

# ASSOCIATION MEDICAL JOURNAL.

EDITED BY JOHN ROSE CORMACK, M.D.

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NEW SERIES.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. WATLEY was elected a member of the Association by the Central Council at Worcester, he having been proposed by Mr. BOTTOMLEY of Croydon, and seconded by Dr. TYLER SMITH of London. The validity of this election never was discussed by the Metropolitan Counties Branch. If our correspondents will peruse the reports of the proceedings of that Branch, at pp. 421 and 535, and of the Central Council, at pp. 469 and 600, they will get all the information which we could supply.

LETTERS, ETC., FOR THE EDITOR, may be addressed to 21, EDWARDS STREET, PORTMAN SQUARE; where members may see the Editor, on *Wednesdays*, between 12 and 1 o'clock.

## DOES MEDICAL PERIODICAL LITERATURE AFFECT MEDICAL CHARACTER?

THE life of a medical man in full practice cannot be too contemplative for action; but it may be too active to allow time and opportunity for contemplation. The information that is gained at the bed side cannot be dignified by the name of wisdom, until it has been classified and expanded by a process of meditation; and if we shut out that hour

"That makes deep silence in the heart,  
For thought to do her part"

we deny ourselves a means of enlarging our field of usefulness, and run a great risk of enervating our necessary qualities for making accurate observation.

We are often asked what ought to be the collateral pursuits of medical men; how they should spend their leisure hours; and what means they should take to occupy profitably Apollo's unbent bow? To give an adequate answer to such a large question now, would carry us beyond our present purpose. It is enough to say, that if routine business alone could employ the whole of a man's time, he would soon become a barbarian; his senses would imperceptibly take the place of his judgment; and the refinement of his original education would melt away before the fire of a sanguine appetite. We all feel, and many confess, that the pressure of hard work is constantly tending to unfit our minds for abstract study. How necessary, then, is it to provide proper mental food for the hour of need—for that season when the powers of thought are weary with the burthen of money-getting occupation, and the mind is unable, from sheer fatigue, to make a stand against principles to which in its healthier moments it could never consent. The most energetic efforts of a vigorous language and clever composition, whatever be the real and internal merits of the writing, will always be felt when the intellect is in a rude and uncultivated state, as the most powerful effects of poetry and music are for the most part displayed when these arts are but imperfectly understood. The savage hearer feels within him the operation of principles which are to him mysterious, and whose defects he is unable to expose. In like manner, the pleasure we derive from reading is less interrupted by the intrusion of a fas-

tidious criticism, the less we are under the dominion of our discriminating faculties.

Almost every man in England who can read has his periodical newspaper; and, whatever his station in society may be, the tone of his daily life is coloured more or less by the literary food he daily feeds on. If his journal be the exponent of sound and definite principles, his mind will insensibly rise to adopting those principles; if, on the other hand, he reads a well written essay, the spirit of which is false, and the philosophy shallow, no power of mental analysis will enable him to get entirely free from the defilement of the pitch he is habitually touching. At first sight it may seem that the educated classes are an exception to this rule, and, accordingly, that the members of the medical profession always carry about with them an antidote to such poisonous influences; but, on examining more narrowly into this subject, it will be found that no absolute safeguard is provided for any class of men. Not only are the frivolous members of our profession, who, with other kindred spirits, enjoy an elysium of their own, made more vulgar, and, without resistance, suffer themselves to be imposed upon by the transparent sophisms of a low-toned periodical press: not only is the "Paradise of Fools" enriched by the specious argument of mischievous agitators; but the leading men of the profession, the scholars, and the accomplished members of our community, if they do not at once recoil from contact with such noxious elements, permit some infection to insinuate itself into their manners and opinions; for it is hardly possible for the strongest and most vigilant mind, whilst the imagination is assailed by the perpetual intrusion of degrading principles, to escape some pollution from the effluvia that are for ever steaming up from the hotbeds of impurity. An insensible assimilation takes place between the agent and the thing acted on; and the better part of the judgment is insidiously decoyed from its higher ground to the level of a corrupt literature. Nay, more; the smallest deviation from the right path is not only a deterioration in itself, but, *pro tanto*, renders the character more liable to further deformity: and, since it is part of the internal constitution of all journals that a battery of many minds is brought to bear upon the one mind of the reader, we may well suppose that the effect of this constant broadside, whether good or evil, will, in the long run show itself in the conduct of the person assailed.

We are sometimes told that it matters not what are the ethical principles of a paper, so long as it supplies us with the information we require; that so long as we get a record of events and (so-called) discoveries, we need not trouble our heads either about the language in which these things are conveyed to us, or about the general doctrines that are mixed up with them. Those who agree with us in thinking that a society of gentlemen may feel its "proprieties" much shocked by having a coarse and licentious phraseology perpetually forced upon them, will readily believe that the adulteration of moral food is as pernicious, in its way, as the poisonous ingredients which the commercial enterprise