THE NERVES

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HENRY BELCHER

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A Few Practical Observations

ON THE MANAGEMENT AND TREATMENT OF SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AND DISTRESSING AFFECTIONS OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM.

BY

DR. HENRY BELCHER.

Quædam labuntur mente; quædam compotes sui confitentur se urgeri dolore nervorum.

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INTRODUCTION.

AFTER labouring for nearly thirty long years in the vineyard of medicine, I am advised by my friends that it would be of public advantage were I to formulate, however roughly, some of the conclusions to which I have been led by experience and observation. It has been urged upon me, that, having been somewhat successful in the treatment of diseases affecting the nerves, I owe it as a duty to Society, now that I have attained my meridian, to throw all the light I can upon my special subject—to which I have devoted the energies of a lifetime. An appeal thus urged upon me, I feel unable to resist, conscious although I am of my own inability to do full justice to myself, still less to a theme of prime importance in an age of high-pressure civilisation; and I therefore enter on the task thus imposed upon me, pleading that a sincere desire to alleviate the sufferings of my fellow-creatures may prove sufficient apology for any shortcomings on my part. I can, in truth, adopt as my own, the sentiment of Terence, "A man myself, I feel for all mankind."

At the present epoch in the history of medicine a host of well-intentioned works are constantly issuing from the Press, which from their incomprehensible and complicated character, seem designed solely to furnish material for discussion on some abstruse point, such as, *e.g.*, the therapeutical action of drugs. In this respect medicine seems to resemble the two other liberal professions, since it is by no means clear that divines of different schools have been unanimous in their definition of the same theological terms, whilst some of the most eminent among the gentlemen of the long robe have actually differed as to the precise line of demarcation between justice and injustice. If then uncertainty attaches to the sciences of Divinity and Law, is it not most illiberal and ungenerous that Physic should be so bitterly reproached in the person of any practitioner who, from a conscientious conviction, steps out of the orthodox path? This obstinate insistance on the infallibility of the pathogists of the past seems to me to resemble cavilling over the peculiar character of some pretty little shell on the sea shore, whilst the great ocean of truth lies all undiscovered. Surely the inevitable evils of life are sufficiently numerous to admit of varied treatment, and he must have a very weak head, or a very bad heart, who can seriously propose to increase the terrible aggregate by ignoring methods of cure which have already stood the test of experience. It is an inexplicable incongruity for a sentient being to do or say anything knowingly that will give pain to another; but

it is beyond measure astonishing that any one can divest himself of pity for those who partake of the same nature with himself. No valid excuse can ever be pleaded for callousness, or for neglecting to alleviate the sufferings of others when we have the power. I am, therefore, justified in doing as I would other members of my profession would do—viz., in bringing under the notice of all whom it may concern, plainly and clearly, the results of my own personal observations and extended experience in the treatment and management of some of the most important diseases to which our frail frames are subject. Moreover, having during the whole of my professional career given a certain portion of my time to the service of the poor—a labour of love I hope still to be able to continue—and consequently having had frequent opportunity of witnessing and treating a vast number of the most distressing cases that can come under the notice of the physician—viz., diseases and disorganisation of the nervous system—I feel less difficulty in putting pen to paper, since I am in a position to bring forward the testimony of friends who have been eye witnesses of the results of some of my cases. Nevertheless, the very fact of my having frequently to use the first person—an unavoidable yet disagreeable necessity—leads me to apprehend that I may be charged with self-seeking or other unworthy motives. I shall, however, console myself with the conviction that I seek no fame, nor have I any personal ambition to gratify. In fact, I am keenly alive to the very responsible position