

AN  
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION

ON

*Symptomatology*

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The history of practical medicine, from its first organic arrangement, under the father of medicine, (Hippocrates) to the present day, has undergone a series of changes, and revolutions, both in its pathology, and in its Therapeutics, so much so, that in many respects, it scarcely bears a resemblance of what it once was.

The facilities, which the knowledge of Anatomy, has given to a more thorough understanding of man, in regard to his diseased organization, as also, the light which has been shed by pathology, which still farther, facilitates the study of disease, by enabling the student to draw a comparison, from the healthy functions of the body, to a diseased state; it has at once, revealed a system of investigation, which has carried the pract-

-ice of medicine, so far towards truth, that it has, ample, grounds of asserting its claims as a science;

The study of disease under the present state of the science, may be said to consist; in three grand divisions, 1<sup>st</sup> its symptoms, 2<sup>nd</sup>. its pathology, and 3<sup>rd</sup> its therapeutics, or treatment; The study of symptoms however, may be considered as but a part and parcel of pathology, as in itself, it constitutes nothing, only so far as it gives us an insight, into the state of the system in disease;

Symptoms, are finger boards, which point to the part that is affected; they are like banners raised upon a wall, to tell what is going on within, and thus they are indispensable in the diagnosis of disease.

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So also with the prognosis of disease, no man could give an opinion, as to the termination of any disease, without the finger boards being set up, to tell him whether it will terminate in death or recovery. Thus, in Typhoid fever, somnolence appearing on the first day, perversion of intelligence, exhibited by the patient, declaring himself well, while in reality, he is at the door of death, catching at supposed objects = picking at the bed clothes, &c. When we see these symptoms, our prognosis is unfavorable, as to the recovery of the patient.

So it is with the various diseases to which man, the master piece of the animal Kingdom is subject to; Without a knowledge of symptoms, we can have no knowledge of the art of Physic; Sagacity, in penetrating the import of symptoms, constitutes a great part in the skill of a physician;

Symptoms are not only valuable in the diagnosis, and prognosis of disease, but they serve for a third purpose, more valuable than all, the treatment of the disease. For in this, the patient as well as physician is concerned; if the doctor treat the case well, and the patient survives, it adds to his reputation; and fills the patient's soul with joy;

I have said, symptoms aid us in diagnosis and prognosis; then we have diagnostic and prognostic symptoms, and we have another class of symptoms called pathognomonic. These are symptoms that settles infallibly the nature of the disease, they become certain signs of a particular morbid condition; There are but few symptoms, when taken singly, can be said to be pathognomonic signs. yet a symptom which in itself possesses little

or no value, may become very significant when, accompanied with others

Again, there <sup>are</sup> symptoms which are not perceptible to us, only through the patients own history of the case, symptoms of this kind, are of inestimable value in the diagnosis of many diseases; the value of these statements is made apparent, by the difficulty we would expect to encounter in investigating, the diseases of children, and of those who are dumb; But it will not do, to rely solely upon what our patients tell us, if we did mistakes continually would be the result;

We will not in this short dissertation, take notice of those healthy functions which are frequently necessary, in order to determine the relative value of other symptoms in disease; And notice those symptoms only, which consist of morbid change, which may be elapied under

three heads; 1<sup>st</sup> Uneasy, or unnatural feelings, impaired sensations; 2<sup>nd</sup> Impeded functions; 3<sup>rd</sup> changes of structure, or appearance;

Uneasy, unnatural, or impeded sensations, are such as some we have named, those symptoms that we are aware of through the testimony of the individuals themselves, The other two classes usually come under our own observation, and are the more reliable; The altered, or uneasy sensations, make up a large class of morbid symptoms, Sometimes by their occurrence, persons become aware that they are unwell, before there is any other evidence of the fact; Of all the uneasy sensations pain, perhaps is the most common, and important; It is a very rare case, that pain is not felt in inflammatory affections, and it frequently is felt where no inflammation exist, and very acutely too.

There are many different kinds and degrees

of pain, Different kinds of morbid actions, produce a different kind of pain, and the same morbid condition, for example inflammation, produces different degrees of pain. The pain that is felt in the lungs in inflammation, differs from that felt in the bowels in inflammation; Tendons, bones, ligaments, muscles, the kidneys, uterus and bladder, all modify in a manner, peculiar to themselves, the pain felt, In these different organs, different names or epithets, have been applied to these different kinds of pain, persons attempt to explain their feelings, by likening their sensations to something they have felt, or fancy they ~~they~~ have felt before; Thus, we hear of tearing pain, burning pain, sharp pain, shooting pain, dull pain, throbbing pain, and so on; There are scarcely any of the local phlegmasias, but what pain is an



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important symptom, though sometimes there is no complaint made of pain, only, on pressure as in splenitis; Inflammation without pain is of such rare occurrence however, that pain is made one of the chief characteristics of inflammation, Thus we say inflammation is recognised, by Pain, Redness, heat, and swelling; We do not intend to speak of pain only as it occurs in inflammation, but with nervous diseases also, for we must not consider that pain is only symptomatic of the different phlegmasia, if we did, mistakes would be frequently occurring in the treatment of many diseases, growing out of a faulty diagnosis; A knowledge of this fact is of practical importance, for without it, we might subject a patient to an unnecessary, and perhaps injurious loss of blood;

In neuralgia, we have pain, and very intense

pain too, exacerbating, or intermitting, which follows the course of a nervous branch, extends to its ramifications, and seems therefore, to be seated in the course of the nerve; Wandering or flying pains are usually nervous, or Neuralgic, while inflammatory pains are fixed; This distinction is by no means constant, but it may often be employed as a diagnostic symptom, Thus it may be doubted, whether pain in the side is symptomatic of pleuritis, or pleurodynia: if fixed, the presumption is that it is pleuritis, if wandering pleurodynia;

We do not have pain always in the part affected, though it gives pain, in a sound part, „Thus,“ when the liver is affected, there is pain of the right shoulder, when there is disease of the heart, pain is felt frequently running down the left arm - irritation of the stomach, gives rise to headache, and itching of

the nose; Hip joint disease produces pain in the knee, and Stone in the bladder, causes pain at the extremity of the urethra; These are instances of indirect, or sympathetic pain, and the only explanation which we can give of them, is this.

It is owing to the reflex action of the nerves, or in other words, the nerves supplying the part affected, transmits the impression to the nervous centre, and from the nervous centre, it is reflected to a different part; A knowledge of this physiological fact, is of great importance, in the practice of medicine; For this reason, a patient may have disease of the liver, and complain of pain in the right-shoulder, we examine the shoulder, and find it normal, we know then from the Law of reflex action, that it is the liver producing the pain; and thereby save the shoulder, of many stimulating liniments, and so on;

In Taking our leave of pain as a symptom, I would say, that it is differently felt; or at least differently complained of, by persons of a different constitution or temperament, persons of a sanguine temperament, complain more of pain, than persons of the other temperaments, It is said by some, that there is even a national difference, Irishmen it is said, always complain more while a surgical operation is being performed upon them, than the Scotchman;

There are a great many uneasy sensations beside pain, which are very important, Nausea, is an uneasy sensation that is symptomatic of several diseases; It is sometimes a direct symptom, of disease or disorder of the stomach; It is again an indirect symptom, as, the nausea felt when a person is labouring under nephritis, nephralgia, or cerebritis.

Nausea is also common to pregnant women, so much so, that it is laid down as one of the signs of pregnancy. This, is another instance, of a morbid sensation, sympathetic of a distant organ; When nausea and vomiting, are very obstinate without any obvious cause, without for example, any apparent disease of the stomach, or other abdominal viscera, and without spinal tenderness, there is reason to fear, that either an eruptive affection is maturing itself, or that the brain is diseased;

We have another example of an uneasy sensation; in giddiness or dizziness; This symptom is sometimes the result of disease within the brain, sometimes it is an indirect consequence of disease, or disorder of the stomach, or of mere debility, and an approach to syncope; It is also a very common symptom of

-Pain, as when Belladonna, Stramonium, Opium, Ether, Hyoscyamus, Camphor &c, have been taken in sufficient quantities, to produce their Pisonous effects;

Many other symptoms might be mentioned which belong to this class of uneasy sensations, and for our knowledge of the existence of which, we must depend upon the accounts given us by our Patients themselves;

Sensations of general uneasiness, restlessness, anxiety, oppression, tightness, fullness, drowsiness and so on, these indicate disorder of the nervous system, and are often very useful in diagnosis;

In the majority of diseases the appetite is lost or impaired, but occasionally, exceptive hunger, accompanies and denotes disease; Thus: in diabetes the first suspicion of the disease, is derived from the Preternatural Rec

-ness of the appetite, though generally in nearly all diseases, the appetite is impaired or entirely lost; Thirst is a very constant, and striking symptom in all febrile, and inflammatory disorders, in diabetes, thirst frequently constitutes the whole distress of the patient;

The appetite may be perverted as well as deficient, or excessive; Chlorotic girls, will eat cinders, slate pencils, and such trash; Pregnant women it is said, have peculiar desires, for particular articles of food, some authors say that they will even eat flies, spiders, dirt &c;

From this class of symptoms, we pass to the second division of our subject; namely; disordered or impeded functions, The functions of the brain and nerves - of the heart and blood vessels - of the digestive organs - and of the respiratory apparatus, would all come under

This class of symptoms, But to be short, we will not notice perhaps, all of these functions when impaired, as symptoms; though they are of vital importance;

The impeded functions which relate to the brain and nerves, are almost identical with the last class of symptoms, which consist of altered or morbid sensations; Sensations being the natural functions of these parts;

Depravity, for instance of the sense of touch, numbness, and the entire loss of feeling.

The sense of vision, is often impaired in various ways and degrees, from mere dimness of sight to perfect blindness; And this blindness may occur without any apparent disease of the structure of the eye, the humors and membranes apparently normal, and this total blindness it is said, may come on so slow and gradual, as not to be noticed by the



patient himself, for some time. This affection is caused by pressure upon the optic nerves, or upon the brain at the origin of the optic nerves;

Vision may be so depraved, as for persons to see dark spots upon objects, to see small objects afloat around them, and so on; Were these things not common, they would seem almost incredulous; This depravity of sight, very well accounts for the numerous ghost stories, which made us when a boy, to fear a grave yard or the room where a man had died, as we would the tiger of the forest;

This ghost seeing, we know now, to depend upon a disease of the brain;

The sense of hearing is also affected by a morbid condition of the brain; It is sometimes preternaturally acute, and sometimes in the opposite condition; When it is very acute, so much so that noises are distressing, it

is to be regarded as a very unfavorable symptom, never occurring, unless there is lesion of the great nervous centre the brain;

Deafness, or obtuseness of <sup>hearing</sup> may depend upon congenital malformation of the organ, or upon disease of its structure, without the auditory nerve being affected; But when it occurs aside from the above named conditions, it is the product of a morbid brain;

Affections of the intellect are very common and very important symptoms, of disease. Incoherence of thought - extravagant perversion of the Judgement; They very frequently depend upon disease of the brain, and upon certain febrile complaints as continued fevers;

Muscular motion is also affected by disease. Sometimes there is excessive action, and sometimes great debility of the muscles; Excessive muscular action, is not so common, as debility.

-ity of the muscles; occurring only in maniacs,  
 and those that have the delirium of fevers,  
 Insufficient muscular action is a common  
 attendant of fevers, and seems to come  
 on before there has been sufficient time  
 for the disease to have produced it,  
 It is very frequently one of the first, and  
 -d chief symptoms; as in hemiplegia, para-  
 -plegia, and palsy of a single limb, or a  
 single muscle; These within themselves ap-  
 -pear tripling, but in reality are far  
 from being so; for they are the precurs-  
 -ors of a more serious disease general par-  
 -alysis;

Perversion of muscular motion, Technica-  
 -ly Spasm, is a symptom of some importance  
 Chorea, epilepsy, hysteria, cramps, tetanus  
 and so on, are all characterized by spasm,  
 Spasm in some instances is indicative of

great danger, and sometimes of no danger at all;

The functions of the circulation require a passing notice, for they are disordered in almost every disease, at least it is so frequently the case, that a Physician never thinks of prescribing, until he has examined the Pulse. The pulse is always consulted in diagnosis, it is always consulted in prognosis, and is always to be noticed in administering our Therapeutic agents. To go into a full detail, of the importance of the pulse, would be beyond the limits of this article. We will merely glance at the subject, and leave it. The different kinds of Pulse, may all be classed under one head, namely, irregularity, though the indications given <sup>by it</sup> are quite different; This irregularity of the pulse is divided into quick, frequent, intermitting, hobbling,

hard, soft, contracted, gaseous, Thread like,  
 wing, and so on; These are all full of meaning,  
 and would require pages to name the diseases  
 of which they are symptoms; Irregularity of  
 the pulse, may be caused by disease within  
 the head - by organic disease of the heart -  
 by simple disorder of the stomach, or it may  
 be merely the result of debility, and the  
 prelude to the complete stoppage of the heart  
 its action, from asthenia; The right cons-  
 truction of each of these different meanings  
 of the same symptoms, is very important; It  
 may indicate mortal disease, it may imply  
 no danger at all, it may afford no clue  
 to any available treatment, or it may teach  
 us how to ward off impending dissolution;  
 Alterations of structure, or appearance, is  
 another and the last class of symptoms; These  
 include flushings of ~~of~~ the face, the increase

or diminution of bulk, and various other changes of structure, or appearance;

Emaciation is sometimes the first observable symptom of disease; It occurs in complaints that are not commonly dangerous, as dyspepsia and Hypochondriasis, again it occurs in diseases that are dangerous, as Consumption and Dropsy. It accompanies many acute diseases and is an unfavorable symptom; for it shows, that the body is not properly nourished.

We have a long catalogue of symptoms which consist of change in colour, in cutaneous diseases, in the flushed face of fever, in the yellow skin, and conjunctiva of Jaundice; in the pale cheek with its central red spot in hectic; and the dusky appearance with lividity of the <sup>lips</sup> when due arterialization of the blood in <sup>the</sup> lungs is interfered with;

Changes of structure or appearance, speak for themselves, and speak the truth, They cannot deceive; as the verbal statements of conscientious Patients, in revealing their uneasy sensations might;