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Specifics in Medicine

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BY

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Specifics in Medicine

By this term is meant the indiscriminate Administration of certain Medicines for the cure of Diseases which Diseases are treated by name without reference to symptoms or accompanying Complications. A firm conviction of the evils arising from such procedure and believing as I do this to be the mountain Rock upon whose bosom the crafts of more young Practitioners are wrecked than any probably all others combined has induced me to notice some of the Ills arising there from, as to there being Specifics for Disease may well be questioned I mean such as will cure invariably. Now there are such Medicines as have a Specific influence over

or relevancy for certain Structures I would not deny. Such as Mercury for the Liver or Ergot for the Uterus &c. Ceteras Paribus these Medicines would Exert the same influence over the Organism. But in as much as Surrounding circumstances are much varied their use must vary likewise.

A Medicine to be a specific must of necessity cure in all instances without failing in any. We see then at once if we have such they are of the fewest number. Having as I have made myself understood as to what I conceive to be a specific in medicine. I will now proceed to notice some of the very many Evils arising from a Treatment based upon such a principle. Where shall we look for the deleterious Effects of those Specialities in medicine. Shall it be into its incipency if it was to be found Only there it would be of less moment but it is found among all Nations since

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the days of Hippocrates, (the Father of Medicine)
It even prevails to this time, but not to so
ruinous an Extent as formerly when the
Science was less developed, In as much as it is
impossible to examine each of the so used Specif-
ics, we will notice a portion only of those used
in Fevers (making it the Type) for as this Disease
is the outlet to more lives than any other it is
likely those Medicines have been used in it more
than any other one, Sydenham says that this
Disease is the outlet to two thirds of the human
lives this may be Extravagant but when contem-
plated and the immense number who in
passing from the present to a future state
of Existence are seen to migrate through this
great passway we can not fail to perceive
the vast importance to the Medical mind.
It behoves us therefore to take a retrospective

View of the before Established plans of treatment in this Diseases and see which has been the most Successful Mode of Practice. Striving to profit by our Examination in as much as the good of our fellow man should ever be the leading motive in medical research, and in so doing a few only of the Theories which have received attention will be noticed and they but partially Examined in consequence of space being so limited. A few remarks only will be devoted to each theory they being sufficient to illustrate the point desired.

When medicine was in its Infancy before it had developed its component parts as it has done by the Scrutiny and close investigation of the many Illustrious men who have Illuminated our Profession, and consequently before the Phenomena of Fever

were as fully understood as at present,
 There was @ Fever Theory which sprung up
 (The humoral theory) very Erroneous, so much so
 that we wonder how it could have received
 the attention of the Profession so Exclusively
 as did it, But when we consider for one
 moment their then Stock of Medical inf-
 ormation we are not so much astounded,
 having confined their Observations as they
 had to the living Subject had not so much
 Even as discovered the Circulation of the
 Blood, @ Subject of so vital importance ^{to the}
 Physician, much less those morbid Appearances
 had they failed to perceive which are revealed
 Only by Postmortems, and without @ Knowledge
 of which the true Pathology of the Diseases
 must have remained unknown and their
 Treatment Erroneous as a natural consequence

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Their want of information on such subjects as the above is sufficient proof of their lack of knowledge of many of the phenomena both of health and disease, the above mentioned theory proposed an explanation of the cause of Fevers and also a cure for all Fevers of what ever type or grade, this was to be accomplished by a few medicines used in all cases whatever irrespect of type complications peculiar Idiosyncrasy &c, how did this theory succeed its abandonment as soon as the science began to develop its self is proof of its baneful effects, when Physicians had acquired a more extensive knowledge of the febrile movement seeing as they did the fallacy of the above mentioned theory formed an other more scientific yet not much more successful this was the Spasmodic

Theory, perceiving as its Supporters did the
 cause of Fever to be some offending mat-
 ter in the Blood, this being the cause the
 indications for treatment were quite
 palpable it was but necessary that the
 Blood should be brought back to its original
 purity to insure health Equal to that Enjo-
 yed previous to the febrile attack, this was
 to be accomplished first by Bloodletting and
 Secondly by Purgation, For which purpose they
 used but few remedies. This was not at all
 Successful, just what would have been Expected
 with our present light upon the Science.
 For we fore see the innumerable circumstances
 with which such Practice would not be admis-
 sible Especially in those of a Typhoid tendency
 for we fore see its debilitating influence
 Exerted through a Series of weeks which it will

run, it being a self limited Disease, this Disease so far from requiring debilitants on the contrary calls for Stimulants as I believe is the received opinion at the present day, at least among our Profession, beyond a doubt this would account for some of the fatal consequences which have attended former Epidemics where in this mode of Practice was applied This like other Specialities used without surrounding circumstances being taken into notice will be seen as ever has been the case productive of great harm, though often placed to the credit of some other circumstance or a combination of circumstances, This Theory so universally abandoned at the present time nevertheless Engaged a reasonable portion of the most Eminent Practitioners at the time in which it prevailed, it is probable that it

has contributed its mite to the Elevation of our Science, though at the Expence of the lives of many of our fellow man, many who did not fall an immediate Sacrifice to this mighty two Edged sword (the lancet & Purgation) have had their health much impared through the remainder of their lives, This like the preceding Theories had its votaries run its round of popularity and was abandoned, Finding all of the above Theories to have failed their Patients dying both on right and on the left they looked still deeper into the Ocean of Science and there saw with their minds Eye the cause of Fever to be resident in the Nervous System, a Nervous disturbance, A new plan of treatment followed of necessity, This was Substantially to set up a counter action or to declare war against the invader and whip him out of camp;

This was to be done by a special set of remedies
 Mercury arsenic and a few adjuncts, these
 admitted valuable remedies in some Diseases
 have been so much abused that it is
 a question of some difficult solution
 whether or not their introduction has been
 a curse to the human family, who of
 us has not seen the deleterious effects
 of Mercury, that has not seen Nature
 herself defaced in the most shameful
 manner, that has not seen cheeks
 destroyed, lips slough away, and Teeth
 drop from their sockets, and worse even
 than these constitutions impaired, cheeks
 may be made anew, lips reconstructed,
 and Teeth restored, but a broken down
 constitution can never be replaced, This
 Theory has not run as rapid a course as the

preceding, indeed some stick to it up to
 the present time, They however are mere
 Empirics and Steadfasts in the Science,
 who do not deserve to be ranked among
 Physicians, This treatment might be admissible
 in some of the forms of Malarial Fever
 but is always injurious in those of a Typhoid
 Nature, For as we know this Fever of its self
 very much impoverishes the blood and at
 the same time Mercury being a known
 defibriniser the very medicine which is to
 be avoided in this Disease, It is a well known
 fact too that reparation can not take place
 while this debility of the blood continues to
 exist, These like all medicines which have been ^{used}
 as Specifics in Disease, in many instances
 have caused the most disastrous Effects, But
 as the most Physicians must have their

locus focus upon which to ride into Practice
 as does the Politician into office, By far
 too many have mounted mounted the
 Sampson of Medicines (Mercury), But
 again in one of our Sister States there
 was a man who sprung up and declared
 to the public that he had found the long
 sought for Germ, which was the cause
 of and cure for Fever, The cause in
 his mind consisted in venous congestion
 Especially of the vena cava Ascendens,
 Little more had he to do in the Treatment
 than to convert the black or congested blood
 into black bile, and in this way correct
 the cachectic state of the System, This could
 be done in no way so Effectually as by
 Stimulating the Liver to active secretion, it
 being the only organ which forms a secretion

from venous blood, hence we see agreeably with
 his Theory (which bears the name of its founder
 Cook) the consistency in his mode of Treatment,
 But since farther investigation of this subject
 has proved him to be in Error as respects the
 cause of Fever, his treatment must necessa-
 rially be Erroneous, This distinguished Man
 whether more lauded in consequence of his
 intellect or despised for the injury sustained by
 the human family is a question which Eternity
 herself alone can solve, He Excited the Liver
 to active Secretion by the administration of
 Mercury, a very skillfully selected remedy if the
 cause had been what he supposed, with his
 Cava Pill composed as it was of Calomel
 Rhubarb & aloes, with this and a few adjuncts he
 proposed to do all for Fever that could be
 done of what ever variety or complications,

This Theory had a wide spread^a circulation many
 of its votaries were men of distinguished talents,
 it had its greatest area in the great Mississippi
Valley for the obvious reason that this locality
so abounds with Fever, I now pass to the last
 Fever Theory which I propose to notice, in as much
 as I believe these to be sufficient to illustrate
 what I designed, This the Thompsonian Theory,
 is still in vogue among us, it reigns to some
 extent where the Science of medicine has shed
 her most benign rays, not so much so though
 as where men are not skilled in the Profession,
 unphilosophical as it is some will pursue it,
 doubtless from the fact that it cost but little,
 it receives some patronage from the contracted and
 miser who had rather risk dying than incur
 an unreasonable Bill, I may safely say unphilosophical
 for verily I do not believe its advocates are guided

by one solitary ray of sound philosophy,
 How can they be when we see them trying to
 produce the same Effect in all kinds of Disease
 using Steam as their great sheet anchor, or
 more properly making use of it as a Specific,
 or again as the vulgar call it, the cure all,
 a name which is only exceeded by their Extreme
 ignorance, using Steam with a few additional
 aids in all varieties of Fever, Intermittent,
 Remittent, Typhoid, as the case may happen
 to be, If the Patient is hot he must be Steamed.
If cold he must be subjected to the Overlasting
Steaming process, For which they are so remarkable
 more so from the absurdities to which they
 hold than their Success, I witnessed a case of
 Typhoid Fever which had been under this mode
 of treatment for three weeks, the free access ^{the} of
 atmosphere had been denied the Patient, he

was wrapped in one Blanket after another almost
 beyond numbering. Teas had been given ad libitum
 he had been delicious for six days in defiance
 to all that Steam could achieve, his Person
 in comparison was as hot as Mt Vesuvius, and
 his head smoked like unto a Jar Kiln. Profuse
 Sweating had been kept up until he was reduced
 to a mere skeleton, his friends had given him
 up to die, but being unwilling to give him
 up thus, they made their last Effort
 to save the already dying man by calling in
 a regular bred Physician, who in honor to
 himself and our Profession, as it was reached
 down into the vault of the grave and rescued
 the Body from the Tomb, we firmly believe
 that there is no sane man with common und-
 erstanding after due reflection who would
 use the selfsame agent to drive away both

heat and cold, Two principles so dissimilar in their
 nature as these would of necessity require different
 means to remove them, This Theory has shared
 to a goodly Extent the fate of the Fever theories
 in general, while Each may (and no doubt has) ^{been}
 cured Cases of a particular kind it will fail
 in the majority, as will readily appear when we
 consider the multiplicity of circumstances
 arising in any given Disease, much less in
 those whose characters are so essentially different,
 In Watsons Practice of Physic (Pa 935) he
 says that much harm has resulted from
 treating Fevers by name without reference
 to accompanying Complications, Again
 (957) he states that it is not only individual
 Cases of Fever which differ but that Epidem-
 ics vary much in their Character so that
 a plan of treatment which was well suited

to One Epidemic may be improper and even hurtful if indiscriminately applied in another, (958) he declares that he believes with Pitcairn who being asked what he thought of Aescapain's treatise on Fever replied that he did not like Fever Curers, further more he said that A Fever may be guided but not cured, just as a Ship may be guided during a Storm, yet the Storm cannot be quelled, one being as impossible as the other, (962) in speaking of varying the treatment for Fever remarked that we should not depend upon any set of remedies in our Fever practice, but that it must be varied to meet the symptoms, for what is applicable in one hour may be Contra indicated in the next, Wood in his practice corroborates the opinion of Watson on this subject

in a very striking manner, it is unnecessary therefore to copy his language, If specifics fail in Fever they would in like manner fail in other diseases,

This indiscriminate use of Medicines is what Quacks have Ever been striving for, in short it is this to a considerable degree which has Ever distinguished the scientific from the mere noise or Ignoramus in medicine, Now I would not be understood to Object to Specifics if we have such, on the contrary I would be as much pleased with such Medicines as any one, My objection is to Medicines being used as specifics when they possess no such properties, Quinine is nearer to this class of remedies than any other

medicine, (in my humble opinion) ~~than any~~
~~and~~ no one is more in favor of that
 drug than myself, I maintain that
 Each Disease has its pathology Esenti-
 ally differing from other Classes, and
 frequently from those of the same order,
 and that the treatment will vary in
 the different Types, and many times
 in the same Class in consequence of
 varied Complexation Idiosyncrasies,

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