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NEW SERIES.

GENTLEMEN WISHING TO JOIN THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL ASSOCIATION ARE REQUESTED TO APPLY TO THE GENERAL SECRETARY, TO THE BRANCH SECRETARIES, OR TO THE EDITOR OF THE JOURNAL. The Annual Subscription is One Guinea. The Subscription runs from January to January; and members now joining will receive the Numbers of the JOURNAL from the commencement of the year. Members receive the JOURNAL free by post.

We have received at least fifty letters on the "Sunday question" within the last week. We propose to print some of them in next number.

## TABLE-MOVING AND HOMCEOPATHY: VALUE OF EVIDENCE IN SCIENCE.

DR. FARADAY has written to the *Times* explaining his views on table-moving, and describing a very simple instrument, which shews that the motion is produced by a force exerted in the direction of the table moved, and that if no such action is exerted no motion follows. The inference is that it is produced by muscular action.

He concludes his letter by these very pertinent and thoughtful observations:

"I have been greatly startled by the revelation which this purely physical subject has made of the condition of the public mind. No doubt there are many persons who have formed a right judgment, or used a cautious reserve; for I know several such, and public communications have shown it to be so; but their number is almost as nothing to the great body who have believed and borne testimony, as I think, in the cause of error. I do not here refer to the distinction of those who agree with me, and those who differ. By the great body, I mean such as reject all consideration of the equality of cause and effect, who refer the results to electricity and magnetism, yet know nothing of the laws of these forces; or to attraction, yet show no phenomena of pure attractive power; or to the rotation of the earth, as if the earth revolved round the leg of a table; or to some unrecognised physical force, without inquiring whether the known forces are not sufficient; or who even refer them to diabolical or spiritual agency, rather than suspend their judgment, or acknowledge to themselves that they are not learned enough in these matters to decide on the nature of the action. I think the system of education that could leave the mental condition of the public body in the state in which this subject has found it, must have been greatly deficient in some very important principle."

These wise reflections are worthy of thoughtful perusal. We, however, as medical men, are not startled by this sudden display in a purely physical subject of the ignorance of the cultivated public to estimate the value of physical evidence, or of their conceit in pronouncing dogmatically on a question of forces whose laws they do not in the least understand. Faraday with philosophic coolness expresses no irritation at the deluge of pseudo-scientific impertinence with which he was overwhelmed; but M. Léon Faucault, the discoverer

of the rotation of the pendulum, in a recent article in one of the Paris journals, has given very full force to the feelings of irritability which were excited in a Frenchman of scientific repute, on appeals made to him on all sides by those who began by believing and wished him to confirm their views. Escape from Paris was his only remedy. We, however, are too familiar with these delusions: we have, unfortunately, too much experience in the same classes of deceptions to feel any great surprise or even much annoyance. When a large number of highly civilised people believe that infinitesimal doses of medicines, so small as to be incapable of detection by any tests, can produce a long catalogue of morbid sensations and actions in a healthy person, and can create a new disease, like, though stronger than the one to be cured—when multitudes believe this nonsense, which is not worthy of the consideration of any scientific mind for more than sufficient time to see its absurdity, and to dismiss it contemptuously out of his thoughts for ever—we can feel no surprise when we see the same inability to judge of the equality of cause and effect in this table-moving experiment.

And when we see the medical experience in the treatment of diseases of all past ages rejected for this new absurdity, we detect the same form of conceit which rejects a known cause, that of muscular action, for an unknown one, because it seems more wonderful and mysterious. In both cases the public will judge dogmatically and conceitedly of subjects which they do not in the least understand. That so coarse an experiment as table-moving, and one so open in all its stages to fallacies, should have been thought to be sufficient to prove the existence of a new force, only shews that the public are entirely unaware of the kind of evidence on which real discoveries in science rest; and with regard to the effect of medicines, the sources of fallacy are much greater, inasmuch as the interior of the human body is more complicated than a table with half a dozen hands upon it.

Those who are at all inclined to believe that truth in science is proved at all by the number of those who are convinced of it, may have a useful lesson now. The belief of a Faraday, a Thomas Bell, or a Grove, would be more weighty than the conviction of the myriads of drawing-room experimentizers who, "like Catafelto, with his hair on end, wonders at his own wonders". An affirmative in science cannot be made out of numerous negatives. No correct inference can be drawn from the largest amount of incorrect data: no law of nature can be discovered by any multitude of crude experiments.

In making these observations, we do not wish to be understood as thinking these table-turning experiments are valueless, and to be dismissed without consideration. They belong to the joint domain of physiology and physics, and deserve the investigation of severe science. What is wrong is the ignorance and conceit of those who would pronounce on matters of which they are incapable of judging, instead of reserving their judgment until they