

Samuel Browne (1809–1890)

President of the Belfast Medical Society

1857–58

President of the Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society

1858–59

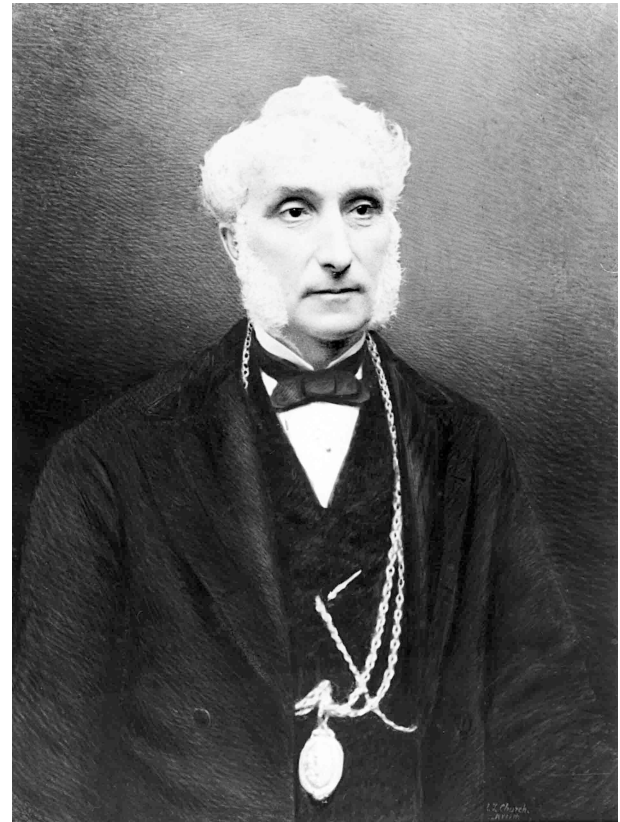
Presidential Opening Address

Belfast Medical Society

1st June, 1857

Gentlemen, Fellow members of the Belfast Medical Society, – I cannot, this evening, assume the chair in which your kindness has placed me, without expressing the deep sense I entertain of the honour conferred upon me, especially as the act is the spontaneous expression of your own good will – unsolicited on my part, and, I fear, undeserved. Since, however, you have deemed me worthy to be president of this old, honourable, and important society, I do not shrink from the responsibility of the station, but, depending upon your brotherly aid and professional *esprit de corps*, I shall endeavour to maintain its high character, and make it, as it should be, a rallying point, a focus of strength, if needs be, for the medical profession of this town and neighbourhood – indeed, for the entire province.

Already, since my own connexion with it, this society has been the medium, on more than one occasion, of concentrating the strength, and of expressing the united opinion, of the profession in Ulster, on subjects materially affecting some of the best interests of our body. Should the necessity again arise, as it likely will, this association will still take the lead in contending for our common interests, and in arousing the spirit of our brethren to the assertion of our inalienable rights. It is, gentlemen, by our being thus united that we can alone hope to maintain our status in society. In no case is the apothegm, that “a house divided against itself cannot stand,” more applicable than when it is used as relating to the medical profession; and, if it were only from a regard to our individual interests, this union should be earnestly upheld; for I hold that no isolated man can ever be successful in his profession, and be, at the same time, generally respected. But, when we come to see how much this harmony – this unitedness – tends to elevate the entire body, and to give it almost impregnable strength, we have an inducement to union much more honourable than the promptings of merely selfish feelings. Hence it is that we must ever regard, with sentiments of affection and respect, the names of those – our worthy predecessors – who first originated and cherished into mature being the society of which we are now the representatives –



founded, as it was, “To afford its members increased facilities of consulting the best medical works and periodicals, by means of its library; of deriving mutual instruction on medical subjects, by means of its discussions and its pathological museum; and, as a collective body, protecting the interests of the medical profession.”

These were noble aims; and it must be very gratifying to the respected head of the profession in town – Dr. Stephenson – alas! the sole surviving founder of it – to see how fully the association has answered the expectations of its early promoters. On the 8th of June, 1822, the present society was inaugurated; and, during the 35 years which have since elapsed, it has ranked among its members very many able and excellent men – men who would have dignified human nature in any position to which they might have been called. To these I need not more particularly refer, as their excellencies live in the memory of most of us; some are among us still – but one who was with us as but yesterday, “I would select from out that throng” – one to whom this society

Samuel Browne

owes much. Yet did it owe less, my private friendship and partiality would not permit me, on this occasion, to pass by his name in silence. Among the many able men who have adorned our profession in Belfast, no one has been more distinguished for zeal, earnestness, and uprightness in the pursuit of his calling, no one has laboured in a more self-denying spirit, for the general good, than my lamented friend and colleague, Dr. Malcolm. Never idle, never satisfied with anything that seemed to require improvement, he threw himself, body and spirit, into every movement calculated to benefit mankind; and whatever appeared likely to amalgamate his brethren and utilise their association had his untiring solicitude and earnest advocacy. In these latter respects, with which we are more immediately concerned, I may instance the remodelling of this, and the creation of the Pathological Society, and in both of which he took the lead, though with marked modesty and abnegation of his own claims, in bringing forward matters important and practical. He has gone; but he has left us an example of patience and industry, kindness of heart, and brotherly regard, well worthy the imitation of the best of us. His years have been few; but he has gained all that the longest lived should desire — he has left an honoured and unsullied name — he will long be remembered as “an honest man, the noblest work of God!”

To two others of our members, who have lately passed away from the realities of life, I may also briefly refer. Mr. Macmullan was a young gentleman of considerable promise; possessed of a kind and generous disposition, he had already gained several warm and attached friends, when premature disease carried him beyond the offices and sympathies of friendship. Still more recently has this society sustained a loss in the death of Professor Stewart; thus has another, snatched away in the prime of life, been added to the number of our early deceased members. Of him I can say that he possessed no ordinary talents and had a highly cultivated understanding; he was naturally of a retiring disposition, hence he seldom came prominently among us; but when he did address himself to any subject, he must have convinced his hearers that he had a clear and logical mind, and powers of expressing himself of a very superior order. He was a most excellent practical surgeon, whose accuracy of diagnosis and soundness of treatment I have often had cause to appreciate and admire; he was a careful and expert operator, always cool and collected, because he weighed well his likely difficulties before he seized the knife, and was quite certain of the

anatomical relation of the parts on which he was about to operate. In his death, then, this society has sustained a great loss, and the hospital in which we are now met has a vacancy which, I may safely say, will not be easily filled up.

Having performed this melancholy duty, permit me now to direct your attention to one or two points in connexion with this society, by which its utility might be greatly increased. Previous to the year when we first met in the evening, the meetings were simply for the transaction of the ordinary business arising out of its progress; but as soon as the hour of meeting was changed, as it now stands, various members brought interesting papers upon important professional topics under our notice; and I can remember with what interest several of these papers were regarded. In the course of time, those members who had been most concerned in supplying these notices for discussion, having failed to induce others to take a share in the labour, began to feel that they were, perhaps, wearying their co-members, and might, possibly, be deemed intrusive, in occupying so much of the society's time — hence they withheld their wonted communications, and the practice nearly fell into disuse. This was, among other causes, one of the inducements that led to the formation of the Pathological Society. But, gentlemen, the existence of that society need not, in any way — should not, indeed, at all, interfere with the furthering of medical science in this the senior association. On the contrary, I think it behoves all of us, who have any regard for its progress, and who have any love for our profession, to unite with earnestness in once more reviving these discussions, which were formerly of such practical value, and the value of which has been fully illustrated in the other society. With this end in view, then, I would respectfully and earnestly urge upon my fellow-members, that two or three papers should be prepared for each of our meetings — I say two or three, as some one might be prevented, by engagements, from bringing forward his promised matter, and thus disappointment would ensue; and as there are really only ten meetings at which papers could be introduced during the entire year, as the time of the April and annual meetings are taken up in transacting indispensable business, we can easily procure the required number. I would also suggest that notice of the reading of these papers should be supplied to the members fully one week before the monthly meeting at which they are to be read. This I consider absolutely necessary, for the purpose of promoting healthy and sound discussion, as members will have had due time to consider the question to be

Samuel Browne

submitted. Surely, gentlemen, after the evidence so many of our members have given of their ability in the Pathological Society, there will not be any difficulty in procuring several practical papers for every meeting. Again, you will please to remember that the time for reading and discussion, in this society, is not limited, due time being allowed for the fullest debate upon any topic that may be introduced. For my own part, I hope and intend to set an example of industry, and I have every confidence that several of you will not only emulate, but surpass me in that respect. Perhaps, in addition, I may remark the arrangement of this matter might be left to the Council, who will solicit, or obtain papers and cases; and, in the meantime, I shall be prepared to submit a topic for discussion at our next meeting.

Gentlemen, I leave this question with you, feeling assured that, when we have so many able and zealous members of a liberal and learned profession, this society will not be permitted to lapse into a mere book club, but will be sustained in its legitimate character, for the cultivation and promotion of medical science. Another point to which I would refer is the publication of the papers and cases, with the discussions thereon, that may be submitted; this is, in my opinion, a matter of very great importance, the carrying out of which would tend certainly to improve the status of this society, and utilize our meetings. There cannot be any question, gentlemen, but that a town of the magnitude of Belfast must afford cases of equal importance to those supplied by many of the provincial cities of the United Kingdom; and I am also quite satisfied that these cases can be as ably recorded by the members of this society, as by any of our brethren resident elsewhere; consequently, it becomes our bounden duty – a duty which we owe to ourselves and to the profession – to put upon record whatever of interest, or practical value we may meet with in our practice.

Hitherto the medical men of Belfast, with few exceptions, have been but little known beyond our immediate neighbourhood – we have moved, as it were, within a very limited sphere, contented, it seems, with local reputation; but that is no reason why we should continue so. We have within us the elements of advancement, and we should not permit either apathy or distrust of our capabilities to retard our progress. We have only to make the effort; we have only to embrace the opportunities every day presented to us, and put forth the powers we possess, and we need have but little difficulty in becoming better known and much more appreciated.

I have already referred to the bond of union

which this society affords to the medical profession of Belfast for mutual support, and for individual improvement also; but these unquestionable advantages have not, I fear, been duly estimated. Now, what is the cause of this? For my own part, I believe it has naturally arisen out of the want of interesting matter, and the absence of intellectual excitement at our stated meetings. May we not hope, however, that the earnest adoption of the plans and views I have ventured to suggest will remedy our late inaction, and restore us to that vigour and harmonious action which are so essential to our professional interest, and to our individual advancement. If the members of the medical profession would calmly and dispassionately consider their relations to general society, and to one and other – if they could only duly estimate the advantage of being an united body – if they could believe that their internal divisions are the cause of most of the disabilities under which they suffer – and, believing this, could be brought to merge their selfish interests in the common weal, our profession, from being the most powerless, might be made a body possessing almost unbounded influence, and be the instrument of incalculable good.

There cannot be any question that we individually command, in our several spheres, a large amount of influence; but that, be it remembered, belongs to *the individual* and does not always extend, through him, to the benefit of the profession; on the contrary, how often does it happen that members of our body use the influence they obtained for their own advantage solely, and rather to the prejudice, than otherwise, of their brethren? Hence the community are too ready to form an unfavourable opinion of us, and to undervalue us, and sneer at what they are pleased to call our pretensions. It may be asked, however, how are these admitted evils to be remedied? I sincerely believe that many of the jealousies, the undervaluing of each other, the neglect of what is due to brethren, and the want of sound, professional *esprit de corps*, may be removed by our associating more than we are in the habit of doing, and that societies like this, if made attractive, not only have the tendency to remove false impressions and prejudices, but also, in their place, to excite the kindest and friendliest sentiments. For my own part, I never join any re-union of my brethren without a sense of pleasure and improvement.

Gentlemen, the man who shuns his fellow-men is a misanthrope, and must, of necessity, be a comparatively useless member of society; and so, if one of us walks apart from his brethren, and affects to despise them, he is no lover of his profession, and his

Samuel Browne

usefulness is limited within a very narrow circle. On the other hand, an earnest interest in whatever concerns the brethren exhibits one in a grateful light, while the exercise of the feeling is not at all incompatible with the progress of the individual. For it is quite consistent that, while each presses on in the exercise of an honourable calling — and that generous competition is laudable — that the hand of help and of fellowship should be held out to every worthy man who has started in the race! Nay more, it is our duty so to run that each may have a chance for a share of the prize. Each, contending to the utmost for himself, should be cautious not, in any respect, to infringe the principles of right, which are very easily understood — remembering that professional etiquette has two bearings — that whatever a man demands on his own part, he should proportionally and cheerfully concede to others. This is simply the rule of justice, which cannot, in any instance, throughout the whole compass of society, be underrated, much less violated. No man can raise a safe or reputable structure upon the ruins of another's character — for so surely as any one shall endeavour to establish himself by underrating — much less vilifying — his neighbour's — a reaction, often overwhelming in its effects, will set in, and just retribution will surely overtake him. No one can, at least in this free country, assume, with impunity, the character of an Ishmael! And if this be true as regards every persons in the community, it applies with increased force to the members of the medical profession.

These brief remarks, gentlemen, I have felt it my duty to make in connexion with this society, on the occasion of my being called to be its president. They contain, in my estimation, the primary elements of medical ethics, and may be summed up in a very few words. Union is strength — division is suicidal folly. Beyond these few sentiments, touching our duty one to another, I shall not venture. Each of you is fully as well aware as I am of the exact rules which should guide our Professional intercourse, for these have already been laid down in an excellent code issued under our collective authority; let us only be guided by these, and a solemn sense of what is due to ourselves and others, and we are not likely to wrong any man, much less the brethren. There is another matter, however, which deeply interests every one of us, and which may be ranked among the foremost questions of our ethics. What is the duty which we owe to ourselves in our professional intercourse with society? On this topic, with your permission, I will now venture, premising that what I shall say will be

submitted not as an authoritative opinion, but as my own solemn conviction, based upon a not very limited knowledge of the world.

In the exercise of our functions we are naturally called on to mix with all classes of men; it is our duty to minister to the wants of the humblest as well as the greatest of mankind, no class being exempt from the casualties of life, and the operation of those unchangeable vital laws, the violation of which brings disease — the unchecked issue frequently being death. It is our glorious privilege — the genius and noble spirit of our profession, to wait by the couch of suffering humanity, and endeavour to alleviate human ills. No one, possessing our common nature, appeals to us in vain: the charitable institution, the hospital, the pest-house alike find the medical man active in his warfare with disease. He wrestles with death, whether the grim foe

“Assails the poor peasant who sinks in the dark
Unseen, unrecorded his name,
Or strikes the young hero — a glorious mark —
Who falls in the blaze of his fame.”

In the lonely cottage, or lordly palace, by the lone hill-side, or on the embattled and ensanguined plain, his aid is promptly and cheerfully given. The pestilential epidemic stalks through the land, everywhere assailing the strongholds of man; the physician gallantly meets the assault — calmly he stands in the imminent and deadly breach, and, undaunted by dangers as great, and horrors as appalling, as those produced by the murderous cannon, he ministers to suffering humanity, and simply feels he is performing his duty. And how often is this done without any feeling but the desire to succour his fellow-being, without any prospect or desire of reward, save the approval of his own conscience and the gratitude of those he has relieved!

Yet, with all this philanthropy, these generous aspirations, the medical man, gentlemen, must endeavour to live. He cannot exist on air, though he does consider it the *pabulum vita*; he must also be clothed and warmed; he requires the occasional shelter of a house, though he often is a midnight wanderer. He, too, has ties of relationship and natural affections, which he may wish to cherish; and we may imagine he has sometimes a hope that, as he descends the hill of life, he may find a little resting spot — a brief repose, ere he finally sinks at its foot. But what provision can he make for securing all those? Well, he has a kind of belief — perhaps a weak faith — that, as the community desire his services, reap the benefits of his experience and skill, and take from him his capital — his time, they will feel, as it

Samuel Browne

were, a commercial obligation to pay him for what he has to give and what they require. If so, he will frequently discover that the value placed upon his wares — to use a trading phrase — is very much below first cost; nay, more, he will find that some of his customers, like speculators in other callings, would rather not pay anything, although they have obtained what he had to dispose of.

I was very much amused, lately, by reading a paragraph which appeared in the newspapers. This, in treating of “Persian morality” spoke of the trick which a certain prince or noble in that land had played his physician, who had recently saved his life, to get rid of liabilities to him; he, in fact, had himself reported as dead, though the doctor saw him, soon after, in robust health. Now, the point in this paragraph which amused me was this — did it never occur to the writer of the book from which the sentence was taken that similar examples of morality are frequently seen in this very moral country. Oh, no; that had never certainly occurred to him. What beautiful simplicity! In this Christian land, however, he might have learned that men do not, on account of a medical man’s just fees, report themselves. In Persia, it seems, the patients pretend to die — the doctor’s bill being unpaid; here, they merely “take the benefit of the Act!” I should like to know if there be here any so fortunate as not to have met with examples of this kind of gratitude for services the most untiring and successful, rendered when life and death have been vibrating in the balance for weeks and months together, or where existence depended upon the issue of a critical operation! If there be any such here, I congratulate him, and trust that he may long be spared the painful knowledge that there are men in this country who are unthankful even for the restoration of health or the preservation of life. The charitable way of viewing such conduct, I may remark, is to believe that such persons, knowing themselves best, estimate the truer value of their lives, and look upon them as just worth nothing! Likely enough they are right!

Now, some may inquire how it is that medical men are so frequently denied their just claims by the public; how it is that persons who would never dream of consulting a lawyer without the payment of his fee, have no hesitation whatever in calling in any medical practitioner and coolly turning him out again when his work has been completed, without even the acknowledgment of thanks for his attendance and trouble? The answer is very easy, and the cause rests with ourselves. If the principle were adopted and maintained that we should demand a fair

remuneration, in all cases for our advice and attendance — if the public were fully impressed with a belief that no practitioner would afford his assistance to any but the poor without the payment of a certain fee — if a fixed tariff, as with lawyers, were agreed upon among our members, from which no one would depart, and if that sum were required either every visit, or at the end of every attendance, I am quite satisfied the practice would be of infinite service to us in a pecuniary point of view, would be gratifying to a large portion of the public, and would give us a better status also, so far as an individual can introduce a custom and carry it out, I have endeavoured to adhere to a fixed rule, and have generally been able to succeed; and what the individual can do, the mass of the profession should be able to accomplish. This, however, can only be attained by united action, which must not be regarded as a combination, but simply the arrangement of a question which concerns both the public and ourselves, for the truth is, the absence of such an arrangement is frequently complained of by the portions of the community who do and are prepared to pay.

I will not here venture to state what I would consider the maximum or minimum of our standard of remuneration, but, of one thing I am convinced, that even a moderate sum for each visit, and that sum punctually paid, would be much more profitable to us than what arises out of the present loose and irregular system of payment. It is true that it is difficult to get the mass of our profession to join in any movement, though that would be most conducive to their own good. We are without a common bond of union, the want of which prevents our acting together; hence every one is compelled more or less, to act each for himself. Yet, as we see that it is possible for the members of the law profession to protect their common interests, by united action, although they have their jealousies and divisions as well as ourselves, I am led to believe that there does not exist any insuperable obstacle to our having a harmonious consent and concurrence in the matter of fees especially, and I am satisfied something of this kind, as well at many other useful reforms, would long ere this have been adopted had not our representative bodies — our corporations, the universities and colleges — been at variance with each other, and that their selfish churlishness and obstinacy had not blinded them to their own and the common welfare. May we not hope, however, that now there seems some prospect of these antagonising interests being united; that the first step is likely to be made to equalise, and, in a measure,

Samuel Browne

amalgamate our several ruling and licensing bodies, and that the day is not very far distant when the medical profession shall cease to be a bye-word and a reproach; when we shall no longer be a mixture without any affinity, deprived of action, devoid of strength.

Gentlemen, while I submit that we should cherish the sentiments I have endeavoured to enunciate in the preceding part of this address, you will permit me to say that we must always remember we are citizens of the commonwealth, and that we cannot separate ourselves from the public interests. On the contrary, so far as our position, education, time, and abilities permit, we should be zealous in the extension of knowledge, the furthering of science, in the promotion, in fact, of whatever tends to improve and elevate mankind. Our influence and our opportunities should never be neglected. By mixing with our fellow-citizens in the public business of the day, apart from our professional pursuits, we not only make ourselves useful, but we gain in return a valuable amount of knowledge. We cannot, in truth, too diligently cultivate the kindly and social relations of society. Our desire should be to be friendly to every man – the enemy of none.

Some of you are aware, gentlemen, that, at our last meeting, I promised this evening to bring forward the subject of medical ethics. In fulfilling that promise, I have been merely able to glance at one or two points of that important and comprehensive question; for, when I came to consider its many and interesting features, I almost despaired of reducing my ideas to the necessary limits, and, at the same time, rendering them presentable. In dealing with the subject, I deemed it advisable to take one or two points only for discussion, and to embody in these such sentiments as I myself entertain, and work them out for a practical end. Whether I have been successful in the attempt rests with your judgment; but I can most unaffectedly say that I have given utterance to no single sentiment, regarding what I deem the well being of the profession, which I do not heartily feel and desire to see carried out.

I have long felt that society at large have a very false estimate of us as a profession – that we are almost powerless as a body, and that all of this, in a great measure, arises from our internal divisions. There cannot be a question but we have within us the elements of strength and almost illimitable power, for promoting the welfare of the human race. Yet our usefulness is greatly impaired, and, in some cases, nearly neutralised, by the absence of correct and compatible principles. The great *desiderata* seem to

be unitedness, and a higher estimate of our professional position; and surely these are not beyond our reach? Let us to ourselves and to our brethren be true; let us cultivate those relations of forbearance and amity, which become the members of a liberal profession, and there cannot be a question but our usefulness, influence, and respectability will increase in proportion to the harmony which exists among ourselves.

Samuel Browne

Presidential Opening Address¹ Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society 30th October, 1858

GENTLEMEN, — Having been called to the presidency of this association, my first duty is to return you my sincere thanks for the respect and confidence thus manifested, and the honour conferred — an honour which I deeply feel and appreciate.

The sixth session of the Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society will, I trust, tend to our mutual improvement, the advancement of medical science, and the good of our fellow-men. This earnest wish, I am sure, animates each of us, and will stimulate us in our researches and in our inquiries after truth. The aim and great object of every such association should be to endeavour to examine carefully, dispassionately, and without prejudice, every question of practice submitted to our notice; to inquire as far as practicable into the natural history of every disease discussed here, and to ascertain as accurately as we can those elements in each which have tended to functional disturbance, or arrest of function — to permanent change of structure, or death; and, on the other hand, to determine, as far as our knowledge and experience permit, how much nature or how much art has been enabled to counteract, the workings of these morbid elements, to prevent their fatal tendencies, to remove structural change, to restore the natural functions — in other words, to produce in the system that condition which, we denominate 'health.'

These, gentlemen, are glorious objects, noble aims — the promotion of the welfare and happiness of the human family; and if, in our inquiries and labours, we are able to throw one mite of sound practicable value, one incontrovertible truth, into the treasury of medical science, our society will not have laboured in vain. Let us, then, earnestly and deliberately set to work. Each of us should think and examine for himself; and, not relying alone on early teachings, early prejudices, and empirical doctrines, bring the force of reasoning and individual experience to bear on every dogma, every question concerning disease. Every question must be tried in the strong light of reason, for every principle of practice must admit of a rational solution, otherwise we cannot admit it to be of practical value, or an unquestionable truth.

It has, I fear, in all ages, been the habit of our profession to vaunt overmuch certain powers which we undoubtedly possess, and to trust nature too little.

That is, when cure of disease has been effected, they have given all the credit to the means used, and have almost, if not entirely, ignored the healing powers of nature. This distrust of nature, and this over-confidence in the powers of medicine, still, to some extent, prevail; and we all, I admit, are still too prone to consider that drugs do more than they really can accomplish in disease. But, while I say so, I do not mean to affirm that our *materia medica* does not possess many inestimable medicines which have great curative powers, whose efforts in aiding the system to struggle with and to repel disease are not most palpable and beyond question. But I do believe and assert that, in all times, the trust in drugs has been too great — the confidence in nature too little. At one period, indeed, in the medical profession — and that not very remote — this reliance on medicaments became so overweening that special drugs were considered to be quite specifics in the cure of certain complaints, and that every symptom almost required a separate medicine — every manifestation of disease a new medicament; hence the unhappy patients were drenched and re-drenched, under the impression, it seems, on the part of the practitioner, that the *materies morbi* could be thus, as it were, washed out of the system; and hence, too, our pharmacopoeia became laden with multitudes of simples and compounds, many of which were inoperative, or worse than useless.

Now, a social evil of such magnitude — even maintained, as it was, by the professors of the healing art — could not have been endured by the community had it not been for the extreme ignorance which existed in the public mind regarding questions of medicine, and had not the most absurd notions prevailed with respect to the causes of disease, and the means that were believed to be capable of removing them. Even at this day the same indefinite and foolish notions prevail among all classes not of our profession, regarding the powers possessed by the physician over disease, so that any amount of boasting — any extravagant assertion — is received by many, even of learning and station, with implicit confidence, and the man who lauds his cures and extols his specifics most is often considered a person of pre-eminent abilities.

But, to return to the period when the drug and heroic systems most prevailed in the treatment of disease. Such a state of matters as that to which I have referred could not long exist, when enlightened members of our profession began to look into the nature of diseases, their causes, mode of production, their progress and natural issue. Such inquirers very soon ascertained that many of their former dogmas

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Samuel Browne

and speculations were based on false principles, and that many of the means they had adopted in practice were calculated more to disturb or arrest the efforts of the system in throwing off disease than to promote a cure, and that many of the then boasted remedies were either inert, had very little effect, or were even injurious – while few, very few, of them, indeed, could be considered as specifics. Hence commenced a revolution in the practice of medicine – a revolution which has progressed up to the present day, and which was originated and has been carried on by the legitimate professors of the healing art – not as has been supposed, and has been asserted, by Hahnemann, his disciples, and successors – who have produced and maintained the most irrational system, the shallowest charlatanry that was ever imposed upon the understandings of men. No, gentlemen, long before the promulgation of his absurd and untenable doctrines, the revolution in medicine which I have noticed had commenced; and the observant members of our body had discarded much of the prevalent heroic practice, and the drugging system, and had seen the necessity of trusting more to nature, and less to the articles of the *materia medica*. And, in proof of this statement, in opposition to the assertions of the homoeopathists, I have merely to refer you to the writings of Gideon Harvey and Ernest Stahl, published more than a century and a-half since. It is true that, long since that period, the heroic practice has been taught in our schools, and carried out by the profession, but it is not less true that, even antecedent to that date, many physicians, distrusting the efficacy of medicine, had pursued a partial or complete expectant system in their practice. I make these remarks simply to show that the reformers of practical medicine were long antecedent to the promulgator of the infinitesimal nonentity – that most miserable fallacy, the most wily yet shallowest pretence that ever duped mankind. To this system it is my intention to refer more specifically presently; but I shall premise that inquiry by stating what the legitimate medical art is – and what it is not; what it professes to do – and what it does not profess; what it can accomplish – and what it never can.

In making these observations, I shall confine myself to the subject of medical art, as exemplified in the practice of the physician. The science of surgery is of a less occult character – its power and efficiency admit usually of easy illustration, its manifestations are generally more positive and unquestionable, and hence cannot be used by the quack juggler in his medical legerdemain. Regarding it, the accomplished author of “Nature and Art; in the Cure of Disease,” has written:– “Surgery, indeed, must be always admitted

to exhibit the least equivocal successes, and the most splendid triumphs of the art.” Then, having enumerated several of these triumphs, he continues:– “It is, indeed, to such facts as these – it is to surgery, even taken as a whole – that the practitioner conversant only with internal diseases, and possessing no other means of combating them but the feeble and uncertain armoury of drugs, must often look up for consolation in his difficulties. It is a perpetual comfort for him to know with certainty that in one of the fields of its display, at least, the noble art he professes leaves no room for doubt as to its vast powers, or as to the incalculable good worked by those in the cause of humanity; and this knowledge yields, moreover, a perennial and lively stimulus to his exertions, by fostering the hope the time may yet come when the treatment of internal diseases may attain something of a like certainty and power.” This, certainly, is a “consummation devoutly to be wished,” and may we not look forward to its almost complete accomplishment, when we remember the vast strides which physiological research, pathological investigation, and chemical analysis have made within our own day, all tending to the illustration of diseases, their nature and origin, their progress and products, their probable results, and the means by which they are best prevented, mitigated, or cured? These aspirations, these researches, are ours; they constitute, or should constitute, the daily duties of the physician; they are the foundation of the noble science of medicine, whose divine object is to alleviate distress and pain, to mitigate the penalties of disease, and to restore health, and, consequently, happiness, to every afflicted son of man. This is legitimate medicine, and, when practised, can claim the power of preserving and continuing life when all other arts fail to do so; when all other appliances are unavailing; and can render life still enjoyable when, without the relief and support it supplies, the world and all of its pleasures, would only be distasteful, and the prolongation of existence would be but one long-drawn scene of suffering and distress. This is medical art – the prevention, mitigation, or cure of diseases by those means which reason and experience point out, but it is not the part of legitimate or rational medicine to say that every disease can be certainly remedied by certain special means, and that too, independent of nature. That this medicine, or that appliance, will surely cure certain morbid conditions of the system, and that, too, without any reference to the sthenic or asthenic condition of the body in which the disease has been manifested – such would be mere empiricism, and closely allied to the very worst species of quackery.

Samuel Browne

Now, what does the legitimate medical art profess to do? It claims the power of preventing, mitigating, and curing diseases, under certain conditions, always having due regard to the efforts of nature, and especially taking care not to disturb her sanative course by using heroic, and, consequently, injurious means. This regard of nature — merely watching her progress in the effort to cast off disease, and aiding her when these efforts seem unequal to the struggle, or when they fail — is the distinguishing characteristic of the physician of the present day, who, while he has due faith in those remedies which experience and the demonstrations of pathology have taught him rightly to apply, has also due faith and confidence in that vital principle of the living body which, from the first manifestation of diseased action within it, till the final cessation of that disease, ceases not to resist or repair the inroads made, and only ends that struggle when it has conquered or has been overcome. With regard to the preventive powers of the medical art, no one who knows anything of medical history can entertain a feasible doubt. Every one who has paid the slightest attention to ordinary sanitary operations, public or private, must have been impressed with their efficacy in preventing disease. There cannot be any question of the potency of hygienic medicine in eradicating the prolific causes of most of our febrile and inflammatory complaints, thereby saving life without the risk and struggle for it, and hence benefitting society in a twofold manner. This is a vast field, as yet but little cultivated; but the results, so far as tried, have been most satisfactory, and lead us to believe that we could calculate upon vast, and almost inconceivable, benefits, were hygienic operations carried to their utmost practical extent. That they have not been so pursued is not the fault of our profession; we have the power to demonstrate and recommend, but we cannot always enforce even the most salutary and imperatively required sanitary operations. Ignorance, apathy, narrow-minded interests, and numberless other antagonistic elements, meet the medical reformer at every step, and too often thwart his best hopes, his ablest and most philanthropic designs.

The second principle which the legitimate medical art professes is the power to modify and mitigate the manifestations of disease; and this it is enabled, every day, to accomplish, in allaying internal or outward pain — in soothing wounds, bruises, and burns — in relieving headache, sick stomach, heartburn, stranguary, constipation; and the like — by plain, rational, and demonstrable remedies, suited to the object in view. It would be mere impertinence on my part to specify these special remedies, as every one of

you is aware of their proper application; and no man of observation or experience will, for a moment, doubt that, in the list of our pharmacopoeia, he has many medicines which do, when duly exhibited, at once alleviate any of those morbid manifestations which I have named. This, then, is a positive and undeniable power which medical art possesses, and is as capable of proof as that fire applied to water will cause it to disappear in the the form of vapour, or that the same water, under different circumstances, by the application of cold, will be converted into the solid material of ice.

The next principle which we maintain is, that legitimate medicine possesses the power, not only to modify, but, under certain conditions, to cure disease. There cannot be a question that nature uninterfered with by drugs, and having fair scope for the exercise of her innate sanative power, will, especially in many acute diseases, overcome the morbid perturbations of the system, restore the normal functions, and bring about that comparative state of the body which we denominate health. But how seldom is it that nature has this fair play — this requisite, uninterrupted exercise of the restorative functions. Few, if any of the sick, are so circumstanced that they may not be said to be placed in a condition unsuitable, in many respects for the wholesome action of the *vix medicatrix naturae*, and this may arise from necessity, ignorance, or the pseudo-medical knowledge of the patient or friends. Take, for instance, a case of measles, scarlet or ordinary fevers, and see how much necessity, ignorance, or pseudo-medical skill may complicate the complaint, and retard, if not entirely nullify, the efforts of nature to shake off the disease. Then it is that the first display of the curative powers of the medical art comes into operation. The experienced physician at once sees what it is that interferes with the natural progress of the malady. Necessity, in one case, compels the unhappy patient to be in a low, damp, badly-ventilated situation, without nourishment — without the means of cleanliness; ignorance, in another case, excludes the light and air, and heaps on loads of bedclothes, and pours down floods of warm drinks; while, in a third case, the pseudo-medical knowledge of the patient or his friends employs all the domestic remedies, from a teaspoonful of sulphur, to a glass of whiskey punch, or from the hot posset, drugged with saltpetre, to the cold and nauseous draught of Epsom salts. Now, what are the curative means which the experienced physician first employs in the instances I have just related? He merely vindicates the rights of outraged nature. He removes the first case into a pure, dry air, administers proper nutriment, gives a cleansing bath,

Samuel Browne

and supplies fresh linen; in the next, he admits a due supply of light, ventilates the apartment, reduces the clothing, forbids the tepid inundations, and allows the use of pure cold water; while, in the third, he employs similar conditions, and strictly excludes every portion of the previous domestic drenching. Having done so, he quietly watches the progress of his cases, and, in almost every instance, he finds that he has done all that art requires him to do. Nature accomplishes the rest. Yet, in all these instances, though he never has exhibited a single drug, will any reasonable man say that, by his knowledge of medical science, he has not accomplished all that could have been done – namely, by having put his patients in the right road to recovery, the disease has been cured? Nay, more, has he not thus simply proved the first principles of the curative power of medical art, by his having removed the impediments which obstructed nature in her struggle with disease?

But let us now inquire whether there are not instances in which medical art can do more – namely, effect the removal of disease by the due administration of drugs, and in which, without their exhibition, the morbid action must continue – nature being unequal to the contest – until either the complaint had destroyed life, or had effected such changes of normal structure as to prevent, for the future, the due performance of the proper functions of the organ or organs so injured! Every member of our profession, of even limited experience, will at once be able to point out a large number of diseases, both acute and chronic, in which the exhibition of medicinal remedies of undoubted powers is essential to their cure, and which, without such remedies, would unquestionably lead either to disorganization or death. For example sake, permit me to refer to one or two of these. Let me instance acute inflammation of a large joint, acute dysentery, inflammation of the cornea, specific or ordinary iritis. In all of these cases we have palpable ocular demonstration of what is going on; we know, in each case, what the result is likely to be; and, while we see that nature, as in every other instance, battles with the morbid affection, step by step, we no less plainly perceive that her unaided efforts must end either in death or destruction of the functions of the part affected. We apply known suitable remedies, and we just as plainly see that the diseased action ceases, the morbid products are removed by a natural process, and the healthy condition and functions of the part are restored. Here, then, gentlemen, we have positive examples of the curative powers of the medical art, and in which it acts as the potent ally and subservient handmaid of kindly nature, which ever responds to every judicious

effort in her behalf, but which as surely resents every interference which disturbs her operations, or which tries to act contrary to her established and unalterable laws.

For there cannot be any doubt that the functions of all organised bodies are guided by laws as certain and unalterable as those which compel the planetary system to observe their special orbits; and if so, it is clear that whatever interference we make with organised bodies must be in consonance with their peculiar laws. This it is which creates the greatest difficulty of medical practice. Observation and research require to be constantly exercised, and the precepts of experience to be ever kept in view, to enable the physician to judge aright of those disturbing causes which constitute disease, and to select those remedies which will not increase the existing disturbance, or set up more dangerous perturbations in the system. That we are still very far from being able to select the remedies most suitable for every diseased condition we must all admit. We do not profess to be able to remedy every disorder. We cannot contend successfully with many; in the presence of several we are almost helpless; yet we do not despair. It is our duty humbly to estimate our powers – the curative powers of medical art. But, knowing, as we do, the value of preventive and palliative medicine, whose operations are evident, and usually unquestionable, we do hope that to the undoubted curative means we already possess, accurate observation and experience will add many others, so that we shall be better prepared to contend with disease, under every form, and to afford to nature, when disturbed, and when assistance seems essential to the well-being of the individual, a succour more certain and consonant with nature's laws.

The principles which I have thus endeavoured to enunciate may not commend themselves to all of you. Some of my brethren present may have a higher estimate of the curative power of medicine than I profess; but I believe that the greater number of those who have passed more than twenty-five years in arduous practice, and who will calmly sum up individual experience, will admit that many views of the powers possessed by curative medicine have been considerably modified since the time we first embarked in professional life. But, gentlemen, in making all the preceding statements, I must not be supposed to yield – nor do I – one iota of the principles which guide and ennoble the legitimate exercise of medical practice. I have merely endeavoured to show cause for our still being hard students: that we yet have much to learn; that we have but little cause for boasting regarding the

Samuel Browne

curative powers of our art; and that, while we know that we have learned much from physiological, pathological, and clinical investigations, we must still be humble observers of the laws of nature, and be content to keep pace with the progressive knowledge of a progressive science, and not attempt “to vindicate for our art the heroic character of a controller of nature and a conqueror of disease.”

And now, gentlemen, having expressed my individual opinion of what legitimate medicine is, and what it is not, what it professes to do, and what it neither professes to accomplish, nor, in our present state of knowledge, can accomplish — having fairly and, I believe, moderately, put forward a few of its claims to be regarded as a noble and invaluable art, and having also honestly pointed out its imperfections, I may, with every propriety, claim your attention while I endeavour to expose the fallacies of some of those systems which have been pitted in antagonism to sound, rational, legitimate medical science. In this review, I shall be, I trust, the exponent of your individual sentiments; for I have every reason to believe that every one of you regards these heresies in the same light that I do — namely, irrational and untenable as sound and comprehensive systems!

Homoeopathy, as being the oldest of these fallacies — as being the most irrational and untenable of these heresies — as affording evidence of the greatest delusion, claims our first notice; and, as it has lately been brought before us under the title of “What is it?” I shall consider, and endeavour to prove, “What it is not!” Besides, this method will be but simple justice. As I have already reviewed legitimate medicine under similar heads, and as I have moderately and honestly shown what medical science professes to do — what it can accomplish, and what it cannot — I may fairly devote like attention to homoeopathy, merely promising that, while legitimate medical science is slow to assert anything regarding its powers, and boasts not of its cures, nor vaunts its infallible specifics, homoeopathy is a system of illimitable assertion throughout — it boasts its wonderful (and impossible) cures, and has a specific for every human ill! And, certainly, if it do not succeed with the public, it is not from any lack of trumpeting forth its delusions as the very embodiment of “rational medicine!” “Rational medicine, as exhibited in the form of a decillionth of a drop of the tincture of belladonna, being gravely pronounced a specific in scarlatina! It is scarcely possible to believe that any medically-educated man, possessed of even very moderate reasoning powers, could conceive, much less believe, such a monstrous proposition; but as I

must charitably suppose, there are some honest men who are sincere followers of Hahnemann, I am bound to accept the confession of their faith; yet must exclaim, O! the immeasurable extravagance of man’s credulity! Alas, poor human nature! In the review which I am now about to take of the doctrines of homoeopathy, I shall be specially careful not to state anything of “what it is” beyond what is contained in the writings of Hahnemann and his followers, even down to the latest blast that has been blown on a provincial penny trumpet. To the homoeopaths I say, “Out of your own mouths shall ye be judged!”

It is evident that time will not permit me to do more than briefly refer to some of the leading doctrines of homoeopathy, as I cannot inquire into the Hahnemannian assertion that itch, *psora* — common itch — is not only the cause of all diseases, but even of moral degradation and sin; that the shakings and titurations of the medicaments and infinitesimal divisions not only increase the dynamic force, but even spiritualise them; that the decillionth of a grain of any of their specifics not only effects the cure of disease, but that its presence can be positively demonstrated — that is, that one grain of sulphur can be detected, by physical signs, in a mass of water larger by some million times than the entire planetary system! Any inquiry into such extravagant assertions, which shock common sense, neither my time nor your patience would permit. I will merely say, that the instrument — the magnetoscope — which the homoeopaths declared capable of detecting the decillionth of a grain of sulphur in a universe of matter turned out to be an acknowledged failure. An instrument, however, of a somewhat similar kind, enabled Faraday to expose the humbug and deceptions, of table-turning — a simple deception indeed, when compared with the extravagant and injurious delusions of homoeopathy.

But to my text — “The theme neglected long!” “What is homoeopathy?” Hahnemann, the founder of the practice, and his followers, tell us that it is based upon the principle that like cures like — that is, that anything taken into the healthy system, and which produces certain indications of functional disturbance, will, in a disease which exhibits a like disturbance — that is, symptoms like the perturbed indications produced in the healthy body — remove the disorder, when exhibited with the view of curing it. And they instance Peruvian bark, sulphur, silex, charcoal, and various other substances, which, they assert, have been proved — that is, tested — on the healthy body, and which, having universally produced certain sensible effects, when thus tested, are known to possess wonderful power in the cure of disease.

Samuel Browne

Credat Judaeus! Non ego! This little system seems beautiful and simple — very simple; but, then, it wants the main element which would render it of any value. It wants the essential element of truth. Who is there of us that has not tested the absolute untruthfulness of those pretences over and over again? How often has each practitioner here exhibited Peruvian bark, and its several preparations, in full doses and in moderate doses, for weeks together, and that, too, in the individual who seemed in ordinary health, without ever producing an attack of ague, or anything “like” ague? Has any one here ever seen sulphur produce itch, or create an evil moral propensity? Has any one here ever seen anything “like” the itch produced by the use of sulphur? or, has he ever observed any evil moral tendency generated by its administration? — an effect which it should have, according to the homoeopathic system; — for Hahnemann expressly stated that, after twelve years of close and anxious observation, he fully believed *psora*, or itch, to be the germ from which all diseases had sprung; and some of his sapient followers improved upon this, by asserting it to be, also, the basis of moral turpitude! Hence, if infinitesimal doses of sulphur cure the itch, it should, surely, remove the effects of the itch, moral or physical! It should, in fact, by a parity of reasoning, regenerate the world! — a hitherto, I believe, unexpected result, which must rejoice the benevolent heart of every moral reformer in the community, and for the discovery of which the discoverer, in justice, should be made perpetual president of some great reformatory establishment! The remarks I have made relative to bark and sulphur apply equally to the alleged “provings” of belladonna, aconite, arsenic, mercury, copper, and every other of those remedies which are said by the homoeopaths to cure on the principle of *Similia similibus curantur*. No one who had not formed a foregone conclusion could have observed any such effects in the healthy body.

Imagination has a wonderful effect upon the human frame — a fact which every one of us is constantly in the habit of observing. Make a powerful impression on the mind, and the most marked results will ensue. This is one of the secrets of the homoeopathic treatment. The homoeopaths never stumble at the most extravagant promises; unlimited assertion and unhesitating promise can effect a great deal, and well they know it! and fully carry out, at least, that knowledge in their treatment of disease. They adduce the example of the efficacy of their treatment in infantile diseases, and triumphantly say, “See what effects are produced by our globules — pillules is now the fashionable term — or drops in cases where imagination has no influence!” But they

must recollect that in no case does Nature so fully demonstrate her healing powers as in these very instances. This fact every observant medical man knows, and hence, in the treatment of the diseases of children, he has the greatest confidence that the natural action of the vital principle will, in most cases, overcome the disturbing cause, and restore the disordered function. In the severest attacks of infantile diseases, as well as in those of adults, do the homoeopaths ever resort to the remedies you or I would likely adopt — clothing these remedies, however, in the mystified garb that conceals all their administrations? They cannot deny that they do: some of them have admitted the practice; hence, who can ever be aware whether he is taking an infinitesimal, and, consequently, perfectly inert, dilution, or swallowing, in a concealed form the most powerful and dangerous of our pharmacopoeial drugs? This may be honesty, but it seems to me very like old-fashioned assurance, not to say knavery.

But, to return to their *Similia similibus curantur*. The homoeopaths say that all the medicaments they use have been tried on the healthy body, and their effects noted; so that any disease having symptoms “like” the disturbance caused by the drug in the healthy body will be cured by the administration of the self-same drug; and they furnish us with a long list of articles that, they say, produce such and such effects in the healthy individual, and, consequently, will, or “should,” cure such and such complaints. We say they cannot shew us any instance of the truth of these assertions, and that the supposed effect upon the healthy individual is the impression made on the imagination, and that alone. Can they adduce any instances in healthy children — children’s diseases being quoted as showing the curative powers of their treatment, uninfluenced by the will — where quinine, sulphur, belladonna, arsenic, aconite, or any other of their medicaments, inert or poisonous, produced ague, itch, scarlet fever, measles, cancer, or anything “like” these diseases? Perhaps they could tell us whether a healthy infant, if given powdered coral, would have heat, redness, and swelling of the gums? — symptoms very “like” teething — and that, hence, in teething, the best cure would be found in rubbing the gums with “a coral”? The suggestion, I believe, is new. The fact has not, that I am aware, been “proved.” The substance in question, however, is as well worthy of the “proving” process as either silex or charcoal. I hope the homoeopaths — especially the young and enthusiastic, members — will value and act on the hint. I trust they will not feel themselves my debtors for it. They need not be uneasy, as, I assure you, I

Samuel Browne

make them a free-will gift of the suggestion.

The next assertion, on the part of homoeopathy, is, that having selected the proper drug, and having regard to “like curing like,” they can administer it in any quantity, from the third dilution – the millionth part of a grain or drop – to the 30th dilution, the decillionth of a grain! Some even go on to much higher divisions, and state that they can produce the most powerful effects and perturbations in the system of the patient, and thus cure the disease. Nay, more, they further assert that the more infinitesimal the dose, the greater becomes the dynamical value of the drug! Can the force of credulity, the arrogance of folly, and the assumption of impudence carry men farther? They can, as homoeopaths, with a fearlessness that borders on blasphemy, assert that their system is a substitution for nature, that it takes her place, and, despite of her efforts, is the conqueror of disease! “The decillionth of a grain of sulphur causes such fearful perturbations in the system that some days must elapse before it can be safely repeated.” So says the propounder of the homoeopathic doctrine. A grain of sulphur dissolved in all the water that has ever been upon the face of this globe, since creation’s dawn, according to the homoeopathist, causes fearful perturbations in the human body, when diseased! And, as it is said thus to cure the itch, it must, of necessity, cure all bodily diseases, and insanity, and moral turpitude, which the homoeopaths assert, originate in the itch. Itch, in fact, being the germ whence all diseases have sprung, it is the true type of original sin!

Gentlemen, I will not tire your patience or insult your understanding by pursuing these monstrous absurdities further. But, were I addressing the public, I would consider it my duty to go more into detail, and hold out a beacon to warn them of the shallows, and quicksands, and dangerous reefs, which surround the barren soil whence homoeopathy has sprung. And yet, perhaps, it would be labour in vain, for the history of man, from the earliest ages down to the present time, shows that the “many-headed monster,” the public, has vast numbers of empty crania that are ever ready to receive any doctrine, howsoever absurd – any *canards* that have mystery enough about them to be totally beyond comprehension; the greater the deception the more compliant the public – the firmer its belief. We have had demonolatry, witchcraft, palmistry, the royal touch, the hanged man’s touch, spirit-rapping, table-turning, clairvoyance, electro-biology, mesmerism, and Pulvermacherism, worshipped, or followed, or believed. We have Kinesapathy and hydropathy contending for the curing of all diseases, each vaunting its peculiar

powers – that is, whether the system of pushing and shoving, of pounding and shaking, or that of sluicing and “packing” and rubbing, shall be most fashionable and most patronised. And then, above all the rest, we have homoeopathy pre-eminent in assertion, boasting, and promise, taking the lead of all other quackeries, and simply because it has the triple pre-eminence I have named, and is, above the rest, totally beyond comprehension.

One or two more inquiries, and I have done. The homoeopaths say that we abuse them and the system – themselves without a cause, and the system without trying it. One would suppose that they have been made martyrs of – the most submissive of martyrs – too good, too “spiritualised,” too conscientious – to retort at all; while the truth is, that from Hahnemann to the latest disciple that has felt himself “dumbfounded,” every abusive epithet has been heaped upon us by the homoeopaths, who have never ceased to revile in public, but especially in private, a profession which most of them were bound to honour and revere – a profession which many of them would have never left had they studied or known it – a profession in the ranks of which some who have left it would still be found had they been able, by the practice of legitimate medicine, to succeed. The latter, however, are more to be pitied than despised. Then, again, they tell us that they have forsaken legitimate medicine “for conscience sake” – actuated by its dictates alone – they have courted what they lead the public to believe is nothing less than professional martyrdom! It may be so; and, yet, I have seen some of these martyrs looking very lively, and carrying, themselves with a rather jaunty air! Perhaps, that is the way that homoeopathic martyrs exhibit their afflictions. Of course, I believe they feel they *are* martyrs. Maybe it is that there must be “Mawworms” to the end of the world, and that these men but fulfil their destiny. Does the *unit*, however, when he boasts of his “conscience,” believe that the *ninety and nine*, from whom he has retrograded, possess any of that principle? Let us hope, in all charity, that he does. Still, the fact remains behind, that Hahnemann and his followers have usually stated that those of the “old school” are “insensible to the stings of conscience.” In connexion with this part of the subject, I may say that the causes assigned by some of the conscientious converts to homoeopathy may strike *them* as very conclusive, but, in *my* opinion, are the silliest and most puerile causes – reasons I cannot call them – that were ever adduced in support of a conscientious movement; in fact, they are such as to leave very serious doubts that “conscience” was not the sole or principal impelling

Samuel Browne

motive. The homoeopaths occasionally boast of the intelligence and learning and high status of the members of their body. That there are learned and intelligent and clever men who have apostatised from legitimate medical faith I do not question. We have seen learned and intelligent men, in all ages, embracing and practising every species of deception; therefore we cannot suppose that homoeopathy should present an exception; but that they had attained high professional status I most emphatically deny. Where are their great men – great in the eyes of the profession before their conversion to homoeopathy? They may boast of them; but I confess I am not aware of their existence.

Now, let me sum up what I conceive homoeopathy is, and what it is not. In the first place, then, the system, being based upon a false assumption, must of itself be false; it is erroneous in principle, and irrational in practice. It is a system of extravagant assertion, rich in promise, but excessively barren in results – save dead failures. It pretends to place value upon physiological investigations and researches, while, in practice, it entirely ignores their teachings, and sets itself up in direct opposition to all who are guided by the information which pathology and physiology supply. It is professed and practised, I believe, by some sincere, but, certainly, silly men, who cannot understand that *Nihil ex nihil fit* – that, in fact, in giving their infinitesimal dilutions, they are exhibiting nothing, and are unwittingly practising, it may be, a harmless, but, as likely in the case of disease, to be a fatal delusion; while on the other hand, I am persuaded, from what I have seen, that there are many men who have no faith in the so-called science of homoeopathy, but have a strong faith in the deception that can be practised upon the public, and thus make it available in a pecuniary point of view. Such are the men who practise, in conjunction with a clairvoyant, and prescribe according to the revelations of a “medium!” Such are the men who give full pharmacopoeial doses, concealed in their pillules and infinitesimal-like globules. Such are the men who have faith in nothing beyond the powers of extracting money from the pockets of the community. These are my views of homoeopathy – “what it is,” and what it is not; and I leave it to all honest men – to all rational men – to say if, in its revelations, they can see any cause “why it should be adopted?”

One or two more words, and I have done. In inaugurating the sixth session of the Belfast Pathological Society, I felt it my duty to draw a contrast between the science which is based upon pathology and some of those systems by which its

doctrines are ignored. Time and the proper limits of an address have permitted me to refer only to a few of those principles which distinguish legitimate medicine from all spurious and antagonistic systems; but, in addressing gentlemen of scientific attainments, intelligence, and experience, like these whom I have the privilege and high honour to address, I feel that I have said enough. We are associated for the purpose of scientific research and the investigation of disease. Let us, then, pursue these investigations with earnestness, and in the spirit of free and impartial inquiry. We are associated for the interchange of thought; let that interchange all tend to the advancement of the noble and generous art we profess; and, while we feel that this advancement is for our individual good, let us remember that it has much higher results – mightier tendencies. For, by the progress of the healing art, the health and social happiness of the world must be materially enhanced and promoted. In conclusion, let me, once more, gentlemen, thank you for the honourable position in which your kindness has placed me. I cannot hope to equal some of my distinguished predecessors in the ability with which your deliberations have been conducted; yet, by your aid and forbearance, and by sincere devotion to the intention and interests of your society, I hope I shall fill the presidential chair so as to merit your approbation.

Samuel Browne

Presidential Closing Address

Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society

4th May, 1859

It now becomes my duty, gentlemen, to bring the sixth session of the Belfast Pathological Society to a close. Before, however, I resign the chair in which your kindness placed me for the bygone year, I crave your indulgence while I make a few observations which, I trust, you will consider appropriate to the occasion. In the first place, then, I may say that I have just grounds for offering you my congratulations on the success of the session that has terminated. On a review of the papers brought forward, and the discussions to which they gave rise, I feel I may affirm that, for accuracy of research, truthfulness of detail, and practical and scientific deduction, they bear satisfactory comparison with those introduced before any pathological society of the Kingdom, and I can, moreover, most unaffectedly state that I have received much valuable instruction and information on several subjects, besides having had my attention directed to points of practise that I had not hitherto sufficiently weighed and investigated. In these respects, I am sure, I do not stand alone. Nay, more, I can, without the smallest disparagement of any, believe that every one of us has been materially benefited by the free interchange of sentiment which has taken place, and that the most experienced, as well as the youngest member, has gathered mental riches, as, in friendly discussion, we have expressed our own views or criticised the opinions of others. It is, gentlemen, in such interchange of thought, sometimes agreeing, and occasionally coming into—not hostile—collision, that the advantages of a society like this mainly consist, and, properly directed, duly estimated, these advantages are unquestionably great. If carefully cultivated, our society opens up a large and productive field into which each of us may cast some good seed, and from which all must reap fruitful information. The power of carrying out the culture is within ourselves; it requires but our united will, energy, and perseverance; with these, the result is beyond a doubt, the reward rich and absolutely certain. Our society, gentlemen, is but in its infancy, and, therefore admits of many of those improvements which maturer years will naturally bestow.

There is one requisite improvement to which, I trust, I may be permitted to refer, and that is with regard to the discussions elicited by the papers read here, but especially to their being published in the weekly report of our transactions. During the three

last sessions, many valuable papers have been produced, important in themselves, and highly creditable to their authors. These have regularly appeared in the abstract issued to our country members, but reports of the discussions that have taken place have either been neglected, or have not been recorded and issued; I fear, indeed, that they are entirely lost to the society. Now, you will all admit that this is a great misfortune, and renders our transactions, in many respects, very meagre, and less interesting, for it will not be denied that, in the discussion, much of the practical value of the question introduced was frequently to be found. Hence, I think that some steps should be adopted by which full reports of our discussions shall be taken; and as this work could not be efficiently performed by our secretaries—indeed, it would be unreasonable to require the duty of them—it would be necessary that a reporter should be engaged for the purpose, and then that his reports should be placed in the hands of the Council to prepare them for publication. I need not enter more into details, as it will be the duty of the Council to make the necessary arrangements, if it be deemed right to carry out the suggestions I now make; at all events, I think that some steps will be considered requisite, for every one of us must have felt the *desideratum* to which I have referred. This question was forced upon me early in the session, and I refer to it only now, as I did not see how we could remedy the evil sooner. It is true that the published abstract usually furnished the papers, as read, and thus laid before the members such excellent matter; but these reports fell far short of giving an idea of the many valuable and practical questions to which these papers gave rise. Now, occupying, as I did, the chair at every one of our sessional meetings, I gave strict heed to the subject, and had frequently to regret the absence of arrangements by which much important information would have been preserved to the society, and would have made our sessional volume of transactions more valuable than it can now be. It is then, to supply a defect that admittedly exists that I have ventured to make the preceding remarks, and to offer the suggestions which, in conjunction with the report of the Council, I beg again respectfully to press upon your notice.

I have referred to the professional advantages which this association confers upon its members, and in which the community at large are, more or less, participators; for whatever lends to the advancement of medical science must, of necessity, advantage mankind; but, beyond this, there is here a kindly fellowship which brings us to know, and I trust to esteem, each other; and I hold that the more

Samuel Browne

frequently we are thrown together and mix on friendly terms of equality, the more we shall feel, as brethren should, interested in each other's welfare, and ready to unite for the promotion of whatever is for our general weal. The longer I live, and the greater my experience of the world, the firmer becomes my conviction that it exhibits suicidal folly when the members of our profession remain disunited, and without a common centre of co-operation. Hence, I feel it a bounden duty to promote, by every means in my power, our medical and pathological societies; and now, from this chair, before I leave it for the last time, I would affectionately entreat my brethren to be kindly disposed one to the other, remembering that we are all engaged in the same great cause—the promotion of the health, and, consequently the happiness, of mankind. This recollection should go far to allay all our differences, and to draw us together by the gentle bonds which ought to unite in fellowship and amity those who labour together in an arduous and philanthropic undertaking. This respect towards each other, moreover, is necessary to command the respect of the world; for in no way could we more effectually mar our usefulness than by losing that esteem, and by no means are we so likely to lose it as by internal bickerings and disunion, or by individual underrating of, and keeping aloof from, one another. This, like the Medical Society, is, in some measure, for us a bond of union; but neither of these societies, in my opinion, is made to perform the professional social good of which each is capable, and, although they are centres round which our brethren of Ulster should rally, I feel they are not so esteemed, and are not sufficiently made the *media* of promoting the interests of our common profession. With whom the blame rests I will not venture to affirm; but I fear that we of the town are somewhat careless of what does not seem to affect ourselves immediately, and that our country brethren are rather apathetic. Yet both parties may rest assured that whatever affects the interests of the one must, more or less, bear upon the other, and that union and hearty co-operation, in all cases, would give us double strength. Holding such views, then I feel that it is my duty to urge the extension of our society so that, as far as possible, it may be made to embrace the wide extent of Ulster; and that it shall be not only, as at present, the medium of our scientific communication, but also, the focus, under certain limitations, of our professional action in all that affects the brethren. I am not aware whether this latter object was contemplated by the estimable founder of our society (Doctor Malcolm); but every one who remembers his zeal, his *esprit de corps*, his untiring energy, in all that concerned our

interests, will readily believe that, nothing could have rejoiced him more than to see the association he had called into existence spreading its influence far and wide, and giving union and stability to our body.

This union and stability are highly desirable, as I for one believe that, till we are more united, we must fall far short of duly fulfilling our mission. It cannot be denied that our influence is not at all commensurate with the opportunities we have for promoting our common interests, and that we are not held in the esteem we should be by a community which owes so much to our profession. This want of position or respect is not any fault of the public; the blame must rest with ourselves. I often hear and read melancholy complaints of the small value the public is inclined to put upon our services; but, while I admit the truth of the complaints, and know the readiness with which every community ignores our usefulness, I also feel that the evil originates with ourselves, and that the unbecoming jealousies and the personal strife which disgrace our body lay the foundation for nearly all the social disabilities we endure. Nearly all of us may be personally honoured and esteemed, and, within certain limits, can exercise considerable power; but, as a body, we fall very far short of commanding an influence at all commensurate with what belongs to us individually—the individual power, in fact, loses considerably in the aggregate, and this is naturally the result of disunion. And, gentlemen, until very recently, our co-members of the public service have even suffered from the very causes which operate against us in private life. Our want of influence extended to, and affected their interests, both in the army and navy; at length, however, these invaluable officers sought, and, by union, obtained, redress, and, in the struggle, they were warmly and generously sustained by the entire profession, which, however disunited and at variance regarding their own social interests, worked harmoniously to obtain for their ill-requited brethren of the two services at least an instalment of the rights which had long been denied to them, and these benefits are now likely to be largely increased in the prospect of war. We cannot but deplore the horrors of war; we cannot but earnestly hope that they may be averted from us; yet, if it becomes necessary that England shall be engaged in the defence of her honour, or of the right, we must also rejoice that our brethren, who will be called on to exercise their humane duty amid the crash of battle or in the face of the dire pestilence, will have the consolation of feeling that their services will be more valued than they have ever hitherto been, and that, in the day of honourable reward, they will not be forgotten.

Samuel Browne

Perhaps at no period have the union and stability to which I have referred been more required than in these days. After many years of barren legislation, a measure of medical reform has, at last, been passed into a law; that Act I shall not venture to criticise, because it would scarcely be fair to find fault with or praise a measure not yet fully in operation; but this much I may say, that we can only regard it as an instalment of what was urgently required, and what our interests yet demand. Still, such as it is, we must accept it, and it becomes our duty to render its protective provisions as effective as possible, and to use all the influence we possess towards the carrying out of those clauses which affect unqualified practitioners. These steps can only be taken, however, when the list of registered medical practitioners shall have been published. But, in the meantime, our union and steady watchfulness are necessary to guard against the several kinds of quackery which, under the guise of medical science, are mere specious pretences. These should have our determined opposition; they should not find any favour at our hands. For I hold that, if we do not, on all fitting occasions, oppose and expose them, we are tacitly assisting in the deception—we are permitting the world to believe that our minds are unsettled on the question. Thus do we sanction judgment to go by default; but, above all, in a cowardly manner we permit the profession we are bound to defend to be trampled on. And why? Is it not because we are too disunited, too timid, too time-serving, and fearful of creating enemies? No one should unnecessarily provoke enmity; but, when a great principle is at stake, I hold that no man who values his privileges should shrink from maintaining them, in opposition to everyone whom he considers in the wrong, and he must never yield a principle for expediency sake, or conciliate any man by admitting an error to assume the place of truth. When I was called to this chair, at the commencement of the session. I felt myself necessitated to express my opinion on some of the medical heresies of the day. This I did, fully and fearlessly, and I do not now regret the course I then pursued, nay, I now reiterate every word I uttered against them. Some of my brethren, I believe, considered that my attack upon certain quackeries was calculated to serve rather than damage those systems; whether they still adhere to that notion I know not, but I am satisfied that, when the gage had been thrown down, I was not only right, but was called on, from my position as president of this society, to take it up. Nay, more, I feel that, had I not done so, I would have merited your contempt, and, certainly, I must have despised myself. Just look

across the Channel, and see the pusillanimous and time-serving course pursued by some members of a medical association there, and ask yourselves whether those who, under the guise of pseudo-liberalism, contended for the admission of homeoquacks to the privileges of that society did not display an utter disregard for the honour and interests of the professions? How they could have acted so I am at a loss to conceive, unless I believe that they had a decided leaning to the system, without the courage to confess their real sentiments. The majority, however, have nobly vindicated the character of the association, and have taught a lesson to homoeoquacks and their sympathisers which these gentlemen will not readily forget.

The Council has suggested—and I quite agree with their views—that some means should be adopted by which country practitioners may be induced to become members. Indeed, I believe that the report of the transactions may be made so ample and interesting as to create a desire on the part of nearly every medical man in Ulster to join with us, and I hope that, before the opening of next session, the Council will have matured a plan by which every inducement will be held out to our country brethren, and that we shall have a great increase of our enrolled members.

The remarks of the Council relative to the museum are worthy of the most attentive consideration. We have now amassed a valuable collection of pathological specimens and illustrations; but, until they shall have been properly arranged, described, and tabulated in a catalogue, they must remain nearly useless. Indeed, to the majority of our members, they are as a sealed book; hence the earliest duty of our new Council, I respectfully submit, will be the careful examination of the collection and the arrangement of it, so as to make it available; and, as I shall still, *ex-officio*, be a member of Council, I shall have great pleasure in devoting a portion of my time during the Summer to this essentially necessary undertaking.

To the general body of the members I would earnestly recommend the storing up of clinical facts and observations during the recess, and the pursuit of pathological research whenever opportunity offers, so that we shall have ample stock of matter wherewith to begin the ensuing session. I throw out this hint as I know that men are too apt to disregard that which they cannot turn to immediate use, and overlook many useful and interesting matters, but of which they do not happen to stand in need, or for which they are not then in search.

And now, gentlemen, it only remains for me to

Samuel Browne

thank you, in the first place, for the honour which you conferred when you called on me to preside over your deliberations. This, like every other professional distinction which you and the Medical Society have bestowed, I owe entirely to the kindness of my brethren, not to any merit of my own. That friendly esteem I hope I shall still continue to possess. In the next place, I have to tender you my very grateful acknowledgements for the unwearied interest which has attended the progress of the past session, and for the anxiety all have manifested to render the papers and discussions of practical value. The President's duty is easily performed, where the members vie with each other in courtesy, and in the maintenance of the order of discussion. Such I have felt to be my position at every one of our meetings; and I shall ever look back upon my presidency of the Belfast Clinical and Pathological Society with feelings of satisfaction and gratitude. (Applause.)