

Cambridge July 20th 1838
W. Beach N. D.

Sir,

In consequence of your Letter of the 2nd ins^t by Mr Kelley, I have given him whatever information I possessed on the various subjects of his inquiry. He submitted to my inspection your three volumes entitled "The American Practice of Medicine", and wished me to give my general opinion of the work, but as they altogether amounted to over 1600 pages, I was deterred from attempting it. I thereupon concluded to select two subjects for examination only, viz the free use of mercury producing Salivation — and the very free use of the lancet as practised by my old friend and correspondent Dr Benjamin Bush; as I see by yesterday's Boston News-paper, I need not repeat it here. There are several other matters in your volumes I should have liked to have remarked on were it practicable; but Time and its natural effects must plead my excuse. Neither my memory, nor my fingers are now what they once were. No is that to be wondered at in a man born in the early part of the year 1754.

Allow me then to speak generally and freely, for if I mistake not freedom, frankness, and friendship go hand in hand, and I love to see them yoked and drawing together; and long experience has taught me that a prudent freedom is the very soul of honest cordiality, and real friendship.

The first thing that struck me was the marks of labor and great industry of the Author, and the next was his courage; for he waves his colours, — steps forward and proclaims Preformation, w^{ch} word implies that something was previously wrong. Improvement does not satisfy him, as it only means amendment of a thing already admissable, whereas reformation means forming anew. It means not repairing an old House and patching and painting over its defects, but building a new one on a better model, out of the same, or ^{the} like materials.

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His very suggestion of re-formation seems to expect, and even to court opposition, while amendments, ^{are listened to.} To amend correct, and even rectify, is to lessen an evil, or imperfect system, or whatever is insufficient and defective for the purpose aimed at; whereas Preformation is an arduous and dangerous task, and engendering strife and contention. And strife is, says Solomon "as if a man letteth out the waters" — that is — as if he cut the Dyke of Prudence, in hopes of drowning his enemy, or rival, and by doing so, he inundates his own dwelling — his own establishment, and thus overwhelms himself.

Your intention or aim is, if I conjecture rightly, to restrict the Materia Medica to the Vegetable Kingdom, to the utter exclusion of the Mineral grand-division of the productions of all beautiful nature; and if I mistake not, you seem hardly willing to partake any of the riches of the animal Kingdom beyond that of simple food. In a word, it appears to me that you are inclined to follow the doctrine of the celebrated Samuel Thomson of New Hampshire in his rigid-
~~ly~~ inculcation of Botanical remedies alone.

I esteem Samuel Thomson, and have told him again and again, that neither he nor I have a sufficient knowledge of the all beautiful and all various productions of Nature to attempt to circumscribe her power, or to even insinuate that remedies against the diseases w^c. flesh is heir to, are confined to either of the three grand divisions of earthly and atmospherical existence. Shall we not listen to the wisdom of ages? We read in the oldest Book we have that — "the Lord created medicines out of the Earth, and he that is wise will not abhor [i.e. despise] them".

What a vast storehouse of riches, and remedies are to be found, placed, with wonderful economy, under our feet, for the use of man, when he has knowledge and Industry, ^{enough} to obtain them? A subterranean world of wonders! Not merely precious stones, and glittering articles to ornament Kings, Queens and Nobles so called; but more valuable articles, from the element of Water

Water, down ^{to} Iron, one of the most valuable medicines that our art can boast of; and the Physician who derides it, because it is found out of the Botanical department, and beyond his hypothetical system, is in danger of being commiserated for his narrow views of created Providence. I labored 30 years in this University of Cambridge in showing to our young men the harmony of the Universe; and particularly dwelt on the minutiae of this lower apartment of the Deity, which we, for a short time, occupy. The youth were pleased and gratified at the demonstrations of order, design, and utility of the vegetable & animal productions, and enraptured by those outskirts of animated nature, the wondrous tribes of Insects; but they were struck with astonishment, when "I broke ground" and gave them a glimpse of the riches that lay under our feet, where there is as much order, and as many marks of supernal power, as in the glorious sunshine. This was the first attempt to inculcate the science of Mineralogy in the United States.

The connexion of the original salt Ocean with its offspring the clouds—that world of wonders in itself—eternally immutable, as far as we know, yet always the same, within an established circle of operations, and co-operations. All these things were listened to with a gratifying juvenile curiosity, and I believe delight; but not with that surprise as when the terrestrial world was laid open to their intellectual view. They never dreamt of the close connexion, and relationship between the vast world of living water w^h covers almost two thirds of this earth, and its highest mountains. They had never before thought that this globe, which we partly inhabit, possessed veins of water like the arteries of blood in an animal, giving life, and a lower species of organization to metallic bodies, and other softer substances for medicine; and ^{the} useful mechanic arts. In no part of my prelections were my pupils more surprised than when informed of the economy of Nature, and of her chemistry, if we may use so low a term for so wonderful a series of operations under ground, and out of sight, yet evident to reason. Now

Now, Sir, can any Philosopher—any diligent Secretary of Nature think, or imagine, for a moment, that this globe of Earth is one crude useless matter from the surface to its centre like a cushion stuffed with wool, hair or bran, merely to give it distension and bulk, without any ulterior usefulness? There is no waste in Nature. Every part is filled with organized beings, or matter waiting for its turn of organization. ~~and~~ The whole, except its mere outer crust, or soil, is ^{not} one huge lump of waste. It cannot be. It is contrary to the analogy of that part of Nature which we clearly understand. What shall we say of the Physician who shall ^{contend that} ~~say~~ the Mineral Kingdom contains no articles adapted to man's use as a Medicine? Antimony—Mercury—Zinc—Sal gem—the alkalis—alum—and a vast deal more—doubtless innumerable—yet that acute and strong minded man Samuel Thomson has persuaded himself, and has influenced others to believe that this magazine of riches contains nothing valuable to man as a medicine. It is said the mineral Kingdom contains arsenic and other quick and violent poisons—But so does the vegetable. I could ^{hemlock—fox glove—henbane—upas—Sobito Tobacco, and all atropa?} enumerate a long and turid list of them, assuredly Opium is a blessed drug in the hands of an experienced and judicious physician, and I should add an honest one; for he who beholds sensibility, that sentinel of life, instead of removing the irritating cause of intolerable pain, deserves to be chased with dishonor from the ranks of the honorable practitioners of our art; while he who denounces vehemently its entire use merits our pity, and his patient, more. Caution in the use of Mercury and of Opium is a mark of wisdom, but the prohibition, or "crying down" their use is an evidence of folly, or of something worse—pertinacious obstinacy.

My friend Samuel Thomson, for I consider him in that light, has come off somewhat from his former tenacity on this head; and I rejoice at it. He has done great service in checking the former very free use of Mercury and opium, and I suspect, will likewise do good in curtailing the too free use of Nitre. Indeed, within his very wide circle of influence he has done it already, and he has been re-warded.

15

rewarded by wealth, and fame, for his exertions.

I desire it may be distinctly understood, that while I am disposed to maintain S. Thomson in the honor of a valuable discovery, and a rational idea in the practice, ~~and~~ have not a word to say on the lucrative part of the business. Great and wise men deemed him worthy a patent right, and it has richly rewarded him.

I acted differently, when I had in my hands alone the first knowledge and practice of Vaccination. But then I was the regular, public, and official teacher of the Practice of Physic in New England — while Samuel Thomson was a farmer — a cultivator of the ground and an obscure individual, who has raised himself to fame and fortune very much by his own exertions; and we who use the pen, and record events, should not be too sparing of rendering honor, where honor is due. I therefore consider the comparatively unlettered Sam Thomson as the pioneer in this reformation now going forward in our land. — A Mr Whittlaw formerly Gardener to the late Dr Hosack, carried Thomson's new practice to England, and with purchased help published a book on the subject.

I have not seen Thomson since last autumn, but understand that he spent the winter in Washington, and had frequent conversations with the President at his leisure moments, and that they were well pleased with each other.

I repeat it. I value your three volumes as a rich collection of facts, hastily got together, and may I think need some softening. The reason that our modern books of physic ^{are} inferior to the ancient ones is, that we take not a 20.th part of the time to make them. A book on the practice of medicine is a weighty matter, and a solemn thing to a conscientious writer. My short treatise on the Whooping cough was upon the anvil nearly a year, and my Essay on Junius more than seven. I write nothing but letters rapidly, if w. this is a sample, and to be considered accordingly —

— Health — and respect from

Benj. Waterhouse

P.S.

Post scriptum. July 23rd

I send for your acceptance, my

1. Essay on Junius & his letters
2. Essay on Tussis Convulsiva
3. A Prospect of exterminating Small Pox [and Dis. on Vitality]
4. The Botanist - or botanical part of my lectures on Nat. History
5. Two copies of inaugural oration in Latin 1783.
6. The University Catalogue
- 7th Public Lecture on Tobacco & Ardent Spirits 5th edition,

Have but one copy left of my "Dissertation on Sympathy" printed at Leyden in 1780, or I would send one; and this, in the case with my Synopsis of my Natural History course of Lectures, and my Discourse on Vitality.

"My Independent Whig" published in 1812-13, & 14 - in a Boston News Paper may appear in a volume or two this year, the next, and so of my Layman, and the Life & Character of Samuel Adams - the great fire-leader of our Revolution - of whom see my Junius. I have thought to leave these productions to those who come after me for publication if they should be thought worthy of remembrance - My simple Lecture on Cigars has been published so often as to have become smoke dried.

B. W.

D^o Information on the origin, Progress, and Efficacy of the Kine Pock Inoculation - Motto -

"Books should have no Patrons but Truth & Reason,"
Lord Bacon -

Camb. 1810.

To Dr W. Beach

N. York

To D Beach — July 23^d — 1836 —

Several engagements, compel me to write rapidly, and I already see I ought to transcribe a corrected copy of this, but I have not time.

Truth and justice lead me to consider Samuel Thomson as the first man amongst us who led the way to a reformation of the Practice of Medicine, as early as 1804. He was led to it by what is called Chance or vague accident. Before this time even when a roguish, or waggish boy, he played tricks with his play-fellows, and the laboring men by inticing them to chew the Emetic-weed, which he discovered, and was afterwards led from its very strong sensible qualities, to suspect that it possessed valuable medicinal qualities, and therefore when an emetic was needed in his family he had recourse to his Emetic-weed, and that induced him to taste, and even eat almost every herb he met with; and from this propensity his neighbors gave him the name of Doctor. At length his acquaintance called on him in every sickness that occurred, and by degrees his attention was drawn off from his farm to the curative art, and what is remarkable, he consulted no books, but made trials and experiments, for which he attained, at length so strong an inclination as to become his ruling passion, and at the same time he took a dislike to the common practice, which it seems, at last, to have grown into almost a contempt of it, when the daring notion possessed him to test it by common sense, and to reform it.

It is remarkable that though Thomson never read Hippocrates, or the writings of any other Greek physician — his ideas, and principles resemble them. He had no superstition about the Moon, and its influence on man, and herbs, yet he had the strongest opinion of the power of the Sun, the source of light — growth — life and warmth he almost worshiped. The Sun was Thomson's God. By it, and through its evident, and its invisible influence, he accounted for every thing in the great machinery of Nature, and also in Man, who was the world epitomised, and so believed the wise Greeks. He derided chemical laboratories, or workshops of the meddling chemist, and regarded only the chemistry of Nature, and of the world in miniature, Man. Entrenched up to the chin in these sublime ideas — who could drive him out of it? —

When

When Thomson first called on me, and laid his papers on my table, asking me to read & examine them, I had never heard of him, and did not treat him with much attention - supposing him to be one of those visionaries, who, for years had pestered me by their letters, filled with schemes & odd notions; but a length I read some of them, and, to my surprize, discovered some traits of intelligence and novelty that pleased me; and induced me to search him out, and invite him to make another call; and thus acquaintance with him commenced, and has continued ever since; but have not seen him for more than six months past, as he spent the winter in the City of Washington, as his patient has, I hear, nearly run out.

All these things, and more, excited in my mind a degree of wonder that the elaborate Author of the volumes of the "American Practice of Medicine," should pass over, in silence that pioneer in the American reformation of the Healing Art. His system of practice has spread throughout the vast West. It excites the attention of the East where it first appeared, and it has so far spread in Boston, that the oldest apothecary establishment in that city has confessed to me that their sale of drugs is not half what it used to be, and all this attributed to the Thomsonian innovations in practice.

I have seen so many inequivalent instances of substantial benefit in chronic disorders, from the use of the *Lobelia emetica*, and the subsequent cleansing of the whole tract of the Intestines, and the elimination of the secretory glands, and various vessels between the bowels and the skin by means of the steam, or vapour bath, that I must be blind, or willfully shut my eyes to conviction not to acknowledge its salutiferous efficacy.

I have laboured without ceasing to induce the Patriarch Thomson to approximate to the regular physician; but he obstinately refuses that alliance. He has experienced not ordinary abuse, but has been most shamefully persecuted - imprisoned, in irons, in a loathsome dungeon, and indicted for "murder, with malice aforethought, by means of a poisonous herb called *Lobelia*," which article I use in powder whenever I need an emetic in the quantity of a tea-spoonful, and often prescribe it in larger doses. I repeat it, I consider Thomson, the *Prodromos* of our reformed practice, and though most shamefully used, he has been amply re-

-warded