

On the Present State of Medical Science in Germany.

Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non.

IN travelling through the different universities on the continent, our curiosity naturally leads us to inquire, what are the prevailing doctrines taught in these schools? by whom are they supported? what is the effect and influence of these speculations? and what is the probable chance of their being unintelligible, or meritorious and useful? To these questions, when asked about the state of medicine and philosophy in Germany, an Englishman might reply as a French emigrant did on his return to his native place, when his neighbours inquired about the language of the people where he had been: "Ce n'est pas proprement une langue, (dit-il), chacun parle son jargon, mais ils s'entendent en-

tr'eux." The last clause of this sentence is no small praise indeed, when applied to the new schools of German philosophy ; for the number of sects and systems is so great, that it is no easy task to understand even the terms employed by the different writers. Medicine comes in for some share of the miserable controversies which are going on between the partisans and opponents of the new system of "*the philosophy of nature*," as it is called. The prevailing doctrine now taught is pure *idealism*, and the disputes are like those between the idealists and realists of the middle ages, substituting useless questions, which do not admit of being proved, for practical inquiries. This scholastic philosophy has extended its influence to all branches of science ; it has set all the heads a-reading and writing a great deal, without understanding much ; and, like the philosophy of old times, only serves to trouble the state of science, already too much confused. Physical anthropology, organical physics, and psychological medicine, engross all the attention which the sober studies of anatomy and chemistry do not occupy. On subjects of practical medicine, very few books have been published for several years past ; the catalogues at the Leipsic fairs have been filled with explanations of the new, and attacks and defences of the old, theory of excitability, which has been grafted on the theory of our countryman John Brown. As the doctrine of this celebrated writer is essentially connected with the present state of medical opinions in Germany, it may not be amiss to give a sketch of its rise and progress in that country. It is only the chiefs of sects of every kind that acquire any degree of celebrity by their writings ; hence it may be explained how the works of John Brown are more universally known on the continent than any of our best practical authors. The humoral pathology, or the doctrine taught by Boerhaave, prevailed, till lately, in all the medical schools in Germany ; and, at this day, it forms the principal articles of faith amongst many practitioners. But the simplicity of the Brunonian theory excited great attention, and stimulated the professors to reject their former opinions, and adopt this new system with enthusiastic zeal. The principal supporters of the doctrine of excitability were Frank, Weikard, Thomann, Marcus, and Joseph Frank. The first translation of the "*Elementa Medicinæ*" was published at Frankfort in 1795 ; several years after the doctrine itself had made its way into Italy, and revolutionized one half of the professors at Pisa, Padua, Pavia, and Milan. This rapid conversion was not so much from a conviction of the truth of the theory itself, but because something new in the shape of a system was wanted, since the old hypothesis of humours was become demonstratively false. *Moscatti* does not scruple to acknow-

ledge this much in the preface to his translation of Brown's works, wherein he confesses his object was to oppose Brownism to humorism, which was prevalent throughout Italy, and particularly taught by the professor of the practice of medicine at Pavia. The partisans of Brown were naturally disposed to confirm the alleged superiority of his theory and practice, by observations made at the bedside of patients. Hence a series of clinical cases and experiments were published by Dr Joseph Frank at Pavia, and by Dr Thomann, first physician to the hospital at Wurtzbourg. These two records of Brunonian practice may be fairly appreciated by knowing the fact, that their authors have both given up the theory and practice of their idol and master. There is a spirit of inordinate generalization, a love of systematic novelty among the German physicians, which is unknown in this country, and, fortunately, we have no relish for its charms. Throughout every school, and every town, a most ardent zeal is shown in the pursuit of physical knowledge; vast numbers of men do nothing but read and write from one year to another; and it is astonishing with what avidity and emulation new inventions are received and propagated. The works of Van Swieten, De Haen, and Stoll, are now seldom heard of; the gastric and bilious hypotheses are sunk into merited oblivion; and the sthenic and asthenic theory of Brown is lost in the complicated maze of the new philosophical speculations. Schelling, a pupil of the celebrated Kant, formerly professor at Jena, now removed to Tübingen, is the founder of a new system, styled, "the Philosophy of Nature." It is difficult to give an idea of what this philosophy consists; and, anywhere but in Germany, one would be astonished to hear men of sense and reflection declare, that what is called empiricism, sensible experience, and experimental philosophy, are necessarily and demonstratively false. And the demonstration, as far as it is intelligible, seems to proceed on some transcendental notions of the powers of the human mind and its external relations. Troxler, a young Swiss physician, who studied at Jena, and was there initiated into the mysteries of Schelling's philosophy, has become a zealous advocate and expounder of those doctrines. His "*Versuche in der organischen Physik*," and his "*Grundriss der Theorie der Medicin*," are much esteemed by those who pride themselves on being able to understand them. Wagner is another popular writer on this department: he was originally one of Schelling's warm friends and admirers, and taught his philosophy at Salzburg; but he has now set up for an original thinker himself, and imitates his friend and associate in bringing forth something equally new and strange. Fichte is one of the most distinguished of the *literati*; but his writings belong

more to the higher parts of metaphysics than to physics, and have no reference, like the others, to medicine, physiology, mineralogy, and chemistry.

Such lofty speculations, such dreams, such transcendental views, are less surprising, when we consider, how great the demand is for philosophical novelty; how many universities there are, and how many professors of philosophy in each, who must think, in order to live, and must publish all they can think.

Yet it is lamentable to reflect on such a waste of time and ingenuity, which might be more usefully employed in making new observations, or in correcting the errors of our predecessors; for these theories are not founded upon any newly discovered facts, but are merely the result of premature metaphysical generalization. After reading through such long declamations, in so many volumes, which announce the sure foundation of all medical science, and a perfect knowledge of nature, it is mortifying to find nothing but what has been repeated over and over again for two thousand years past, in so many different languages: one is tempted to cry out with the poet Martial:

“ Turpe est difficiles habere nugas,
Et stultus labor est ineptiarum.”

From so general a censure, however, the physiological writings of Professor Reil at Halle, must be exempted. This is not the place to vindicate the peculiar merits of his works, yet it ought to be known, that his “*Archiv für die Physiologie*,” and his “*Fieberlehre*,” are remarkably distinguished from the works of his contemporaries, by many just views on several points of physiology and the practice of physic. The object of Reil’s inquiries is not to seek for the cause of animal life, either in the respiration, or in the brain, but he simply states, that life is the effect of a perpetual series of physico-chemical changes taking place in organic bodies; and he points out the way to obtain a philosophical analysis of those complicated facts, which are briefly expressed by the words *vital actions* and *organic motions*.

The number of medical journals is very considerable. Those edited by Loder, Hufeland, Harles, Mursinna, and Roschlaub, are the best, and contain the largest collection of useful facts. There is one journal for foreign literature, entitled, “*Journal der ausländischen Medicinischen Literatur*,” edited by Hufeland, Streyer, and Harles of Erlangen, which is well conducted, and gives early intelligence of all the most important medical books published in different countries of Europe. Anatomy is studied with particular attention in every college, and the opportunities for such pursuits are very favourable. Loder teaches anatomy

and surgery at Halle, and Soemmering enjoys the reward of his well-earned reputation, by holding the sinecure place of an academician at the Court of Bavaria at Munich. With regard to practical parts of physic and surgery, it is not easy to form any accurate conclusion, because the particular excellence of an art depends so much upon the skill of the artist, and individuals differ so much from each other in different places, and even from themselves on different occasions. In general, however, the German physicians are far behind the best practitioners in this country; the surgeons have not made any particular improvements lately, except in the operations on the eye. Diseases of the eyes have been investigated with minute attention, and Beer and Schmidt at Vienna, are highly rated as expert oculists. Beer has gained great credit by his skill, in making an artificial pupil; and he has restored sight, in some cases, where, without such a nice operation, it was impossible to get any relief. On medical subjects, where so many readers are to be found, of course there will be a prodigious quantity of bad books; but there are some good ones published occasionally in Germany, and the custom-house officers allow both good and bad wares to be imported on paying the duties. We shall endeavour to select the most interesting, and, from time to time, give a sketch of the state of medical science on the Continent, by inquiring into the merits of the principal publications which acquire popularity there.

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