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HOUSE OF DELEGATES.
Dr. WILLIAMS'S REMARKS

On the bill to incorporate The Thompsonian National Infirmary.

MR SPEAKER,

Being entirely unaccustomed to public speaking, and feeling inadequate to do that Justice to the subject under consideration, which would have been done it, by those whose seats I am sorry to see unoccupied, it is with great reluctance that I rise on this floor, in the midst of those who have so often entertained, and who are so able to entertain this house with their eloquence, to present in my feeble manner the views I entertain in regard to it. But as one of the committee to whom this bill was referred and who concurred, both, in the conclusions and details of the report presented by the very intelligent high-minded, and honorable chairman, I feel bound in duty to the majority of that committee, in duty to the citizens of my state, and in duty to my own opinion to say something or attempt to say something, in support of that report.—What sir is the subject now before this house? It is a bill to incorporate certain men, their associates, and successors to practice the healing art on the Thompsonian System. *Is* this sir, the real subject, or, is there not something behind the curtain? *Is* this merely intended for the bennefit of the few individuals who come here and apply for this act of incorporation, and to be confined within the limits of Baltimore? Do not these men get paid for their medicine, and their services. *I* am sure they may sell as much medicine as they chose & obtain as much as they can sell. This in my humble opinion is not the principle object It is sir to obtain legislative sanction, to obtain a character for their system.—And what sir will be the consequences of passing this bill? This legislature will have said, virtually, to the citizens of this state and to the world, we have examined this subject, and have compared this Thompsonian System, with that which is denominated the regular scientific system to practice which it is required by the laws of this state that all practitioners shall have pursued a certain course of preparatory studies, and have obtained from competent judges such testamonials of their acquirements and qualifications, as will afford some security to the community against imposition. (And here sir, *I* wish to impress on the minds of the members of this house, that this provision was not intended for the benefit of any privileged order of men, but to protect society and advance the science of medicine.) And having thus examined and compared those systems, we are prepared to say, that the Thompsonian system is a distinct and perfect system, adequate to meet all the varied indications of disease and worthy your confidence and patronage. Sir, under the influence of this legislative recommendation, which will be trumpeted forth to the world as such, and, deluded by the boasting and specious, but false pretensions of this system, hundreds of our virtuous and really well disposed citizens will be induced to leave those peaceful & innocent employments which they are now pursuing, and to which they are better fitted both by nature and education, to enter upon the practice of the healing art. And sir, not only these, but numbers who care not what they do, whether evil or good for gain; men destitute of intelligence, good sense, or moral worth who can raise twenty dollars for a Thomsonian Book, which is really all that is necessary to qualify them, will take advantage of that credulity and misplaced confidence on the part of a large portion of our citizens, which our legislative proceedings will have produced; and which will pre-eminently fit them for that awful experiment which will certainly be made. Pass this law, or any such law, and you may pass such a one for every county in the state; for what reason or justice would there be in denying those inestimable advantages to some which have been extended to others. Now, sir, what is this system for which we are called upon to say so much, to recommend so strongly? *Is* it worthy of such commendation? How many of us known any thing about it, either practically or theoretically?

Sir, I have this system, if a system it can be called, and believe I have spent as long a time, perhaps a longer time, in studying it than the learned, and no doubt, sir very skilful & successful agent, from whom *I* obtained it thought necessary, to qualify me to enter upon the very important and highly responsible duties of a physician; that was about a week. And now, sir, as a matter of course, having had this work a much longer time, and previously posessing some knowledge of the human system, the diseases to which it is subject, the principle remediate agents which have been or are now used, and the history of their application and mode of operation it will *I* hope, at least he conceded to me, that I ought to know something of the merits of this system. This system originated with a man by the name of Thompson, who according to his own narative, was born in obscurity and bred in ignorance.

It appears that his early life was characterized by two very remarkable dispositions, one was a curiosity to learn the qualities and names of plants, the other an unconquerable repugnance to work, & I very much suspect sir, that it was to the latter of these remarkable dispositions which has no doubt been well cherished, the world is indebted for his admirable system. But whatever may have been the peculiarities of his early years, his after life has proved him to be one of the most bold and reckless experiments with human life and happiness that ever attempted the practice of the healing art.

Sir, I shall not attempt to expose all the errors, inconsistences, and preposterous absurdities of this pretended system for several reasons. One is they are entirely too numerous and the time of this house is to precious to be thus wasted; another is as a system, whatever claims some of the remedies used may possess, it is too contemptible to require a general, or to be honored with a grave and serious refutation. But for the information of this house I will notice some of its principles, and practice, and expose some of its errors and absurdities.

It professes to be founded on these assumed facts. First, that the human body is composed of four elements, earth, water, fire and air, that earth and water form the solids, and fire and air, give life and motion. Second, that heat is life and cold is death. Third, that all constitutions are the same and all diseases are the same. Fourth, that cold produces all diseases. Fifth, that obstruction produces all diseases.—Sixth, that all diseases are to be cured by the same remedy. Seventh, that fever is a friend of the human system and not an enemy. I am well aware, sir, how difficult it is to present these errors, inconsistences, and absurdities in their true light, even, before this intelligent assembly. I know that there are but few of us who have directed our mind to the investigation of the subject under consideration, who are acquainted with all those established facts, and posseses that information which would at once render those errors, inconsistences, and absurdities apparent. I am well aware, that, the very name and pretention to simplicity, possesses a talismanic charm, which philosophy and logic do not possess over the minds and opinions of those who cannot understand. To attempt to show the absurdities of this system by logical reasoning, would be in many cases, to offer an insult to human understanding and intelligence. As to the first fact, or assumption, every intelligent or scientific individual, knows that instead of the human body being composed of four elements, analizing hand of science has proved to the world, that it is composed of almost fourtimes four elements; that some of those which were once believed elementary principles are compounds, and that others are only the phenomena of matter or the mere result of life and organization. As to the discovery, that heat is life and cold death, the proposition of itself is absurd. If it be meant that heat is the primary cause of life, and if this be so, it is only necessary to preserve health, and protract human existence to an indefinite length, to confine man in a warm and well regulated temperature and give him number six or red pepper. That cold produces all diseases is another fundamental principle of this system. Cold undoubtedly, is a very fruitful source of disease, but it is not the universal cause'—Heat also produces disease of the most threatening character, and I have no doubt sir, that I can kill a patient with heat, or steam, as soon as a Thompsonian could destroy him with cold, or freeze him to death. It is also stated that obstructions occasion disease. This is not unfrequently the case. But I should rather think, disease is more frequently the cause of obstructions.—Every organ in the human body has a function, or duty to perform, and as, every organ is subject to disease, when an organ is in a state of disease, no rational being can suppose that its ordinary function will not be suspended or imperfectly performed. Sir, the exciting & predisposing causes of disease are too numerous to be here detailed. Every physical agent which operates upon us, as well as numerous others, as the causes of small pox and cholera, the intimate nature of which are inscrutable, and which we only know by their melancholy effects, produce disease. And sir, the cause of disease may exist in the human system itself from the constitutional defects, and thus the germs of disease are often planted before the first breath of life is drawn. A blow on the head, or the long continued influence of the rays of the sun, may, and will produce an inflamation of the brain. Send for the Thompsonian, he tells you your disease is produced by cold, and in the delirium occasioned by a violent inflamation, and may give you a puke and steam you to expell the cold. Or suppose you have taken powdered glass, or any other agent, which from its physical or chemical qualities, has occasioned a violent inflamation of the inner courts of the stomach, and what is the remedy? Why you are stuffed with cayenne pepper, steamed, and puked to dislodge immaginary canker and cold. This system tells us that all constitutions are the same, and that all diseases are to be cured by the same remedy, and that fever is a friend of the human system, and not an enemy, and of course, should be promoted or encourage, instead of resisted or opposed. That all constitutions are the same, is what no intelligent being can for one moment believe. Sir, human constitutions, are as various as human forms & dispositions, & liable to as great a variety of diseases, and require a treatment equally as various. This doctrine of fevers like many other things in this system, is not new.—It prevailed in the very infancy of the medical science and gave rise to a practice similar to this, and which in many diseases produced the most fatal consequences. The influence of this erroneous theory and similar practices was peculiarly evident in the small pox; under a highly stimulating treatment scarcely one half of those who were attacked were saved. But what is the result of the present systematic plan of cure? Sir it has been met by science and philosophy, and not one case in ten on an average is now lost. Thus we see, sir, that the very foundation is false, contrary to established facts, and preposterously absurd. What are we to expect of the superstructure. Now sir, let us notice the materia medica of this system or the remediate agents used under those monstrous views human organization and disease which we have exposed The principle are Lobelia, or Indian Tobacco, which is an emetic, and sir I have no doubt, a very valuable remedy properly used and which is, or may be, in the hands of every physician.—Steaming, it is well known is not new: It has been used in domestic practice from the earliest periods, is common to barbarian nations, was found in use among the aboriginees of our own country, and of course does not exclusively belong to the Thompsonian system.—The bark of the root of Bay or Myrtle bush, the Hemlock bark, white Pond, Lilly, Peach Kernels, Raspberry Leaf Tea, and a few other common domestic, old woman remedies, the most of which are, and have been in use where Thompson's book was never seen. With Cayenne Pepper, which by the by sir, is the most important remedy of the whole, and enters largely into most of those famous numbers; one, two, there, four, five and six, as well as into almost every proscription.

Then, sir, the principles which we have noticed, the monstrous notions of disease, and those remediate agents, with slander foul abuse, & misrepresentations of regularly educated physicians and their system, Illogical and nonsensical reasoning and preposterous absurdities, mingled with sentiments of atheism and blasphemy, an attack upon the sacred priesthood and religion, and a foul reflection on the female character, which alone would entitle the author to the universal contempt of mankind, constitutes this much famed system.

Now, sir, let us see what is the nature of, and what constitutes the regular scientific system of medicine. Sir, it is but the recorded experience of all those who, in every age, have devoted their time and talents to the study and observation of diseases and their cure. It embraces an intimate acquaintance with, or knowledge of, the anatomy of the human system—all the organs which compose it, their connections and relations to each other, their various functions, the laws which govern or regulate their action in health and disease, and the symptoms which denote the diseased condition of each of those organs, so far as has been ascertained; the history of every disease which is known, their particular symptoms, their origin or cause, their treatment, the success of the plans or means which have been used for their cure, with the views of those who gave their history, and the history of all the remediate agents which have ever been known,—no matter where produced or found, whether in the fertile regions of Asia, the highly cultivated soil of civilized Europe, or in the wilderness of our own America—no matter where applied, whether in the gaudy chambers of royalty, or the humble cottage of the peasant—no matter by whom discovered and used, whether by the ignorant, daring, and desperate quack, or by the intelligent, cautious, and conscientious physician. This, sir, constitutes the scientific system of medicine. It is based and founded on established facts philosophy, and experience. It has been cultivated, and is still cultivated by such men Hipocrates, Galen, Hervey, Sydenham, Cullen, Hunter, Bell, Broussais, Lænnec, Baudelock, and our own immortal Rush and Physick, men who have been, and are still to be found in every department of life, whether civil, political, or religious devoted to the best interests of mankind, studious to better the condition and to promote the happiness of their fellow men, at once, among the most useful members and brightest ornaments of society Sir, it is as wide as the whole range of human knowledge and human experience. It embraces all that is known, or ever has been known, of diseases. It includes in its expended arms, every remedy, whether of the animal, mineral, or vegetable kingdom, that a beneficent Providence has been pleased to bestow on the world, and which experience has proved capable of relieving disease, or mitigating the sufferings of mankind.—This, I contend, is the only rational system of medicine.

Now, then, compare this system, founded on established facts, philosophic research, and the experience of two thousand years—each successive generation improving on the attainments of the past, cultivated by men of the brightest genius, most brilliant talents, and of moral worth, & conscious of the high responsibilities under which they acted, with the erroneously predicated, absurdly sustained, imperfect system of Thompson; originating with, and perfected by, one obscure individual, who knew nothing of the organization of the human body, who never saw one half the diseases which afflict our race or one tenth of the remediate agents which have been found successful in the relief and cure of disease and decide between them:

What sir, has been the result of the cultivation and practice of the scientific system of medicine? Diseases which once threatened to depopulate the world, the very name of which produced horror in the minds of men, under the influence of the science of medicine, have been rendered far less fatal, and some entirely, others almost entirely, robbed of that terror, by which, with more unering certainty, they destroyed the trembling victim. And notwithstanding civilization, with her concomitants, luxury and refinement, has tended much to weaken and render more delicate the human constitution, subjecting it to diseases which were formerly unknown, it is computed that human existence has been extended on an average about five years. Sir, the regular system of medicine has been denounced as founded upon theory and speculation. This is a mistake.

From settled facts and the known operation of the laws of nature, every man has a right to form, and will form some notion of the cause, intimate nature, and influence of what is brought under his observation; and other things being equal, the man of intelligence, who is acquainted with the facts and experience of others in relation to any subject, is more likely to be correct. It is true, sir, that many men, under mistaken and enthusiastic notions, anxious to advance the science, or ambitious of fame, departing form those settled rules or laws for the advancement of science, philosophic investigation, and sound and legitimate deduction, have wandered far into the unproductive regions of speculation and hypothesis. Yet, sir, those established principles and settled facts of the medical science, the application of those settled rules under which it is cultivated, with the touch stone of cautious experiment, in the hands of scientific intelligent, conscientious men, like the refiner's furnace, have separated the dross from the mass presented, and if any pure gold has been found, added it to the stock previously possessed,—and if only the fact that all was error, that alone is valuable; as a warning to the theorist, a beacon to the course of the skilful practitioner, and one more safeguard to secure mankind.

Sir, it has been attempted to repell the imputation of quackery and imniricism contained in the report. I think I have proved to the satisfaction of every individual in this house, and if I have not, I here assert on the responsibility of a member of this house, and on my own responsibility as a member of society, without the fear of successful contradiction, that this system is a boastful pretention to what it does not possess, that it affects to teach what its author never understood, and is calculated, under the specious pretention of simplicity and unerring certainty, to impose on a large portion of mankind. And if this does not stamp it with the character of quackery, the common acceptation of the word is incorrect. And, sir, if the entire independence and ignorance of, and contempt for all past experience, in an author, and the establishment of a system upon his own limited experience and by mad experiments, entitles it to the character of empirical, this pretended system richly merits it, and I humbly conceive, no one can successfully dispute its claims. It is said that very intelligent and correct men approved of this system, subscribe to it and practice it; and that the terms quacks and empiries applied harshly to them. Sir, there is no one less disposed than I am to cast reflections and imputations upon, or wound the feelings of individuals, but if they will connect themselves with, and stand forth to support this system, they are liable to the same imputations, to which the system itself is obnoxious. It is also said that learned physicians sanction and approved the Thompsonian system, and have decided in its favor. Sir, that any intelligent physician or scientific man, that is perfectly sane, however willing he may be to acknowledge that some of the remedies used, and some of the means employed, are valuable, and may in many case be successfully applied, which I do not deny, can recognize this as a new & distinct system of medicine, perfect in itself, and capable, as it professes to be of answering all the various indications of disease, and sanction its principles, its falsehoods, abuses, and absurdities, I hold to be utterly impossible.

Sir, tell me of the man who is acquainted with the advantages of civilized life, who has felt the genial influence of the light of science, and tasted the pleasures of truly refined society, preferring the destitute, barbarous, and benighted condition of the Hottentot, or a native of some of the South Sea Islands. Tell me of the skillful and experienced mariner, who has often seen the ocean wrought into mountain waves by the tyrant storm, and who knows that dangerous shoals and rocks lay hid beneath its surge, throwing away his compass, his quadrant, and his chart, and committing himself to the mercy of the waves and the winds, without a landmark or a beacon to guide his course towards the destined port, over the trackless sea,—but tell me not of any learned physician recommending this monstrous system to the world.

Mr. Speaker, this system professes to be perfectly simple and intelligible to all, to be reduced to the comprehension of the most humble intellect—and all, sir, I would ask, is for it to be placed in the hands of the public. I feel no doubt that there is sufficient intelligence in this house, if it can be brought to bear on this subject, to compare this system with reason, established facts, and experience, and to reject it, as false in its premises, setting up claims and pretensions which cannot be sustained, and from obvious imperfections, slander, abuse, and indecencies, utterly disgusting.

Sir, in order to give the house some notion of the nature of this system, and the mind and principles of the author, I beg the indulgence of this house, to read some extracts of this celebrated work. Sir, I am going to read some of the commencement of his treatise on obsterix, one of the most important branches of medical science, on a proper knowledge of which not unfrequently the life of mother and child depend. Thompson says:—"This is a very difficult subject to write upon, as I know of no words that would be proper to make use of to convey the necessary information to enable a person to practice with safety."

And this acknowledgement is true—his system proves in this, as in all other branches, that the author was destitute, utterly destitute of knowledge as well as words, to teach what he professes to understand. A little further on, in this treatise, he says:—

"All the valuable instruction I ever received, was from a woman in the town where I lived, who had prasticed as a midwife, for twenty years; she gave me more useful instruction, in an interview of about twenty minutes, than all I ever gained from any other source."

Now, sir, I ask, what are we to think of a system, founded alone on rash and reckless experiment, by a man who acknowledges himself indebted to such a source, for all the valuable information he possesses, on a subject in which is involved human life and happiness I will now read a dissertation on a certain proposition, in order to show the philosophy logical powers, and theological views of the author.

The proposition is:—"Why do old people die more in a warm and rainy winter than in a severe cold one? The answer to the above question is at hand. Old people are like the old houses they build in their younger days The house decays about as fast as its builder, and becomes racked with wind and storms which have beaten upon it, until the cracks open, the shingles blow off, and the house grows leaky and cold; so is the man in his old age. He becomes racked with the storms and hardships of life; his heat goes out, the fire place decays, his food digests poorly, and gives but little nourishment or heat to warm the body and expand the lungs. For the inward heat rarifies the air in the lungs, and causes them to expand, by lightening the air within, and the heft of the surrounding atmosphere, being higher charged with oxygen or water, puts out the fire faster than dry cold air; and as the heat decays inward, the weight of the air crowds heavily on the lungs, and causes great difficulty of breathing; the lungs labor like the wheel of a mill in back water, the fountain almost level with the stream, until the heat in the lungs becomes insufficient to expand them any longer, the heft of the air comes to an equlibrium of heft inside, and all motion ceases. The water in the air puts out the fire. This is the cause why those people who have but little fire in the body, and such a heft of damp air outside, the heat is so soon extingushed inside; like a person falling into the water; the cause of the death is, the water has put out the fire in the same proportion. Thus I think I have given a satisfactory cause of death upon natural principles. The cause and effect are in themselves.

"In this case I would ask the christian of every denomination, what God, here either gave or took away life? Was there any God in the case abstract from the cause here, given? Or what soul or spirit went out at death, except the heat or nature, which caused life and breath."

This, sir, is a specimen of this system which you are called upon to recommend to the world, an emanation from that bright genius to which science and mankind are indebted for a new and complete system of medicine. And I call upon the physician, the scientific man philosophers, theologians and divines, to analyse, admire and improve by the lesson. I will trouble the house with but one more extract from this frothy work.

"*The effect of religious meetings, where women chiefly attend, in the absence of their husbands.* If women are allowed to attend day and night meetings, for the purpose of having the priest pray for their souls, and pardon their sins, while their husbands and children are left at home, how long will it be before the sandals of the priest will be left at the door, as in some other countries, as a token that the husband must not enter, lest he should see and learn how the priest pardons his wife's sins?

The doctor, also, who comes in for a full share in these secret privileges if he be allowed to examine secretly our wives and daughters for the purpose of finding out some secret complaint, which is indecent for the husband or father, to witness or to know, as was the case of R****'s wife and Dr. A****, of this city, but a few years since, who is to be responsible for the mode of examination.

If men will allow their wives to be thus privately examined by these crafts for the purpose of pardoning their sins, and removing their indecent disorders, will they not soon claim all the indecent jobs in their families?—If it be indecent for a man to be present at the birth of his child, why not equally indecent to be present at its generation? And so we must let the priest and the doctor generate, as well as bring into the world, all our children. The priest could still baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; in whose name, also, he might pardon the sins of their mother!—In this way, these two crafts might liberate the affectionate husband from all the toils of his family, exceping that of their maintenance!!

"Arouse husbands, from your lethargy.—Gird on every man his sword by his side. The sword of truth, I mean.—Go in and out your camp and whenever you please, till you have driven all such miscreants from your borders. Take the protection of your wives and daughters into your own hands; keep them at home at all proper times, & when they go to meeting go with them; when they are so sick as to need a doctor which, if properly treated, would seldom be the case be present at the examination; if they need prayers, pray, for them yourselves; if they want children, be sure to be their real father, and take a fatherly care of them in bringing into the world as well as afterwards; nourish them with due attention, instruct them in all that is good but save them by all means from the pincers of learned doctors, or the ears of missionary *mules*."

Now, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I ask the members of this house, this grave and intelligent assembly whether they are prepared by any act of legislative sanction, to recommend to their fellow citizens and the world, this pretended system of medicine, with all its boasting pretentions, its imperfections and preposterous absurdities and all its abuse and vile slander intended to prejudice the mind of the people against the regularly educated physicians, and which I do contend, is as much apart of this system, as steaming and red pepper.

Sir, are we prepared to pronounce the experience of all those who have devoted their lives and talents to the study and practice of medicine, for the last five thousand years, under a deep sense of the responsibility under which they acted, entirely worthless? Are we prepared to usher a host of ignorant, boasting pretenders upon community, without the guarantee that they know, even a part of that imperfect system, which they pretend to practice, utterly ignorant of the human system, and the diseases which affect it, and destitute of every qualification but the proof of having paid twenty dollars for a Thompsonian book?

Sir, let us pass this bill, or any similar one, and we do all this. I am now willing to submit this subject to the intelligence, justice and humanity of this grave assembly, and take my seat.

From the Baltimore patriot.

THE PRESIDENCY.

MR. MUNROE.—A writer in the Chronicle for the country, of the 16th March, in reply to one in your paper of the preceding Saturday, seems to be a man generally of sound principles and views, but unless I am mistaken he is somewhat in error.

I do not mean to interfere in the affair between these gentlemen, but the point upon which I suppose error to rest is so important to the Whig cause, that as an

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