EXPERIMENTATION ON ANIMALS AS A MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE IN PHYSIOLOGY, PATHOLOGY, AND PRACTICAL MEDECINE

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Experimentation on Animals as a Means of Knowledge in Physiology, Pathology, and practical medecine by J. C. Dalton

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IN

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AND

PRACTICAL MEDICINE.

BY

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1875.

INTRODUCTION.

WITHIN the last ten years the method of investigation in the medical sciences, by means of experiments on animals, has been, on several occasions, the object of strenuous attacks on the ground of its inhumanity. The opponents of the practice also allege that it is needless for the acquisition of knowledge; that its results are generally unimportant; and that it is useless, or even deceptive, as a means of discovery and improvement. These allegations emanate from non-professional sources, and are made by men who are unacquainted both with the object of physiological experiments, the manner in which they are conducted, and the history of progress in the medical sciences. It is unnecessary to offer to the medical profession any defence of experimental investigations, since their value is notorious to all who are conversant with the subject. But the educated public, who have not turned their attention to medical matters, cannot be expected to know the facts of the case without some direct statement in regard to it. The recent attacks upon the method of experiment

have sometimes been made in extremely violent and denunciatory language, calculated rather to excite the feelings than to give any intelligent or impartial expression of the truth. It has even been declared, by one of the most active agitators in this field, that "even though these living dissections were productive of all that their advocates claim for them, mankind have no right to the knowledge thus acquired;" and demands have been made, from the same quarter, for legislation which should put a stop to "these wicked contributions to human knowledge, which mankind would be all the better off for never knowing."* It is evident, therefore, that the aggressive movement against experimental investigation is both unreasoning and persistent. It is liable at any time to resume its activity, and to endanger, both in the State of New York and elsewhere, the progress and improvement of physiological medicine. For these reasons it has been thought desirable to present in a condensed form the most important facts in regard to the character, the necessity, and the results of experimentation upon animals for scientific purposes, together with the testimony of the medical profession as to its value.

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* In the New York *Evening Post*, September 4th and 12th, 1874.

EXPERIMENTATION ON ANIMALS.

CHAPTER I.

ITS CHARACTER.

The charge of inhumanity, as brought against the practice of experimentation on animals, seems to ignore in great measure the motive and object of such investigations. Cruelty is the wanton destruction of life or infliction of pain, either for the gratification of a morbid ferocity, or for an unthinking amusement which disregards the suffering it may cause. Neither of these faults can be charged upon scientific investigation. Its object is solely the acquisition of a kind of knowledge which has been shown to be inferior to none in its importance for the welfare of mankind. It is also at the farthest possible remove from a careless or trifling occupation. Scientific knowledge is simply a knowledge which is definite and precise, which has been attained by known means, and which is capa-