the principles set forth in the *Examen*. Scarcely is it finished, when forth comes the *Dictionnaire Abrégé*, in which those principles predominate to such a degree, that they absolutely make up the greater part of its bulk. In the great Dictionary, fevers are still *essential* ; they are but symptomatic in the Dictionary abridged ; and the Dictionary in 18 volumes, which comes next in order, reduces those fevers considerably, and, moreover, everywhere displays the banner of the doctrine which the *Examen* advocates.

[M. Broussais then proceeds to notice other works of his, and among them his recent tract on the Cholera ; after which he goes on :—]

But, gentlemen, it is time to give you a summary and comprehensive view of the method we follow in the distinction and treatment of diseases, which we shall now attempt to do in the most succinct manner we are able.

This method has for its guides two phenomena which never abandon it at the bedside of the sick—motion and sensation. In fact, as long as the individual is alive, his animal substance will be affected by the influence of external agents, and hence will result, under given circumstances, certain perceptions for his consciousness. The sick man suffers ; but as sure as he suffers, observation describes in his suffering organs movements different from those of the sound state ! The sick man takes a remedy which does him a service—his sufferings diminish ; and *vice versa* : but in the former case, his organs will be less disordered—they will more nearly approach the *normal* rhythm ; while in the latter, they will tend to more and more disorder, and the disturbance will spread from the first organ to several others.

This being settled, the bases of medicine are settled also. No disease is ever in the first instance general ; it always begins in some one organ, and often in a single tissue of that organ, even when it depends on a cause which has effected an alteration in the fluids—as in the case of smallpox. If, then, the practitioner make use of his senses, and find out the primitive seat of the disorder, and if especially he ascertain the exciting cause of this rising disturbance, he succeeds most usually in arresting it, and the malady is stifled in its cradle. It is thus that the new French method has reduced, in a manner truly wonderful, the

number of severe fevers, or rather of those bad symptoms which are indeed now seldom met with, except where assistance has been tardily given, or where it has been entirely rejected. This is a fact well known ; it is attested by all practitioners who have to deal with fever in the hospitals, civil and military. It is rare now to find among them any general or essential fevers ; they are all reduced to affections simply local.

But what particularly distinguishes this method is, that it rejects no means, how empirical or powerful soever they may appear. We do not become bound to employ only one kind of remedy, for we believe that all kinds have their proper uses ; but we take pains to appreciate their effect, and to accommodate them to the susceptibility of the organs disturbed. The action of the modifiers of the constitution is our constant study, and their effects on motion and sensation our guide in estimating their value. Whatever is injurious to the case in hand is thrown aside ; but we do not reject its possible use in other cases.

Thus we have no system *à priori*, no preconceived ideas, no oath *in verba magistri*. If we have adopted for our guide the irritation and ab-irritation of the tissues, it is because we cannot by any possibility find others better.

We entreat you, gentlemen, that you will each individually reflect upon this subject, and ask yourselves how you generally judge that the prescription of your physician is or is not suited to your complaints. If you feel more fever, more agitation, less repose, and more suffering, you say to him, ' your remedy, sir, does not appear to me to be suited to my case ; ' if you feel, on the contrary, more calm, less agitation, and less suffering, you say to him just the reverse, and express all your gratitude. Well, then, gentlemen, these modifications, which you have each of you experienced, resolve themselves ultimately into the simple facts of motion and sensation (*le mouvement et le sentiment*), and the system which we pursue is nothing more than the interpreting their indication in maladies. But perhaps you will say, have we not had the system from the earliest times, and has it not been practised by all the sects ? Common sense would suggest such a question ; the truth, however, must be told—it has *not* been so. In a large number of cases it was usual to say to the sick, ' have patience, it is the remedy that is operating.' In others, as in the gout, for example, the expression was, ' I can give you no relief—your sufferings are necessary for nature's purpose, and you must bear them.' In divers acute diseases, where the remedies only augmented the fever, and the other bad symptoms, in place of soothing him, the practitioner would congratulate the patient, and tell him that it was necessary to keep up the natural powers, in order to effect a salutary crisis. How often have unfortunate creatures, parching with thirst, and dying for cold drinks, been obliged to gorge themselves with hot draughts, which they rejected with horror ! This has been the practice, gentlemen, not very far away from you. Before the Cholera reached France, it was treated in this way : it was only with the greatest difficulty, and by dint of undeniable success, that the physicians of the north and east consented to cool their patients.

There are still many physicians who, in costive and painful states of the digestive organs, prescribe stimulants under which the stomach suf-

fers, and who bid the patient be of good cheer, as he will be benefited by his sufferings in the end. Others there are who have more regard for their patients' troubles, but do nothing more than change the remedy, substituting one mode of punishment for another (always preserving the principle), but never rendering them any real relief.

No, gentlemen; the art of sparing the sufferings and tortures of patients is not so ancient as you might suppose: it is a modern art, and an art which has made but little real progress, except under the happy influence of the method which we cultivate.

This method, gentlemen, is called the *physiological*, for it observes and deals with life in the abstract, the life of the organs, and in the organs, with reference to the agents which can exercise any influence upon them.

I have now laid before you, gentlemen, the principles of the *physiological* medicine—that medicine which good sense approves, and which keeps pace with the intelligence of the age—that medicine which has necessarily been adopted by all the ablest members of the profession, and by all whom their vocation or their circumstances induce daily to come amongst us. It remains for you, the *élite* of our men of science, to extend to it your encouragement. Only deign to consider it well, and you will be convinced that here is no chimera—that it has a real existence, and is of a nature to extend itself, and to attract the regards of all men who love to contemplate the advancement of all the predictions of the human mind.

BROUSSAIS.

SULPHATE OF COPPER IN CHOLERA.

BY JAMES MORRAH, M.R.C.S.

MR. EDITOR—Believing that the following facts may lead to a more successful mode of treating the epidemic, I request that you will allow them to be made known to the public through the medium of your very useful publication.

On the morning of the 17th August, I visited a young woman, a dress-maker, 20 years of age. She had been under medical treatment all night for a severe attack of cholera. All the symptoms were present, and strongly marked. I had contemplated trying the sulphate of copper, in a few doses, in the first case I met with, having seen all the modes of treatment recommended fail. I ordered a scruple in an ounce of water to be given. The gentleman who was in attendance reported to me that it remained in the stomach a quarter of an hour, a strong proof of the diminished excitability of that organ. When the vomiting ceased (which was occasioned by the sulphate), the skin became warmer, the pulse more distinct, and the severity of the spasms very much mitigated. The stomach was now quiet. Two grains of calomel, and one tablespoonful of beef tea, were given every half hour; at night three drops of croton oil; soon after which the bowels began to act, exhibiting some improvement in the secretions. This patient very slowly recovered, but the urgency of the symptoms soon subsided after the vomiting produced by the sulphate of copper.