

SUPPLY OF ANATOMICAL SUBJECTS.

THE late murders in Edinburgh have very strongly called public attention to this subject. The horror arising from them has served more than all that sound reason and good sense have urged for years to bring home to the minds of men the *necessity* of furnishing the surgeons with subjects for dissection, in a regular and legal manner. We confess we think this a narrow view of the question: the great and paramount object should be that students should have proper and ample means of prosecuting their professional education. No one can shrink with greater awe than we do from the details which the trial of Burke brought to light:—but we cannot believe that the practice has become nearly so general, either in Edinburgh or in London, as it has been lately endeavoured to make it appear. That it has existed to a certain extent, there can be no doubt; but that it has existed long, or that it has spread into anything like a prevalent system, we wholly disbelieve;—for that belief must involve the connivance, to use the lightest word, of a large body of surgeons at a continued course of murder. To this we attach no faith.

That the establishing means for a regular supply of bodies will wholly put a stop to such terrible and loathsome doings, is, no doubt, a very eminent advantage; and that it will annihilate the existence of the trade of exhumation—conducted, as it is, by gangs of intolerable ruffians—is another, less only than that. But the great principle of the whole subject is, that it is the duty of a civilized community to provide—or, at the least, to throw no impediment in the way of their provision—due means for medical men to acquire that fitting knowledge of their art, without which their very existence would be hurtful to the last degree, instead of being an inestimable blessing. As the law at present stands, a surgeon is actually guilty of a misdemeanour for having a dead body in his possession. That which every medical man declares to be an absolute necessary, for him to acquire the slightest knowledge of his profession, is proscribed by law; and the same law holds him responsible to his patients for having due skill to treat their diseases concerning which he may be called in. Actions enforcing the latter right are by no means rare; but it has only within this year been held that the mere possession of a dead body, for the purpose of dissection, with the knowledge of its having been disinterred, is a misdemeanour*.

That such a state of things should continue—that medical men

* So ruled by Baron Hullock at Lancaster Spring Assizes, 1828. This was confirmed by the Court of King's Bench, who passed sentence on the defendant in the May following. It is singular that in Mr. Serjeant Russell's work on Crimes and Misdemeanours, in the chapter on offences relating to dead bodies no mention whatever is made of the possession as a crime at all, and this in the edition published as late as 1826; neither, we believe, is the doctrine laid down in any of the books. It is, we cannot but think, a very violent extension of the principle which regards exhumation. It is, in fact, making the possessor of a corpse, under the circumstances mentioned in the text, a principal in the act of exhumation: for in a misdemeanor, which exhumation is, there can by law be no accessories.

should be liable to punishment if they learn their profession, and to be called upon for pecuniary compensation if they practise it unskillfully—that the most villainous of mankind should, of necessity, be encouraged and fostered by the most respectable surgeons for the supply of bodies; and that, after all, that supply should be so scanty and so dear as to render the necessary education daily more difficult and more expensive to obtain—that these things should exist in England in the nineteenth century, is so preposterous that we think it is impossible for the approaching Session of Parliament to pass over without a bill being brought in for their cure.

Last year, a Committee sat on this subject, and we hastily noticed their report at the moment of its appearance. (London Magazine, September 1828.) We then expressed our hearty concurrence with the recommendation of the Committee; but we shall now go into rather a more detailed view of the subject in general, and especially devote a portion of our attention to the evidence. We do this because we believe the public mind to be at this moment very much interested on the question; and still more because we think a fair and frequent discussion of it, the thing of all others most calculated to dissipate those prejudices which still certainly exist to some extent, but we are convinced to a far less than has been represented by many.

The evidence differs very curiously on some points; but, on one, *all* are agreed; viz. that without the dissection of dead bodies it is impossible for any one to acquire proper knowledge of medicine or surgery. It is the one great foundation of all medical knowledge;—without it, there is none. For this purpose it follows of course that it is necessary that surgeons should have dead bodies. Either the dead must be dissected, or the living must be mangled, poisoned, and die, in cases where medical knowledge has the power to save. Of the prejudices against dissection, we shall speak bye and bye; we now assume that it is necessary that bodies should be procured for that purpose. The knowledge of anatomy is indispensable; unless we choose to abandon the aid of medicine altogether, dead bodies *must* be used to make known the structure of the living. And yet, at this moment, all such supply is prohibited by law—for, the bodies of murderers are so few that they cannot be taken into account.

We will assume, for the time, that a supply is *necessary*. It has been so found in all countries; and we grieve to state that our own is the only one among civilized nations, in which that supply is insufficient, which it now is grossly; and the only one, with the exception of America, in which it is procured by exhumation. That the United States should share this stigma with us is quite natural. They are, as it were, our offspring; and it is to be understood that they should have some of our bad points as well as our good. Still, we cannot but consider it a strong stain upon the British stock, that those sprung from it should be the only nations professing to be civilized which withhold by law the necessary means for the acquisition of knowledge in the science which is that of the most temporal importance to the human race.

The result of this is, that both the most eminent of those questioned

on the subject, and those who have had local means of ascertaining, declare, in the frankest and most unqualified manner, that the knowledge of anatomy is more diffused and deeper in France, Italy, Germany—and, it is added, Ireland—than in England*: Scotland is represented as the worst of all:—and these results are unanimously attributed to, among a few others, the main cause, that those who dissect the most will have the greatest knowledge of anatomy†. The details, indeed, given by the gentlemen who have frequented the hospitals abroad are most highly interesting—but perhaps they do not affect the general question sufficiently directly to allow of our quoting them, although they all tend, no doubt, to prove the advantages arising from increased facilities of dissection. We shall, however, give a précis of the mode of proceeding at Paris, drawn up from the evidence of those gentlemen who have had long experience there.

We cannot begin better than by extracting the following answer of Mr. Bennett, a gentleman who had, for some years, a considerable number of students under his care at Paris:—

It may not be unnecessary to premise, that prior to the revolution in France, the different hospitals in Paris were supported, as in London, by voluntary contributions, and private and distinct funds, each having its separate government. At the period of the revolution all were connected together, and their several funds being consolidated, and further revenues being provided by the government, the management of all the hospitals in Paris was entrusted to a body entitled the “Administration des Hopitaux,” which is now composed of the leading noblemen and other distinguished persons in Paris. The Administration des Hopitaux have always felt it their duty, for humanity’s sake, to promote the cultivation of medical science, and with that view to give up for anatomical purposes the unclaimed bodies of those who die in hospitals. They thus carry into effect the law passed by the legislative assembly, whereby it was enacted that the bodies of all those persons who die in hospitals, which should be unclaimed within twenty-four hours after death, should be delivered up for the purposes of science. Exhumation was thereby rendered unnecessary, and severe laws were directed against the practice, which at present is never resorted to in Paris.

This, we think, is an admirable arrangement, and, in many points, tallies with that recommended by the Committee. So short a period as twenty-four hours has been objected to, lest the body might be dissected before the friends of the deceased knew of his death. But it

* Mr. Brodie is the only one, as far as we recollect, who differs from this. He goes, indeed, so far as to say, that, if his information be correct, they do not dissect much at Paris. The evidence of Mr. Bennett and Dr. Barry proves, we think, that Mr. Brodie has been misinformed. Mr. Lawrence speaks so powerfully in accordance with the position assumed in the text, that we will subjoin one of his answers on this subject.

“245. Are you in the habit of seeing many of the eminent foreign surgeons and anatomists who come to this country? I see many medical persons from France, Germany, and Italy, and have found, from my intercourse with them, that anatomy is much more successfully cultivated in those countries than in England; at the same time I know, from their numerous valuable publications on anatomy, that they are far before us in this science; we have no original standard works at all worthy of the present state of knowledge.”

† It may be noted that the difficulties of procuring subjects in Scotland is, throughout the evidence, represented as extreme. See the consequence! Her anatomists ranking the lowest, and murder supplying the place of exhumation!

might be doubled, trebled, or quadrupled, and the subject would be equally fit for dissection—as is proved by the supply in this country consisting entirely of bodies raised after a burial that nearly always takes place several days after death, which is very seldom the case abroad. And this very difference of the intermediate length of time may perhaps render it advisable to have the period of forfeiture later than in France. The dissections, it seems, are not carried on at the hospitals where the patients die, but the bodies are taken thence to one of the two great dissecting establishments, the Ecole de Médecine, and the amphitheatre adjoining the Hopital de la Pitié, which alone are allowed in Paris. The bodies are taken from the principal hospitals—as also from the two great houses of refuge—the Hospices Salpêtrière and Bicêtre—sewed in a clean cloth, and placed in a covered cart. Everything is conducted with the most perfect decency; and, after death, the priest attached to the hospital performs certain religious ceremonies over the body, which is then placed in the dead-room till the twenty-four hours have expired.

There is, in the Appendix, a copy of the regulations relating to the removal of bodies and to dissection in the establishments at Paris; the order, the decency, we might add the delicacy of which, seem to us to render it a perfect model. It is proposed that, with us, in accordance with the usages of our religion, the funeral rites should take place after dissection; in Paris they are performed before, but the bodies are ultimately buried. We mention this for the purpose of expressing our conviction that, adopting such arrangements as these, and a certainty being established that no religious feeling will be violated, it is impossible that the prejudices against dissection should long continue to exist.

The ample supply of subjects gives opportunities to the Professors at Paris to pursue courses of instruction most advantageous to the communication of science, from which the scantiness of bodies here debars both professor and student. The following is from the evidence of Dr. Barry, a gentleman who resided for four years in Paris, and took his doctor's degree there:—

590. Is there not attached to La Pitié a gentleman of the name of Monsieur Lisfranc, who is celebrated for teaching the mode of performing upon a dead body the principal surgical operations? Yes, there is.—591. Are not his demonstrations frequented by a very large number of English students who resort to Paris? Particularly so, almost by every one.—592. Do you know of any similar course given in this country? I know of none; I have studied in Dublin and in this country; I know of none.—593. Do you not consider that course of surgical instruction of the highest importance? I certainly do.—594. Should you not think it unsafe to commit yourself, for the performance of a difficult operation, to a surgeon who had never performed upon a dead body, an operation which he was required to perform upon the living? I certainly should, unless he had acquired the necessary dexterity by having operated upon the living body.—595. But if he begins to perform upon the living body, before he has performed upon the dead body, he necessarily, until he acquires that experience, must perform those first operations in a very awkward and insufficient manner? Most certainly; and independently of Monsieur Lisfranc's demonstrations, each pupil may have as many subjects as he pleases, and operate upon them himself, or in company with other

pupils : they instruct and help each other at La Pitié ; I say this in relation to statements made by some witnesses examined yesterday as to the English schools, some stating that two subjects, and some that three were enough. I conceive that there is no eminent surgeon in Paris who has not, in the course of his education, dissected and operated upon more than thirty subjects.

This brings us to a question upon which the witnesses differ remarkably in opinion—namely, the number of bodies which they deem necessary for a student during the course of his studies. Sir Astley Cooper says, three bodies during a season of sixteen months ; Mr. Brodie, one, or one and a half, in a year ; Mr. Abernethy says, that taking two years for the period of education, three bodies are enough for two students for that time ; Mr. Lawrence says, three or four for one student for one year ; Mr. Green, of St. Thomas's Hospital, says, three for each student yearly ; Mr. Cæsar Hawkins, two in the whole course of the student's education, whether one or two years. The gentlemen who have seen the hospitals on the continent—where dissection and the performing operations on the dead are carried to such an extent—rate the fitting number higher than any of those whose experience is confined to this country. Dr. Barry, who states at thirty, as has been already seen, the number which he conceives all the eminent surgeons in Paris had dissected and operated upon in the course of their education, when asked what he should “ consider, *with every view to economy in the use of subjects*, sufficient for an adequate course of surgical instruction,” says, that he “ should think four subjects in a season would be the very least, for two seasons at least.” Mr. Granville Sharp Pattison, who was Professor of Anatomy and Surgery in the University of Maryland, gives the same yearly number ; but adds, the lowest, “ certainly the very lowest, period ” of the student's education should be three years.

There is also a considerable, though by no means so great, a difference of opinion as to the necessity of a pupil's performing on the dead body all the principal operations before he performs them on the living. Mr. Abernethy and some others do not think it necessary, though none go so far as to say they do not consider it beneficial : they hold that from dissection, and witnessing dissection and operations, a young surgeon may safely perform an operation for the first time on a living person. Sir Astley Cooper, Mr. Lawrence, and (we may say of course) the gentlemen who have practised in France, are strongly of the opposite way of thinking. The following answers of Sir Astley afford a melancholy contrast between what ought to be and what, from the scarcity of subjects, is :—

8. In any part of the course which a student is now expected to go through, is he instructed how to perform upon a dead body, the principal of those operations which, in the common course of practice, he may be required to perform upon the living ?—He is only shown the mode of performing different operations, but whenever subjects can be obtained for the purpose, it is considered that it is his duty to perform the operations himself upon the dead body.—9. Can bodies be obtained in such numbers at present, that it frequently happens that the students have an opportunity of performing those operations on a dead body ?—It now very rarely happens that a student can obtain a body for the purpose of performing operations, and

there is a lecturer in London who will be probably examined by this Committee, who has been unable to obtain a body to exhibit operations upon the dead, for a great number of days.—10. Can you state at all, how many bodies have been used in teaching the pupil how to perform operations upon the dead body, that is, in the hospital schools in London, in the course of the year?—I am afraid there have been scarcely any lately used by the students, but at all events very few, on account of the great difficulty in obtaining them.—11. You nevertheless would consider that an essential part of a good course of surgical instruction?—My opinion is, not only that no person should practise surgery without privately performing all the operations upon the dead, but that he should also exhibit his powers of operating upon the dead, in the presence of a great number of individuals.—12. Can the young practitioner be expected to possess the necessary courage in performing a difficult operation on the living, if he has not already been taught to perform a similar operation upon a dead body?—He must be a blockhead if he made the attempt; and the practice of the most sensible and the most expert surgeons in London has been to visit the receptacles for the dead, for the purpose of performing the operation which they were about to execute upon the living, if the operations were in the least novel.

Mr. Lawrence, also, is very decided upon this point. We have already extracted Dr. Barry's opinions on this subject.

We shall now allude to one more point of difference, because we think we have hit upon a clue which, with some modifications and allowances, will tend to account for the existence of them all. The subject to which we now allude is one on which we can speak freely, and form a direct judgment of our own—for it is one of general reason, not of medical science. Sir Astley Cooper lays down an opinion that bodies should not be exceedingly cheap, because, if they be so, "as they are in France, the result of their being so is, that they are less valuable to the student, and they do not take precisely the same pains that they would if the body cost them a little more." Mr. Brodie adopts this doctrine only by halves—for in the answer in which he attributes superiority to the English over other students, he says that he attributes it as much "to national character as to the cause mentioned by Sir Astley Cooper, namely, the superfluity of subjects." Mr. Abernethy seems, to a considerable extent, to contradict himself on this point:—

199. Do you concur in the opinion of Sir Astley Cooper, that the supply of bodies may be redundant, so as to occasion negligence, as in the hospitals abroad?—Unquestionably, the supply may be so great that students are likely to be less attentive.—199*. So far from promoting science, such a redundant supply would rather impede it?—It would depend upon the character of the students; *some would profit according to the abundance of their opportunities of acquiring knowledge.* The English students are in general very industrious.

Now, we confess, we never saw a position laid down by persons of eminence with which we more thoroughly disagreed. Mr. Lawrence has not the question directly put to him as to superfluity—but says, in most decided terms, "that those who possess the greatest opportunities of dissection would be the best qualified," and he has, in an earlier part of his evidence, said that he understands that there is no limit in Paris, but that "a person employs as many as he likes,"—without any comment of disapprobation. It is, we own, to us perfectly

incomprehensible how three such men as those we have named could lay down such a proposition. It appears to us that it would be just as rational to say, that the more books a student had on the subject of his study, the more tools and materials were furnished to a mechanic, the less would their progress be. That each separate body would in the event of an unlimited supply be less thoroughly dissected, is very probable—but what then? The only use of dissection is to instruct the dissector—and we cannot see how his knowledge would be diminished by its being derived from several bodies; as, indeed, in all cases it must be. That a young man who was industrious and active would learn his profession more quickly and better with as many bodies as he chose to ask for, we cannot doubt. In the case of too few, he would be detained in his search for such or such a point of knowledge by want of means to acquire it—and we really cannot see how any case of *too* many could arise. There is no motive for it.

But, we think, that there is one principle which will go a considerable way towards accounting for these discrepancies of opinion—viz. that the one side—that, namely, consisting of those who give the smaller number of bodies as necessary, who say that operations on the dead are not necessary, and who think that an unlimited supply would be hurtful—looks to the system as it is, and as it is here. The other, we should say, turns to what ought to be, and to what is elsewhere. We do not mean to carry this to its full extent—but we think the doctrine may be, more in some than others, and not always in the same point in each, traced to the *spirit* which we have indicated above. We could point out numberless instances which tend to support this idea; but it is better that we should devote our space to the pith of the subject, than to striving to account for differences which we are sorry to see exist. We think if any of our readers should be tempted to go through this evidence—and we can assure them we have seldom met any more interesting—they will see reason to agree with us.

We are sorry to state that the effect of reading this mass of evidence has been to leave on our minds the conviction that the study of anatomy is very sensibly declining in this country, and that that arises from the lack of subjects. All those examined agree on this point, that the supply of bodies is by no means sufficient. However they may differ as to the number needed, the number furnished is far, far below the lowest estimate. It is quite clear that unless some mode of supplying subjects be adopted, surgery and medicine will, as the students advance into practitioners, grow worse and worse. The Committee have thoroughly come to the same conclusions, as will be seen in the following extract from their report. It is lamentable to read the last statement there made, which, like all the rest, is most fully borne out by the evidence, which is throughout referred to numerically in the margin. It shews to what a state the scarcity of subjects is fast reducing the general practitioners throughout the country. No blame can attach to them individually for not acquiring that which is beyond their reach—but it is dreadful to think that that which is universally laid down as the only real foundation for medical knowledge, should be unattainable by what has been computed at twenty-nine thirtieths of the profession—we mean the general practitioners in the country:—

It is the duty of the student to obtain, before entering into practice, the

most perfect knowledge, he is able, of his profession; and for that purpose to study thoroughly the structure and functions of the human body; in which study he can only succeed by frequent and repeated dissection. But his wants cannot adequately be supplied in this country, except at an expense, amounting nearly to a prohibition, which can be afforded only by the most wealthy, and precludes many students from dissecting altogether. From the precariousness or insufficiency of the supply, the dissections and lectures are often suspended for many weeks, during which the pupils are exposed to the danger of acquiring habits of dissipation and indolence; and, from the same causes, that important part of surgical education is usually omitted, which consists in teaching how to perform on the dead body those operations which the student may afterwards be required to practise on the living. But not only does the student find dissection expensive and difficult of attainment; but he cannot practise it, without either committing an infringement of the law himself, or taking an advantage of one committed by others. In the former case he must expose himself to imminent hazard, and in either, he may incur severe penalties, and be exposed to public obloquy. The law, through the medium of the authorities entrusted with conferring diplomas, and of the boards deputed by them to examine candidates for public service, requires satisfactory proof of proficiency in Anatomical Science, although there are no means of acquiring that proficiency without committing daily offences against the law. The illegality and the difficulties attending the acquisition of the science, dispose the examiners in some cases to relax the strictness of their examination, and induce them, in the case of the Apothecaries' Company, to dispense with dissection altogether; the persons to whom certificates are granted by the examiners of this Company, being those who, from their numbers* and extensive practice, ought especially, for the safety of the public, to be well instructed. The annual number of certificates so granted exceeds 400.

To cure such a state of things as this is manifestly a public duty; and if the most advisable plan carry with it the exceeding advantage of annihilating the system of exhumation, surely such an arrangement should join the efforts of all well-wishers of their species in the furtherance of its success.

The plan, then, which has been proposed is, that the bodies of all who die in hospitals, the infirmaries of workhouses, and similar establishments, and remain unclaimed for a given time, should be delivered up for dissection, with proper security from the surgeon that the burial rites should be performed. In this case no feelings could be injured—for if there were any friends who objected to the dissection, his claiming the body would prevent its being subjected to it, yet would not saddle him with the expense of the burial. Many are buried at the expense of the parish, whose friends do follow them to the grave. These persons would not come within the class designated. There would be here *no feelings to injure*; the great end would be answered, and by means totally irreproachable. The supply derivable from this source, it is unanimously agreed, would be thoroughly and amply sufficient.

Still, there was one point on which we confess we had some doubts—and most glad we are to find, from another unanimous opinion of the surgeons examined, that they were quite unfounded. The only possible objection which suggested itself to us as against this regulation, was that the belief, or still more the certainty, of dissection following death,

* Computed at 10,000 in England and Wales.

might painfully affect the mind of the patient while still living. But every one gives testimony against this;—Mr. Brodie says—

I believe it is the case in some hospitals, at any rate it used to be so, that the bodies cannot be examined without the form of permission of the friends; in our hospital * it has always been considered as a rule that every body who died was to be examined, and we have had no difficulty about it; perhaps, once in two or three years, there comes a poor woman to pray that her child or her sister may not be examined, because it was her wish that she should not; but it is very rarely that there is any such application, either before or after death; they consider the examination as a matter of course, and think nothing about it.—148. Is it your opinion that the dislike to the practice of the examination is on the decrease?—I believe so.—149. Should you extend the same remark to the practice of dissection?—Examination is in fact dissection to a certain extent; the more people's minds are familiarized to dissection, the less they think of it. Those who live in the neighbourhood of an anatomical school think nothing about it.

Mr. Abernethy speaks still more strongly:—

197. At the time of adding the dissecting establishment to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, did you find that the number of persons claiming admission fell off?—Not at all.—198. You do not believe it would occasion any alteration?—I am sure it would not; there is a hospital in this town where the poor know that the most of the bodies are dissected, and yet applications for admission there are as numerous as in other hospitals; the poor go into hospitals because they are ill and in a state of penury; and do not think that they are to die there; or if they do, they care not what is to become of their remains.

Mr. Lawrence thus expresses his similarity of opinion:—

239. Do you anticipate any indisposition, on the part of patients or their friends, to their being sent to hospitals, in case of the unclaimed bodies being given up in every instance to dissection?—Not the least; I quite agree with Mr. Abernethy upon that point.

We have given the words of these very eminent persons, because we think the being thoroughly satisfied as to the effect upon the mind of the patient must be of the highest gratification to every humane person. What we are about to extract relates, for the most part, to the feelings of the friends; but there are some very strong points as to the patients themselves, and the whole is we think in the highest degree encouraging. It is from the evidence of Dr. Southwood Smith, lecturer on physiology at the Well-street school in the Borough, and author of an essay, entitled, "The Use of the Dead to the Living,"—the whole of whose evidence seems to us so valuable and so well-given in every way, that we should be most happy to reprint the whole of it, if our space at all permitted its possibility:—

983. Do you wish to add in any point to your evidence?—There is one point which I wish to say a word about; I think we cannot pay too much deference to the feelings of the poor, indeed of all classes; but from what I have observed, I should infer that these feelings are neither so strong nor so difficult to be removed as is commonly imagined: I form this opinion from what I have observed in the analogous case of inspecting the body after death. When I first began to practise in London, I became attached to one of the principal dispensaries; often there was a very great objection in the minds of the friends of those who died, to allow an examination after death; but I found that by reasoning with the poor, and explaining to them

* St. George's.

the importance of such inspection, I could generally succeed in obtaining their consent; ultimately I found but very little difficulty, and it was always greatly lessened by allowing the friends to be present. I observed that they attended to what was going on with great calmness and interest; I recollect no instance of a relative or friend having been present at such examination, who did not become convinced by it of its usefulness and importance; and in very many instances I went away, receiving the warmest thanks of the people for what I had done. I may state that the same result has been obtained at the London Fever Hospital. I am one of the physicians to the London Fever Institution. In that institution a considerable number of persons die annually; it had been the rule never to examine any one there without the consent of friends; we hardly ever meet with any difficulty, and when any objection does exist, it can generally be removed by reasoning the matter with the friends that come to claim the dead. The Irish, of whom there is always a great number in the hospital, must be excepted. We have hitherto not been able to make any impression upon them; latterly, however, we have examined the bodies of all the Irish that have died, without consent; there was some clamour at first; it is now a good deal subsided; and I wish particularly to direct the attention of the committee to the fact, that although it is now known to these people that the body is invariably examined after death, it has not had the least effect in deterring them from entering the hospital.—984. Are the committee to collect from your answer, that you think a mistake is made in behaving towards the public with secrecy and mystery upon this subject; and that you think much may be done by taking proper pains and precaution, and by reasoning with them on the use of dissection?—I think so; I think, in the state of mind at present prevailing in the British public, the poorer classes are as much open to conviction as those above them, and perhaps more so; that they are quite able to perceive the reasonableness of the measure if it were properly represented; and that their feeling is so good, that they would ultimately acquiesce in it.

We now come to a point on which we are rather inclined to differ from the general opinion. Most—indeed we cannot at this moment lay our hand upon any exception—of the witnesses who were asked the question, whether the proposed arrangement should be permissive or mandatory,—namely whether the parish and hospital officers should be compellable, or only allowed, to give up unclaimed bodies, answered they would rather have it permissive only. They assert that a compulsory act would not carry the feelings of the public along with it, which most of them think the other might. It seems to us that these gentlemen overlook that it is only the *unclaimed* bodies which it is proposed to subject to this law. Relations are *not* to be deprived of their deceased friends. But this plan of option would throw that option entirely into the hands of the parish overseers, and the officers of hospitals—a measure, we think, very much calculated to give rise to abuses. Still, if the public mind would go along with this measure, and would not with the other, we should be contented with this last. But we really cannot see the distinction. Let it be borne in mind that none but *unclaimed* bodies would be liable, and we are at a loss to conceive how granting a discretion to official persons wholly uninterested about them should have a tendency to propitiate the public. If, however, it could once be made clear that it did, the minor enactment would, beyond doubt, still be a gift of exceeding value to the country.

There is one objection, concerning both suggestions, on which we must say a few words:—or rather we will borrow the words of the Report to speak for us. We trust that those who have read our work since the commencement of the present series, will need no assurance in words that we should shrink with disgust from any measure that would betray the least tendency to shew favour to the rich at the expense of the poor—that is, of the few and fortunate as contradistinguished from the many and wretched:—

“ It may be argued, perhaps, that the principle of selection, according to the plan proposed, is not just, as it would not affect equally all classes of the public; since the bodies to be chosen would, necessarily, be those of the poor only. To this it may be replied, 1st,—that even were the force of this objection to a certain degree admitted, yet that, to judge fairly of the plan, its inconveniences must be compared with those of the existing system; which system, according to the evidence adduced, is liable in a great measure to the same objection; since the bodies exhumated are principally those of the poor*; 2dly,—that the evils of this, or of any other plan to be proposed on this subject, must be judged of by the distress which it would occasion to the feelings of surviving relations; and the unfairness to one or another class of the community,—by the degree of distress inflicted on one class rather than another; but where there are no relations to suffer distress, there can be no inequality of suffering, and consequently no unfairness shewn to one class more than another.”

The poor are also, in another way, more interested than the rich in the diffusion of surgical and medical knowledge. The rich can always procure the best assistance; the poor must have recourse to the apothecary in the next village. It is, therefore, most highly their interest that professional education should be widely-spread and sound. Almost every witness uses language to this effect.

The following extract from Sir Astley Cooper's evidence will, we think, bring the practical part of the subject to a close:—

79. If the practice of giving up the unclaimed bodies from workhouses were rendered legal, under what regulations would you propose to place the distribution of the bodies?—There I should revert to my idea of having a Director of Anatomy, so that there should be the most perfect impartiality in the distribution of the bodies, that every thing should be conducted decently, that the fees should be paid, and the funeral rites known to be performed; and when such a director was appointed, I think there would be no difficulty.

We thoroughly agree with Sir Astley, that an establishment of the nature suggested by him would, in the proper regulations of detail,

* This is proved, by three of the exhumators, as arising from the more slight burial. One of them says that by one digging he has got three or four bodies, and that during the several years he has been in the regular habit of supplying the schools he never “got half-a-dozen of wealthier people.” This witness is represented by Dr. Somerville, Mr. Brodie's assistant, as really living by the supplying bodies, that is, that he is not a thief as well. He himself says that there are forty or fifty men in London who profess to be resurrectionists, but that there are only two besides himself who get their living by it—the others make it a cloak and help to robberies of all kinds—for the police are instructed to connive at men employed in exhumation. This man's evidence is not only highly curious and characteristic, but very instructive also.—ED.

answer admirably. But we should wish to see anatomical schools extended to some of the chief provincial towns, at which, under the proposed system, we doubt not students might receive excellent education, without being forced up to London, at a distance from their friends, and at a heavy, and often embarrassing, expense.

It is also proposed to repeal the existing law, which gives the bodies of executed murderers to dissection. With this we very readily concur. The supply derived from that source is next to nothing,—and the practice certainly does give legislative sanction to the prejudices against dissection, inasmuch as it is thus awarded as part of the punishment of the crime the most terrible to our nature. The idea that there is any thing in the least degrading in dissection ought, above all things, to be removed from the minds of the people.

We hope that most of our readers, who have gone through the foregoing pages, will agree with us:—1. That the knowledge of anatomy is necessary for any proficiency in medical science.—2. That the only possible means of acquiring that knowledge is by the dissection of dead bodies.—3. That the present supply of subjects for dissection, in this country, is grossly insufficient; and that its mode is open to moral objections of the darkest order.—4. That a plan for the remedy of this deficiency has been suggested by the Committee on Anatomy of last year, alike effective, and consonant with reason, feeling, and religion.

So strongly does our own conviction go along with these propositions that, while we express our most hearty and grateful thanks to the Committee for its admirably conducted labours, we earnestly entreat them not to let sleep their recommendation of a bill being introduced into parliament in the approaching session, to give effect to their philanthropic views.

We said, we believe, at the opening of this article, that we should, during the course of it, devote some attention to the subject of the prejudices against dissection altogether. We find that we have not done so—nor, now, shall we. As the case stands, those prejudices are avoided. No general antipathy to anatomy, or its means, at all exists. It is only when it comes home—when dissection is to take place with regard to beloved objects, that the prejudice—for, amiable, and indicative of many of the best and most beautiful feelings, as we willingly own it to be—still, it is a prejudice;—it is only then, that it arises. Alas! this is one of the fast diminishing number of cases, in which, when Reason has operated undeniable conviction upon the mind, Feeling still creeps in, and causes strong pain that the opinion should be held, even when it is unable to destroy it*. But, in the plan which we have advocated, this sentiment may remain undisturbed. The measure proposed has the delightful merit of doing no injury and giving no offence to any one, whilst its effects would incalculably tend to promote the first physical blessing of mankind—HEALTH.

* We have called these cases fast diminishing, because, thank heaven! we thoroughly believe that Reason and Feeling agree better and better every day the world grows older.