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On the Practice of Body-Snatching.

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menting temper. Ten to one but he will enter upon some elaborate oration, and by the loudness of his voice and the extravagance of his gestures make you stared and laughed at by all rational and peaceable passengers; for so satisfied will he be of the sagacity of his remarks, that he will take good care not one of them shall be lost by any person to whose ears he can extend his vociferation.

A disputative man seems to me a pest of the same nature as a scolding woman. In both characters there is

the same perversion of language from a source of pleasure to a source of torment to their neighbours—there is the same exclusive appropriation of your attention to a subject often disagreeable—and most commonly, in both, there is exhibited the same heat and intemperance. It is deeply to be regretted that our gallant legislators who have rewarded the eloquence of the lady with the ducking stool, have left the exertions of the gentleman without a similar requital. H. S.

Newcastle, 12th Feb., 1823.

ON THE PRACTICE OF BODY-SNATCHING.

To the Editor of the Newcastle Magazine.

SIR,—Permit me to offer a few suggestions, through the medium of your magazine, on the great frequency of the practice of body-snatching, or the digging up of bodies for the use of the surgeons.

I see numerous paragraphs in the daily and other journals, calling upon the legislature to adopt more severe measures for the prevention of this practice. But I would gladly be informed how, if this practice be prevented, the study of anatomy is to be forwarded? Far be it from me to wish to diminish the respect which all must more or less feel for the relics of those whom they loved or venerated while on earth;—but I wish that those who oppose the practice of body-snatching would look the evil full in the face, and endeavour to do it away, not by adding to punishment, which has already been increased without effect, but by seeking to remove the causes of the evil. A knowledge of anatomy is necessary for the proper treatment of the human body. This, I suppose, will be granted me by every reader.—the next question is, can a perfect knowledge of anatomy be acquired without the dissection of the human subject. This, I believe, will be allowed by every person who knows anything of the progress of anatomy, to be impossible. I may appeal with safety to every surgeon to confirm what I allege, when I declare that the constant use of human subjects has constantly increased the knowledge of the minute parts of the body, and when we know how the disorganization of the smallest fibre is sometimes productive of the most fatal diseases, I doubt whether any ra-

tional person would lay his hand upon his heart and say dissections are not necessary. The additional knowledge we have acquired of the brain, the nerves, and the muscles, is all attributable to actual dissection;—whereas, were the medical world to be compelled to study from engraving, model, and preserved subject, they would be acquiring no additional knowledge whatever. They would either depend entirely upon the acquirements of their predecessors, or degenerate into a race of idle theorists. Any man who has ever read of Bichat, (who sacrificed his life in the study of anatomy) knows that, by the laborious investigation of the human body alone, he raised much of the knowledge of the human organization into certainty, which was before doubtful and obscure. There is no reason to doubt that, had he survived, he would have done more for both physic and surgery, than any man for the last 300 years, and that merely by his unparalleled application to practical anatomy. If it had not been for actual dissection, it is probable that Bichat would never have had a name beyond the walls of Paris.

The increased knowledge of anatomy is the cause of almost all our milder operations in surgery, and consequently, of all our improvement in the construction of surgical instruments. Indeed I need say no more upon the utility of dissection than this—the knowledge of anatomy from prepared specimens, or casts, is fixed. You can acquire no more knowledge of the part than the specimen or cast is made up for the purpose of shewing; but the knowledge acquired from dissection is

progressive and hourly increasing. I question if there ever was a body dissected from which some actual addition to anatomical knowledge was not acquired.

But if it were possible to imagine that anatomy was not necessary for a knowledge of the human body, an argument which is not expected at this enlightened period, it happens that the law says the contrary. A person cannot now obtain a license to practise as apothecary, surgeon, or man-midwife, without an examination into his knowledge of anatomy, and it is well known the examiners are now extremely strict, and frequently dwell on the latest discoveries. How, then, is this necessary knowledge to be attained? The law demands of us a knowledge, *which the law gives us no means of acquiring*, but, on the contrary, heaps penalty on the miscreants we are compelled to employ for the general benefit of mankind. Such a state of things calls loudly for legislative interference. Nothing but the legislature can cure the evil. Bodies must be procured—that is a point every surgeon will admit. How are they to be procured—that is a point no man can answer.

I have a respect for the feeling which occasions the execration with which all body-snatchers are viewed, notwithstanding it is a feeling evidently anti-scientific. But it is a feeling that cannot be suppressed by legislative enactment. It must be allowed quietly and in process of time to wear away by the progress of information. Were I, however, inclined to argue the subject on that ground, I would ask any reasonable person what difference there can be between his or her rotting in the earth, and his or her contributing to the stores of human knowledge? I would ask whether the difference is not in favour of the latter supposition?

Having thus, though I fear as imperfectly as briefly, stated the necessity for human bodies, I shall now state what I conceive ought to be done to forward the remedy. I would recommend the surgeons of the United Kingdom to petition both houses of parlia-

ment instantly for a committee of both houses to sit upon the acts relative to body-snatching, to examine witnesses as to the necessity surgeons are under of procuring human subjects, to ascertain, if possible, the precise number of bodies necessary throughout the kingdom, to examine the papers and records relative to executions for murder, by this means learning how many less than the probable number required there were executed, and to report upon the whole matter to their several houses. The contemplation of such investigations is by no means agreeable, but they are nevertheless necessary.—My argument about the necessity of the bodies may be wrong—if that should be the case, the committees will ask leave to add heavier penalties to body-snatching, and require of the parliament to enact punishments against the surgeons who use bodies unnecessarily. But be my argument right or wrong, the committees will be productive of benefit. Parliamentary documents upon such a subject would do more to produce conviction in the public mind than any other proceeding. If the committees should find that bodies were necessary, it might be a question whether a law might not be passed condemning the bodies of all *felo-de-se* suicides to be anatomized as well as murderers, and whether to some crimes short of murder the sentence of *dissection after death*, with the immediate release of the culprit after trial, and the power of his removing the sentence by a certain number of years of good behaviour, might not be efficacious.

These considerations I throw out with the utmost deference to all professional persons; but I have to entreat them, whatever they may think of the rest of my observations, that they will weigh well the necessity of petitioning. As they value their characters, and the safety of mankind, that proceeding is necessary, more especially after the great additional odium cast upon them by the late frequent discovery of resurrection-men.

I am, &c.

BLANCARDUS.

ON 'PROPHETS IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.'

"From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, good Lord deliver us."

To the Editor of the Newcastle Magazine.

SIR,—The other day I happened to be in a shop in this city, in company with two literary characters, for I assure you, Mr Editor, they are not ra-