THE SIMPLICITY OF LIFE. AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER TO PATHOLOGY

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TO

PATHOLOGY

BY

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"Whoever thinks a faultless work to see
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be."
Expect not such, my friends, from me.

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MDCCCLXXIII.

ESSAY

ON

THE SIMPLICITY OF LIFE.

In preparing materials for an edition of Fletcher's Pathology, the use of vague and uncertain terms in describing both healthy and morbid phenomena, has constantly thrown obstacles in the way of treating the subject.* Vague Terms.

Before discussing the clear and lucid theory of Fletcher, who reduced all morbid actions to one, and the same law or general expression, it appears desirable that the terms which Fletcher employs when speaking of vital action should be explained: and as vital action implies life this subject first demands attention. Fletcher's Theory.

For pathology being merely a branch of physiology, any doctrine of the former must be consistent with the more general laws of vital action, or with physiology. "Health and disease are the same states differing only in degree." All pathology then must be consistent with our knowledge of the nature of vital actions in health, or physiology in its more restricted sense.† J. Brown's Axiom.

Notwithstanding the teaching of John Brown in the Nature of Life.

* Note 1, Appendix. † Note 2, Appendix.

the last century, and the clear and precise explanation of Fletcher in the early part of this, the nature of life is still a subject of dispute.

The following remarks on this subject, consist merely of some extracts from Fletcher's Physiology, and a few old notes from his lectures, which, when brought together equally show the error of the physical and vital theories of life, and explain its intrinsic nature in all its simplicity.

At the present time there are three principal theories of life, the physical, the vital, and the natural.

Huxley. The physical supported by Professor Huxley, who considers "physiology a complex branch of mere physics" and that "vitality is a nonsensical fiction," because "it can neither be weighed, measured, nor conceived to exist." "Life therefore is a form or mode of ordinary force."*

Gull.

† Beale. Beale who advocates the vital doctrine considers "life to be a power, force, or property of a special and pecu-

* "Irritability is synonymous with vitality, and signifies the susceptibility of undergoing, on the application of a stimulus, any change which, as not strictly either mechanical or chemical, is characteristic of organised beings." Fletcher's *Physiology*, pt. ii. p. 52.

"By irritability we merely imply the possibility of the powers of a protoplasmic mass being called into play by some agent external to itself, and of these the simplest and most efficient is heat." On Protoplasm, *Med.-Chir. Review*, April, 1872.

† *Mystery of Life*, p. 2.

liar kind, temporarily influencing matter and its ordinary forces, but entirely different from, in no way and correlated with, any other."

The natural theory, that life consists in the "sum of the actions of organized beings" was advanced by John Brown in 1770, and systematized, and enforced, by Fletcher in 1826, and published in his *Physiology* ten years afterwards. Brown's Theory of Life. Fletcher.

He taught that vitality was the property that characterises organised beings. It results from their organic structure, and when acted on by certain external powers gives rise to actions not strictly mechanical, or chemical and which are hence styled vital, and in which actions, life consists. Vitality.

After these three theories of life have been discussed, Mayer's theory and his notion of the equivalence of Force will also receive a few words of explanation. Mayer.

Had Prof. Huxley, Sir W. Gull, Dr. Lionel Beale, and Mayer used the words, Life, Vitality, Force, Power, and Organization, in the sense they are used by grammarians and logicians, they would have come much more nearly to an agreement with Brown and Fletcher. Use of Words.

In discussing the nature of Life it is most important to keep steadily in mind the distinction between a property, a power, and an action. Fletcher's Property.

A property signifies only a susceptibility of motion, Power.

* Note 3, Appendix. † Note 4, Appendix.