

**LETTERS TO BROTHER
JOHN ON LIFE,
HEALTH, AND DISEASE**

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Letters to Brother John on Life, Health, and Disease by Edward Johnson

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ON

LIFE, HEALTH, AND DISEASE.

BY

EDWARD JOHNSON, M.D.,

Great Britain.

'The pith of nearly all that has been written on the prevention of disease might be included under two heads, almost in two words—**TEMPERANCE AND EXERCISE.**'—*Dr. James Johnson.*

Twenty-first Thousand.

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DEDICATION.

To the Hands that produce our wealth, to the Hearts that defend our homes, to the Intelligence of you,

The Working Classes,

the Muscle and Manhood of England, I dedicate this edition of 'Life, Health, and Disease.' Your health is your patrimonial estate, which, like any other patrimony, may be recklessly squandered or carefully cultivated. In the one case it will yield you vigor of spirit, energy of will, capacity for enjoyment, and all that pride of independence which conscious strength can alone bestow; in the other, its produce will be feebleness of body, lassitude of mind, incapacity for work, dependence, humiliation, poverty and dirt, rags and destitution. The object of the little Treatise, of which I herewith dedicate to you the sixteenth edition, is to show you somewhat of the intrinsic nature of this your patrimonial estate, that so you may the better know how to manage it, preserve it whole, and hand it down, clear of all mortgage, to its next inheritors.

Edward Johnson

September, 1868.

LETTERS TO BROTHER JOHN.

LETTER I.

Great Malvern.

MY DEAR JOHN,

IN reply to your Letter, wherein you complain that you cannot gather any clear notion of the nature of your malady, because you cannot attach, in your own mind, any distinct idea to the terms which your medical attendants seem obliged to use in their endeavors to explain it to you; I am about to give you, in a series of Letters, a plain and familiar description of the mechanism of your internal man; together with a brief history of those internal motions and actions which constitute animal life, and any disturbance in the harmony of which constitute disease. Thus, I think, I shall enable you easily to surmount the difficulty of which you complain. There is another benefit which I intend should result from these letters. They will, I hope, enable you to understand what are the habits of life which are most likely to conduce to a sound mind and a sound body. For if I were requested to teach a man how to regulate and repair his watch so as to make it keep true time, I should think the best way to enable him to do this would be to make him acquainted with the internal mechanism of a watch—showing him the uses of the several wheels and springs which keep his watch going. So, I believe, the best plan to teach men how to regulate their diet and habits of life, so as to make their health keep true time, is to make them acquainted with the mechanism of their internal selves—showing them the uses of the several organs and fluids which keep *life* going.

But, before we descend to particulars, it will be as well to take a rapid and brief, but general survey of the several parts which go to the composition of the animal, man. I say the animal—because we have here nothing to do with the higher attributes of his nature*—attributes which have no connection with physical structure, and the phenomena of which are wholly independent of all physical laws. We are here wholly and solely concerned simply with the physical animal.

The method I shall adopt, in order to exhibit the principal systems of which the whole scheme of man is made up, and to show the relation which exists between them, and the dependence of one upon another, may be considered as fanciful. Perhaps it is so. But it struck me as one well calculated to render what I wish to say easily comprehensible; and that circumstance alone is a good recommendation: for I am not ambitious of fine writing, either as it regards accurate arrangement, philosophical speculation, or learned and elegant diction. I am only anxious to be understood.

If man had been the work of any being less than Omniscient, the several single ideas composing the one complex idea of man must have occurred in succession; and the first must have been the idea of his figure. The first idea could only have been, as I shall presently prove, merely that of an image or statue of the particular form and appearance which man presents. I am, of course, for the present, supposing man to have been the first animal produced, and that his artificer was some being of inferior wisdom to that of Him who is, in truth, his real Author.

Having conceived the idea of a particular figure, and determined to realise it, the next point to be settled would be the kind of materials of which to fashion it. Having chosen bone, and shaped his image according to his preconceived idea, the first of a series of single ideas forming the one complex idea would be realised; and a solid statue of bone would have been the result—a mere image of the human form.

* By which I mean—not the mind—not the reasoning faculties: but the soul—its immortality, etc.

Contemplating the work of his hands, the desire of endowing it with powers of locomotion might then occur to him. In order to accomplish this, the artificer would find it necessary, first, to divide the statue into parts, (reuniting these parts by means of joints) and then to contrive a number of motive instruments, which, being attached to the jointed statue, would enable it to move—as the mechanic who wishes to move a heavy weight must first construct his instruments of motion, such as wheels, pulleys, levers, etc. Having effected this contrivance, the second idea of the series would be realised—the idea of the muscular system.

But when he had contrived and attached his muscles, he would find that the particular shape and general appearance, which he had predetermined his work should bear, had been quite destroyed, and that these same muscles attached to the outside of the statue were a terrible disfigurement of its external beauty and symmetry. To remedy this evil, it would be necessary to scoop and pare down, and hollow out, different parts of the image, and then to fill up these hollows with his muscles; and thus restore those parts, which had been so cut down, to their original size, and again bring his image to its former shape and dimensions, by taking away a bulk of bone equal to the bulk of muscle which he wanted to add. But still he would find, notwithstanding his muscles, that his statue could not yet move, any more than a steam-engine can move merely because it has wheels, unless there be some power to set those wheels in motion. Hence would arise the third idea of the series—that of a nervous system, whose office it is to afford motive power to the muscles, which are of themselves only motive instruments. This motive power is to the muscles—which are, in fact, only so many pulleys, ropes, etc.—what the mechanic's hand is to the pulleys, wheels, etc. : it sets them in motion, and keeps them moving. And here, again, he would be obliged to hollow out another portion of the bone, in order to make room for the brain and spinal marrow (from which nearly all the nerves arise), so that their attachment might not destroy the symmetry of his image. The nerves which arise from the brain and spinal marrow, and whose office it is to carry the motive power to

the muscles, he would of course distribute and conceal among the numberless little bundles of fibres of which the muscles are composed. And this he might easily do, seeing that the nerves are merely small threads, and therefore easily concealed and embedded in the soft parts, without producing any disfigurement, or much apparent increase of bulk.

Again contemplating his production, it would occur to him that the materials of which he had found it necessary to construct it were liable to decomposition and decay—putrefaction. To surmount this new difficulty, it would be incumbent upon him to contrive a conservative system: and hence he would arrive at the fourth idea—that of a system of nutrition. As the organs of this system are large and numerous, he would be compelled to hollow out the whole body of the statue, in order to make room for them, and put them out of sight; leaving no more of solid image than just sufficient to support and give attachment to the several new contrivances which, in improving upon his original idea, he had been obliged to add.

Once more contemplating his work, he would now be delighted to see his new, animated, and improved statue moving from place to place without assistance. His satisfaction, however, would be somewhat disturbed, by observing the grotesque, awkward, and uncertain manner in which it proceeded or rather zigzagged; and very soon all his joy would be suddenly turned into consternation, by beholding his unhappy automaton all at once break its head against a post, or hop into a river, and vanish beneath the waters.

Having fished it up from the stream, or mended its broken head, it would now be tolerably clear to him that his new creation was not yet perfect. He would see that it was absolutely necessary to its safety that it should know when its path was obstructed by a post or a pond. This would suggest the idea of the organs of the senses; being the fifth idea, and completing that series, of which the complex one, represented by the words 'animal man,' is composed. By the organs of the senses, his object would be to establish a certain relation between it and the rest of the world—to enable it to acquire ideas (by means of the experience of these senses) of whatever was likely to