

Literature, &c.

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CONFESSIONS OF A QUACK.

WHEN a person who for many years had been living and making money by practices which a moralist would term fraudulent, comes forward at the end of his career with a confession of them, it is likely to be presumed that he has renounced, and is alarmed of, his former course of life. Now I, for a considerable period have only been getting my bread, but also buttering it richly, by medical quackery; and I am retired on a handsome fortune which I have thereby amassed. But for my part, so far from feeling either shame or repentance on account of what I have been, I declare solemnly, with my hand upon my briches pocket, that I glory in the name of a Quack. I wish any body could imagine with what exultation I hear, as I pass by a village pond, the popular cry of the ducks upon it. Quack, quack, quack! Yes; I am a Quack, although a retired one. I own it, I boast of it, and when I look back upon all things, ay, and all the persons too, that I have done, to become the rich, fat, comfortable fellow that I am, I am delighted. So pleasing is this retrospect, that thereby, partly, it is, that I am induced to publish these disclosures, which nothing but an ingenuous modesty in speaking of my own affairs makes me term "Confessions." In so doing, however, I am actuated by another motive, namely, by a craving for sympathy; a desire to render kindred minds partakers of my own. This amiable instinct is one which we Quacks, in the busy hum as it may be truly called, of our lives, are obliged to repress. We cannot unbosom, even to our dearest friends, without putting ourselves in each other's power. Our secrets, in that case, would be betrayed, at all events they would be shared in; and this would not do—would not pay. But now my active days are over. My mission is fulfilled. I am independent, able to speak out, and can tell what I choose without losing a farthing by it. And let me mention that, although in this position, I am only a middle-aged man. I reflect on this circumstance with great complacency, whilst, when riding in my carriage, I behold one of my brethren—for I will call all medical men my brethren, although they disown me—grown old and gray in what is called honourable practice, hobbling along on foot.

Full particulars respecting my birth and parentage shall be recorded on the monument which I mean to have erected over my remains. I was educated, that is to say, half-educated, like most persons whose destiny is the medical profession, at a classical and commercial academy. There, I remember, I was once, and only once flogged; which I mention because the infliction made a powerful impression on me, and, I believe was the means of doing me much good. My offence had been a verbal fiction. My executioner, with the concluding lash, bade me mind how I told lies for the future. I recollected this advice in after years, to my no small success and advantage. Having left school, and being required to choose a calling, I made choice of physic, influenced, I believe, chiefly by a love of the mystic and the marvellous; attributes with which my imagination had invested that science. A short course of practical pharmacy, however, in my master's surgery, soon dissipated all the romantic notions I had formed respecting it, but astonished me at the same time in an unexpected manner. I had fancied that the ills that flesh is heir to, were many, and that their corresponding remedies were equally numerous. I was, therefore, surprised at finding that by far the greater part of my employment consisted in pouring into phials, or "putting up," as it was termed, "Haust: Nig;" and "Mist: Feb." Three sorts of medicine, I thought, seemed to go far in treating diseases; and the dim forecast of a still grander generalisation, the embryonic notion of a universal pill, would occasionally occur to my conception.

When the term of my apprenticeship had expired, I proceeded, as a matter of course, to London, for the purpose of completing my studies. To these I really did apply myself with some diligence, and all that I now regret is, that I wasted so much time as I did in attending lectures and dissections, and storing my mind with anatomy, and chemistry, and botany and other sciences; which, in the first place, as I crammed them all up by rote, I forgot in less time after my examination than I had taken to learn them in before it, and which, in the next, if I had remembered them, would have been no use to me. A large percentage of curable diseases is to be cured with a blue pill and a black dose; those which are incurable are best treated with coloured water and placebo-pills. Now of what service is chemistry, or anything of the sort, in the prescription of such remedies as these? To arrive at the great truths contained in the foregoing statement, it will be supposed that I endeavoured, at least, to acquire some knowledge of medicine; and that I reflected to a certain extent, upon the information which I acquired on that subject. Such was actually the case; for before I entered into private practice, I thought, and certainly not without a show of reason, that the success of a medical man was proportionate to his professional skill, and that the better commodity he had to offer, the more would he gain by the sale of it. How beautifully was I deceived! How not less beautifully undeceived, as I shall show presently! Under this delusion, not only did I cram my head with scientific verbiage, in

order to pass the Hall and College, but I diligently attended hospital practice, and besides that, visited, in the capacity of pupil, patients belonging to another public charity. Acting under the physician to the institution, I undertook their cases, and visited them at their own homes, thus acquiring a knowledge of disease and its treatment at the bed side. Hence I arrived at the two great principles in therapeutics which I have above enunciated; but this was not all. I certainly did find that there was a no small number of diseases, whose cure really required scientific knowledge, applied by sound and careful judgment; and among these my confessions, I may mention that I thought myself a rather fine fellow, if not somewhat of a philosopher, for the mode in which I managed them. I do verily believe that I saved several lives, and a large number of eyes and limbs, by sheer art. I afterwards found how little the preservation of a life is appreciated, and how much less is thought of saving a limb, than of amputating it. But let me not anticipate.

My examinations passed, there was the world before me where to practice. I was not a little ambitious; and had any public appointment been open to competition or obtainable by talent, I should have striven for it, and perhaps have become a hospital-surgeon. But such was not the case, and I here tender the heartfelt thanks of a quack to my brethren, the surgeons of the London hospitals, for contriving so cleverly as they do, to exclude from their respected fraternity all but those who have been their apprentices, and their relations. But for this prudent and praise-worthy arrangement of theirs, I might still be a working man, without perhaps but a middling practice, and only a moderate amount of property in the funds. But to return. I saw no prospect of doing great things in London; and an advantageous opening for a general practitioner occurring in a country town, thither I repaired, worth about two thousand pounds, which had been left to me by my maternal grandfather.

Private practice, I very soon found, is quite a different thing from the treatment of gratuitous patients. I was quite astonished at the number of coughs, colds, mere aches and pains, and other trivial ailments, for which my attendance was solicited. I administered what was necessary for them, assuring the applicants that they had nothing to fear; and sometimes, when no medicine was wanted, merely told them to go home, keep quiet, and put their feet in warm water on going to bed.

Noodle, ninny, simpleton, that I was! I believe there is a piece of music called "With verdure clad." I declare that I never hear it named without thinking of the excessive greenness with which, as with a mantle, I was invested at the period just referred to. Imaginary and trifling complaints are the staple of medical practice. Serious diseases are too few to furnish bread and cheese. That there should ever have been a time when I was ignorant of these things!

From month to month, from week to week, I waited for important cases. Seldom they came; and for the few that I met with I got small pay and fewer thanks. My practice, altogether, instead of increasing, decreased; and the coughs, pains, and aches, betook themselves to a rival, who, I afterwards found, made much of them, and persuaded the subjects of them that they were really seriously ill.

My practice thus growing "small by degrees," had become, by the end of the third year from its commencement, so "beautifully less" than it was during the first, that, to pay my rent and taxes, and discharge my Christmas liabilities, I was obliged to make a large hole in my capital. There is, or was, a publication called the Medical Gazette, in which the names of many practitioners appear in connection with their published cases; but I began to fear that mine, if I did not take care, would very soon appear in a Gazette of another sort, connected with no case whatever, except a case of bankruptcy. In the back ground of my prospects, to speak figuratively, and by no means far in the distance, I very distinctly beheld the Dogs. It was therefore necessary, with a view to remedy this consumption of the purse, that I should resolve my whole man, medical as well as individual, into a Committee of Ways and Means.

I will not exhaust my reader's patience with a record of the debate into which I thus entered with myself, but will merely mention the resolutions in which it terminated, which were these:

Firstly, That in expecting to succeed in my profession by skill, knowledge, and attention, I had made a great mistake.

Secondly, That, by endeavouring to recommend myself by sincerity and straightforwardness, I had, on the contrary, incurred disavow.

Thirdly, That, in having followed my own inclinations in matters wherein I should have been guided by the fancies of others, I had been guilty of a grave contempt of the majesty of prejudice; to which, in all particulars, I ought to have been an abject slave.

Fourthly, That, through the above mentioned errors, I had irretrievably lost my practice; and fifthly, that I had better try my fortune somewhere else, remodelling my whole course of action, and turning over an entirely new leaf.

In a word, I fairly made up my mind to turn quack; and for my sphere of operations in that capacity, to choose the metropolis itself. I had little to lose, go where I might; my success in any part of the country would at best be limited; but there was a possibility that it might be unbounded in London. I therefore, without loss of time, transferred myself to town, boldly took a house in a good neighbourhood, put my blue bottles in my window, and

dressed myself in the fashion of a dissenting minister. I also, though my sight was as keen as a hawk's, put a pair of spectacles on my nose, for the very reason that I had known this done by pretenders, whom I used to despise. Thus equipped and established, I felt as if accoutred for a fight, and I screwed up my energies for an onslaught on my prey—the stupid, the ignorant, the vain, the credulous, the domineering—the creatures who would not let me get an honest maintenance.

My first step was to bring myself into notice. For this purpose I availed myself of every kind of introduction that I could procure, and I had a number of professional cards printed, which I did not scruple to send to all manner of persons, whether I knew them or not. I likewise, every now and then, wrote letters to the newspapers, sometimes asserting that I had discovered a remedy for hydrophobia; at others commenting on cases which happened to come before the public. As to the truth, speculative or practical, of anything that I asserted, I paid no regard to it whatever; my sole object was notoriety. I bribed penny-a-liners to report imaginary accidents, to which I was summoned, in the papers; and I hired persons to ring and knock at my door, and even, occasionally to call me out of church—whereat, by the by, my attendance was most exemplary, and my demeanour conspicuously devout. Whenever I went to a party, I was sure to recollect, at an early hour, that I had a professional engagement; but I scarcely left one without having ingratiated myself with some old lady or gentleman afflicted with indigestion or gout.

A steady perseverance in these and similar artifices, was in no long time rewarded with some success; and I was soon resorted to by a number of patients, sufficiently large to enable me to carry out my new principles of practice. And I now had brought myself into such a frame of mind that fresh truths, in reference to them, were continually imparted to me, as if by poetic inspiration. The first great fact that I perceived was, who, and what, are the bulk of profitable patients. I found that they were weak, fanciful, timid, and old women, and corresponding characters of the opposite sex, feeble in body, and still more feeble in mind, pampered to extreme sensitiveness, unable to bear the least pain, and frightened to death at the slightest symptom of disorder. Incapable of reasoning or hearing reason, knowing little of anything, and least of all of themselves, physically or mentally, they judge merely from their sensations. If these tell them that they are very ill, it is useless to attempt to convince them to the contrary. They will disbelieve the truth to their physician's prejudice; now, it is much better that they should believe a falsehood to his advantage. Accordingly, when such patients came to me with nothing, or next to nothing, the matter with them, I no longer told them that they would be well in a few hours, or dismissed them with a few cautions and a little medicine. Not I. I listened to their groans, and moans, and rigmarole, with profound attention. I told them, indeed, that they had no ultimate danger to apprehend, but at the same time I besought them to take care of themselves. And then I said that I would send them a little medicine; and I sent them several draughts to take every day, and pills or powders night and morning, for a week; so that I was better than my word. Consequently I not only made money, but also got the character of a kind, considerate man, and a dear creature; whereas I had formerly been called a savage, and a brute.

I soon, also, saw that many of the above class of patients who are rich, particularly if they belong to the fairer, not to say the softer sex, do not apply to a medical man merely for relief. They regard him as a sort of social luxury, a thing to rest upon—a cushion, a sofa,—or by which to be solaced, as by a comforter, a muff, or a warming-pan. They require him to come and console with them, and pity them. They want him also to gratify their vanity, whether by direct flattery, or by obviously and studiously consulting their whims and caprices. They would not care for a gratuitous doctor. He must be their paid sycophant, that they may enjoy the full luxury of despising him. How soon, like dear, meek Mawworm, did I learn to like to be despised! How musically chimed the reward of my humility!

Thus enlightened, I perceived the folly of my former independence, and the causes of its injurious consequences to me. I now dressed, acted, talked, nay, looked, solely at the dictation of society. I contradicted nobody, and yet agreed with everybody. I seemed to have no will of my own. On moral, political, and metaphysical subjects I never breathed a syllable, lest I should offend some one. And let me here lay down this aphorism, that no medical man, who would prosper in his calling, should ever deliver any opinion but a professional one. I may add, too, that he had better word even that ambiguously.

Another important, I may almost say tremendous, verity which I arrived at, was the proper mode, in a pecuniary sense, of treating serious diseases; one widely different from that which is right abstractedly. The latter mainly consists in the careful rectification of disordered functions, and the prescription of a suitable diet and regimen, with occasional recourse, in certain cases of necessity, to more active means, such as bleeding and counter-irritation. For diseases result from transgressions of the natural laws, and in conformity with those laws they should also be cured. Now scarcely any patients are aware of this. They imagine that diseases are cured directly, by certain drugs; whereby, indeed, mere symptoms are often relieved; and they are unable to distinguish such relief from a real cure. They moreover dislike

restrictions in diet, and hate to be obliged to take exercise; and they object to the right method of treatment because it is long and tiresome. They do not know or consider that by it alone can their diseases be finally eradicated. What they want is to be made well at once. Hence the Quack, to get money, must treat mere symptoms, irrespectively not only of their essential cause, but also of the mischief which he may thus do on the whole. For instance, I have often applied to by patients with determination of blood to the head. I might have given them appropriate medicine, desired them to live abstemiously, and perhaps to apply a mustard poultice, now and then, to the nape of the neck. By these means they would certainly have become well and have remained so. Did I do this? No! I bled them, to be sure which relieved them instantly; and then I allowed them to go and live as they liked. In a few months they were ill again. Again I bled them; and so on as often as they came to me. At last they generally died, though they would have lived under a more rational treatment; but what of that? I got well paid, and reputed a clever, nay, a bold practitioner, to boot.

A grand popular fallacy, which I successfully traded on, was the popular faith in specifics. For every complaint I invariably gave something to take. It was generally, therefore, believed, that I knew "what was what;" but what I really did know was, that there are but two specifics in the whole "Materia Medica"—sulphur and quinine. Diseases, directly or indirectly are the result of some sort of injury. The only specifics are those that either neutralize the injurious agent, or expel it from the system. I must apologise for all this philosophy; but really it is necessary to know something of medicine, in order to pervert it to quackery.

I had formerly often lost credit for a good cure by not having at the outset, sufficiently magnified the importance of the case. I took very good care now, to avoid this mistake. I have been summoned, frequently, to the bedside of a child, affected, perhaps, with the scarlatina, or measles. I have seen the mother, her lips white with agony, trembling as she listened for my opinion. And I have looked solemn, and shaken my head, and said I feared there was great danger, although, in fact, I had no apprehension of the kind. I was rather sorry to be obliged to trifle with her feelings; but I was forced to do so in self-defence.

A question, perhaps, may by this time, have occurred to the reader, as to how many people in the course of my practice, I calculate that I have killed? I cannot say exactly. By bleeding for the relief of symptoms, in the manner above mentioned, I believe I have produced several cases of diseased heart, which terminated fearfully. I have also, I think, shortened some lives by the use of mercury for a similar purpose. Likewise, I suspect that, with the same end in view, I have treated divers cases of indigestion with alcoholic stimulents, whereby was occasioned disorganisation of the liver, ultimately producing death by dropsy.

By means of a practice, based on the principles above indicated, I became, very speedily, a prosperous gentleman, if I may venture to claim the appellation. At length I hit upon my grand discovery, which has raised me to the proud pinnacle of affluence that I now stand upon. There was a certain pill, compounded of various ingredients, which, as I have sold the patent for it, I am not at liberty to mention. I have frequent occasion for its use in everyday disorders, the result, principally, of over-eating and drinking. I found, when I came to consider, that in forty out of fifty cases, at least, I had occasion to give this pill. I came, therefore, to the conclusion that it would be serviceable, that is, would produce apparent relief in the proportion of twenty per cent., taking diseases at random. This at once suggested to me the idea of making it a patent medicine. I reasoned, that out of those who might be induced to take it, eighty at least in every hundred, would fancy that it had done them good; and that the many voices in its favour would be attended to, and the few against it disregarded. Nor did the issue falsify my conjecture. I took out a patent for it, under a fictitious name, of course. I advertised it in every paper and magazine that would admit such an advertisement; that is, in most of the papers and magazines in the kingdom.

I wrote grateful communications from enthusiastic purchasers, testifying to its miraculous virtues, and appended them to those advertisements. In the same manner, I published letters which I pretended to have received from Abernethy, and Astley Cooper, recommending my pill to families. I actually procured testimonials to its efficacy from one or two stupid noblemen, and several old ladies of rank; and in some instances actually forged letters of gratitude from public characters. Every dead wall, every boarding, was placarded up with my infallible pill. In these spirited proceedings I spent a little fortune; but the bread which I scattered on the waters returned to me, after not many days, hundredfold. Thanks to the glorious credulity, thanks to the stupendous ignorance of my fellow-creatures, with respect to the laws of health and disease! And now, perhaps, it will be asked by those who have perused the above Confessions, what are my reflections when I lay my head upon my pillow? Why, I reflect what a clever head it must be that has made its owner a Croesus. As to conscience, I drown it in the Pactolus of my Three-per-Cents. I have now candidly described my course through life, and I advise every medical man to imitate it. Whilst common sense remains uncommon, and till the minds of the many are enlightened on the sub-