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978-1-108-06625-9 - Domestic Medicine: Or, the Family Physician
William Buchan
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It is sobering to realise that as recently as the year in which *On the Origin of Species* was published, learned opinion was that diseases such as typhus and cholera were spread by a 'miasma', and suggestions that doctors should wash their hands before examining patients were greeted with mockery by the profession. The Cambridge Library Collection reissues milestone publications in the history of Western medicine as well as studies of other medical traditions. Its coverage ranges from Galen on anatomical procedures to Florence Nightingale's common-sense advice to nurses, and includes early research into genetics and mental health, colonial reports on tropical diseases, documents on public health and military medicine, and publications on spa culture and medicinal plants.

Domestic Medicine

Taking the view that medicine is as much the art of avoiding ill health as it is the cure of disease, physician William Buchan (1729–1805) published this home health guide in 1769. The first part is devoted to preventing ailments through proper diet and exercise, while the second part helps families diagnose and treat maladies ranging from coughs and hiccups to jaundice and gout. Buchan showed particular concern for the health of women and children, whom he believed were often misunderstood and neglected. He condemned corsets and restrictive infant swaddling, discouraged 'high living' and indolence, and blamed the high child-mortality rate on upper-class ignorance of child-rearing wisdom. His book became the most popular health guide prior to the twentieth century, with over a hundred editions by 1871. This reissue is of the first edition. Its diagnoses of physical (and cultural) ailments will illuminate eighteenth-century concerns for modern readers.

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DOMESTIC MEDICINE;

OR THE

FAMILY PHYSICIAN:

BEING AN ATTEMPT

To render the MEDICAL ART more generally useful, by shewing people what is in their own power both with respect to the PREVENTION and CURE of Diseases.

C H I E F L Y

Calculated to recommend a proper attention to REGIMEN and SIMPLE MEDICINES.

B Y

WILLIAM BUCHAN, M. D.

Sed valitudo sustentatur notitia sui corporis; et observatione, quae res aut prodesse soleant, aut obesse; et continentia in victu omni atque cultu, corporis tuendi causa; et praetermittendis voluptatibus; postremo, arte eorum quorum ad scientiam haec pertinent. CIC. DE OFFIC.

E D I N B U R G H:

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A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

IT is astonishing, after medicine has been so long cultivated as a liberal art, that philosophers and men of sense should still question whether it be more beneficial or hurtful to mankind. This doubt could never take its rise from the nature of medicine, but from the manner in which it has been conducted.

ALL ages and nations have agreed in thinking that the sick ought to be treated in a manner different from those in health. Indeed the very appetites of the sick shew the necessity of, at least, a different regimen. So far medicine is evidently founded in nature, and is quite consistent with reason and common sense.

HAD physicians been more attentive to *regimen*, and less sollicitous in hunting after wonderful medicines, and concealing their pretended virtues from the rest of mankind, the medical art would never have become an object of ridicule. The affectation of mystery may, for a while, draw the admiration of the multitude, but will never secure the esteem of men of sense; and it will always occasion suspicions in the minds of the more enlightened part of mankind.

EVERY attempt therefore to monopolize or conceal any thing that relates to the preservation
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tion of health or the cure of diseases, must not only be injurious to the interests of society, but likewise detrimental to the medical art. If medicine be a rational science, and founded in nature, it will never lose its reputation by being exposed to public view. If it be not able to bear the light, it is high time that it were exploded.

SECRECY in any art lays a foundation for imposition. Had physicians never affected mystery, quacks and quackery could never have existed. Now that they have over-run all Europe, and disgraced both human nature and the medical profession, there is no other method of discrediting them with the people, but a total reverse of behaviour in the Faculty. Let us therefore act with candor, openness, and ingenuity, and mankind will soon learn to dread every thing in medicine that has the smallest appearance of secrecy or disguise.

THE affectation of mystery not only renders the medical art more liable to be abused, but likewise retards its progress. No art ever arrived at any considerable degree of improvement so long as it was kept in the hands of a few who practiced it as a trade. The interested views of a trade will always obstruct the progress of a science. Other arts have been diffused among the people, have become the objects of general attention, and have been improved accordingly. Medicine still continues a mystery. Even the philosopher is not ashamed to own that he is ignorant of the causes and cure of diseases.

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diseases. Hence it is, that while other branches of science have arrived at a high degree of perfection, the healing art is still involved in doubt and uncertainty.

THOSE who follow the beaten tract of a teacher seldom make any useful discoveries. Accordingly we find that most of the real improvements in medicine have either been the effect of chance, or have been made by persons not bred to physic. Men who think and reason for themselves, who are not fettered by theories nor warped by hypotheses, bid the fairest for improving any art.

As all men are liable to disease, and equally interested in every thing relating to health, it is certainly the duty of physicians to shew them what is in their own power both with respect to the cure of the one, and the preservation of the other. Did men take every method to avoid diseases, they would seldom need the physician; and would they do what is in their own power when sick, there would be little occasion for medicine. It is hard to say if more lives are not lost by people trusting to medicine, and neglecting their own endeavours, than all that are saved by the help of physic.

WE do not mean that all men are to be made physicians. This, according to the present acceptance of the word, would be an attempt as ridiculous as it is impossible. We only mean that they should be taught the importance of

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due *care* for the preservation of health, and of a proper *regimen* in diseases. These they are certainly capable of understanding, and all the rest are of small account.

We are happy to find that some of the most eminent physicians now begin to entertain more liberal ideas with regard to physic. Van Swieten *, Rosen †, Tissot, and some others, have written with a view of diffusing some knowledge of medicine among the people. Their performances have met with that applause from the public, which it is always ready to bestow upon works of real utility. Had Tissot's plan been more extensive, the following pages would probably never have been made public. He confines himself solely to the acute diseases. We have likewise treated the chronic; both because they are very frequent in this country, and because the cure of them chiefly depends on a proper regimen.

Dr TISSOT has also treated the prophylaxis, or preventive part of medicine, less minutely than seems necessary. A very slight inquiry into the causes of popular maladies is sufficient to shew that many of them might, by due care, be prevented. For this reason a considerable number of the following pages are employed in pointing out the most common causes of

* Physician to their Imperial Majesties.

† First physician of the kingdom of Sweden.

popular

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popular diseases, and the means of avoiding them.

THE first part of the prophylaxis is calculated to shew the importance of proper nursing *. The observations were made in a situation where the author had the greatest opportunities of seeing the effects both of the right and wrong management of children, and of being fully convinced that the latter is the principal cause of their great mortality.

PECULIAR attention is paid to the diseases of mechanics. That useful set of people, upon whom the riches and prosperity of Britain depend, can never be too much regarded. Their valuable lives are frequently lost for want of due attention to circumstances which both to themselves and others may often appear trifling.

WE have likewise endeavoured to point out the bad effects of luxury, indolence, &c. All men acknowledge health to be the chief blessing of life ; but few shew a proper concern for the preservation of it. There is hardly any pleasure or profit for which people will not hazard their health ; and it is often bartered for the most sordid enjoyments. Few things however are more in our own power. Most men
may

* Most of the observations contained in the first chapter were made in the Foundling Hospital at Ackworth, and communicated to the public several years ago, in a pamphlet addressed to the governors of that hospital.

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may enjoy health if they will. Even those who have had the misfortune to be naturally of a weak constitution, have often, by proper care, arrived at an extreme old age, and enjoyed good health to the very last; while such as were naturally robust, by trusting too much to their strength of constitution, and despising care, have either died young, or dragged out a life of pain and misery.

IN the treatment of diseases we have been chiefly attentive to diet, drink, air, and the other parts of regimen. Regimen seems to have been the chief, if not the only medicine of the more early ages, and, to say the truth, it is the most valuable part of medicine still. But regimen and domestic medicines are despised, while foreign regions are ransacked for things of less value, and every ore which the earth affords is tortured to extract poisons, and arm the daring empiric for the destruction of his fellow men.

WE have indeed ventured to recommend some simple medicines in almost every disease; but even these should only be administered by people of better understanding. We would have the ignorant omit them altogether, and attend solely to the directions relating to diet and the other parts of regimen.

THE laudable disposition which so universally prevails among the better sort of people in the country, of assisting their poor neighbours in distress, suggested the first hint of this attempt. It never was, and, in all probability, never will
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be in the power of one half of mankind to obtain the assistance of physicians. What must they do? To trust themselves in the hands of quacks, or blunder on in the track which their rude forefathers pointed out, are perhaps equally dangerous. The ignorant rustic puts little confidence in any endeavours of his own. All his hopes of a cure are placed in something which he does not understand, something mysterious and quite above his capacity, as herbs gathered under the influence of some planet, charms, the nostrums of quacks and conjurers, &c. Such are the ridiculous and destructive prejudices which prevail among the inhabitants of this country, even in this enlightened age, and such is their entire ignorance of medicine, that they become the easy dupes of every pretender to it.

WE make no doubt but the ladies, gentlemen, and clergy who reside in the country will readily concur with us, in endeavouring to root out such pernicious and destructive prejudices. Their example will have great weight with their dependents and inferiors; and their advice will be often listened to with more attention than that of a physician. They will teach the poor the importance of a proper regimen both in health and sickness; the danger of trusting their lives in the hands of quacks and conjurers, and the folly of their own superstitious notions. By this means they may prevent much evil, do some good, and prove real blessings to those among whom they reside.

NOTHING

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NOTHING is farther from the design of the following pages, than to induce ignorant persons to tamper with dangerous medicines, or trust to their own skill, where better assistance can be obtained. But where something must be done, and no medical assistance can be had, it is certainly better to direct people what they ought to do than to leave them to blunder on in the dark.

THERE is no doubt but the more mercenary part of the Faculty, whose ideas of medicine never rise above the sordid views of a trade, will do all in their power to discredit every attempt of this kind with the public. With such as are able to see through the disguise, their censure will pass for applause; and with the less enlightened, it will be very little regarded. With us it can have no weight, so long as we are conscious that we have the good of mankind at heart; and that, however imperfect the execution may be, the design has been approved by many whose names do honour to the medical profession.

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As people who live in the country cannot always obtain medicines, upon any sudden emergency, even though they knew how to use them, we have here added a list of such simple druggs and medicines as ought to be kept, at least in every gentleman's family, in order to be in readiness upon all occasions.

Rhubarb	Burgundy pitch
Jalap	Agaric of the oak
Senna	Ash coloured ground Liver-
Manna	wort
Glaubers salts	Cinnamon water
Cream of tartar	Penny-royal water
Salt of tartar	Pepper mint water
Tamarinds	Syrup of poppies
Ipecacuanha	—— of oranges
Jesuits bark	—— of lemons
Nitre, or salt peter	Spirits of wine
Sal prunell	—— of hartshorn
Sal. ammoniac	Sweet spirits of nitre
Flowers of sulphur	—— of vitriol
Magnesia alba	Liquid laudanum
Crabs claws prepared	Elixir of vitriol
Snake root	Vinegar of squills
Liquorice root	Oil of almonds.
Seneka root	Olive oil
Wild Valerian root	Adhesive plaster
Gentian root	Blistering plaster
Gum arabic	Wax plaster
—— camphor	Yellow basilicum ointment
—— ammoniac	White ointment
—— asafœtida	Turner's cerate