

**THE PHYSIOLOGY OF THE
LONDON MEDICAL
STUDENT, AND CURIOSITIES
OF MEDICAL EXPERIENCE**

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The Physiology of the London Medical Student, and Curiosities of Medical Experience by
Albert Smith ("Punch")

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BY
"PUNCH."

PHILADELPHIA:
CAREY AND HART.
1845.

PREFACE.

Our lively neighbours on the opposite side of the *Pas de Calais* (as they are pleased, in a spirit of patriotic appropriation, to translate the Straits of Dover), have lately shot off a flight of small literary rockets about Paris, which have exploded joyously in every direction, producing all sorts of fun and merriment, termed *Les Physiologies*—a series of graphic sketches, embodying various everyday types of characters moving in the French capital. In the same spirit we beg to bring forward the following papers, with the hope that they will meet with an equally favourable reception.

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THE
PHYSIOLOGY OF THE LONDON MEDICAL
STUDENT.

I.

THE INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE.

WE are about to discuss a subject as critical and important to take up as the abdominal aorta; for should we offend the class we are about to portray, there are fifteen hundred medical students, arrived this week in London, ripe and ready to avenge themselves upon our devoted cranium, which, although hardened throughout its ligneous formation by many blows, would not be proof against their united efforts. And we scarcely know how or where to begin. The instincts and different phases, under which this interesting race appears, are so numerous, that far from complaining of the paucity of materials we have to work upon, we are overwhelmed by mental suggestions, and rapidly dissolving views, of the various classes from Guy's to the London University, from St. George's to the London Hospital, perpetually crowding upon our brains (if we have any), and rendering our ideas as completely muddled as those of a "new man" who has, for the first week of October, attended every single lecture in the day, from the commencement of chemistry, at nine in the morning, to the close of surgery, at eight in the evening. Lecture! auspicious word! we have a beginning prompted by the mere sound. We will address you, medical students, according to the style you are most accustomed to.

Gentlemen,—Your attention is to be this morning directed to an important part of your course on physiology, which your various professors, at two o'clock on Saturday

afternoon, will separately tell you is derived from two Greek words, so that we have no occasion to explain its meaning at present. Magendie, Müller, Mayo, Millengen, and various other M's, have written works upon physiology, affecting the human race generally; you are now requested to listen to the demonstration of one species in particular—the Medical Student of London.

Lay aside your deeper studies, then, and turn for a while to our lighter sketches; forget the globules of the blood in the contemplation of red billiard balls; supplant the *tunica arachnoidea* of the brain by a gossamer hat—the *rete mucosum* of the skin by a pea-jacket; the vital fluid by a pot of half-and-half. Call into play the flexor muscles of your arms with boxing-gloves and single-sticks; examine the secreting glands in the shape of kidneys and sweetbreads; demonstrate other theories connected with the human economy in an equally analogous and pleasant manner; lay aside your crib Celsus and Steggall's Manual for our own more enticing pages, and find your various habits therein reflected upon paper, with a truth to nature only exceeded by the artificial man of the same material in the Museum of King's College. Assume for a time all this joyousness. PUNCH has entered as a pupil at a medical school (he is not at liberty to say which), on purpose to note your propensities, and requests you for a short period to look upon him as one of your own lot. His course will commence next week, and "The New Man" will be the subject.

II.

THE NEW MAN.

EMBRYOLOGY precedes the treatise on the perfect animal; it is but right, therefore, that the new man should have our attention before the mature student.

No sooner do the geese become asphyxiated by torsion of their cervical *vertebræ*, in anticipation of Michaelmas-day; no sooner do the pheasants feel premonitory warnings, that some chemical combinations between charcoal,

nitre, and sulphur, are about to take place, ending in a precipitation of lead; no sooner do the columns of the newspapers teem with advertisements of the ensuing courses at the various schools, each one cheaper, and offering more advantages than any of the others; the large hospitals vaunting their extended field of practice, and the small ones ensuring a more minute and careful investigation of disease, than the new man purchases a large trunk and a hat-box, buys a second-hand copy of Quain's Anatomy, abjures the dispensing of his master's surgery in the country, and placing himself in one of those rattling boxes denominated by courtesy second-class carriages, enters on the career of a hospital pupil in his first season.

The opening lecture introduces the new man to his companions, and he is easily distinguished at that annual gathering of pupils, practitioners, professors, and especially old hospital governors, who do a good deal in the gaiter-line, and applaud the lecturer with their umbrellas, as they sit in the front row. The new man is known by his clothes, which incline to the prevalent fashion of the rural districts he has quitted; and he evinces an affection for cloth-boots, or short Wellingtons with double soles, and toes shaped like a toad's mouth, a propensity which sometimes continues throughout the career of his pupilage. He likewise takes off his hat when he enters the dissecting-room, and thinks that beautiful design is shown in the mechanism and structure of the human body—an idea which gets knocked out of him at the end of the season, when he looks upon the distribution of the nerves as "a blessed bore to get up, and no use to him after he has passed." But at first he perpetually carries a "DUBLIN DISSECTOR" under his arm; and whether he is engaged upon a subject or no, delights to keep on his black apron, pockets, and sleeves (like a barber dipped in a blacking-bottle), the making of which his sisters have probably superintended in the country, and which he thinks endows him with an air of industry and importance.

The new man, at first, is not a great advocate for beer; but this dislike may possibly arise from his having been compelled to stand two pots upon the occasion of the first dissection. After a time, however, he gives way to the indulgence, having received the solemn assurances of his companions that it is absolutely necessary to preserve his

health, and keep him from getting the collywobbles in his pandenoodles—a description of which obstinate disease he is told may be found in “Dr. Copland’s Medical Dictionary,” and “Gregory’s Practice of Physic,” but as to under what head the informant is uncertain.

The first purchase that a new man makes in London is a gigantic note-book, a dozen steel pens on a card, and a screw inkstand. Furnished with these valuable adjuncts to study, he puts down every thing he hears during the day, both in the theatre of the school and the wards of the hospital, besides many diverting diagrams and anecdotes which his fellow-students insert for him, until at night he has a confused dream that the air-pump in the laboratory is giving a party, at which various scalpels, bits of gums, wax models, tourniquets, and fetal skulls, are assisting as guests—an eccentric and philosophical vision, worthy of the brain from which it emanates. But the new man is, from his very nature, a visionary: His breast swells with pride at the introductory lecture, when he hears the professor descant upon the noble science he and his companions have embarked upon; the rich reward of watching the gradual progress of a suffering fellow-creature to convalescence, and the insignificance of worldly gain compared with the pure treasures of pathological knowledge; whilst to the riper student all this resolves itself into the truth, that three draughts, or one mixture, are respectively worth four-and-sixpence or three shillings: that the patient should be encouraged to take them as long as possible, and that the thrilling delight of ushering another mortal into existence, after being up all night, is considerably increased by the receipt of the tin for superintending the performance; *i. e.* if you are lucky enough to get it.

It is not improbable that, after a short period, the new man will write a letter home. The substance of it will be as follows: and the reader is requested to preserve a copy, as it may, perhaps, be compared with another at a future period.

“MY DEAR PARENTS,—I am happy to inform you that my health is at present uninjured by the atmosphere of the hospital, and that I find I am making daily progress in my studies. I have taken a lodging in —— (Gower-place, University-street, Little Britain, or Lant-street, as