

So long as the Association is destitute even of the shadow of a system of representation, I look upon it as utterly absurd, nay, as most unwarrantable, for the Worcester Council, or any Medical Reform Committee of the Association, to go before Parliament and the profession with a measure of medical reform, backing it with the statement that it is the approved scheme of "an Association of physicians, surgeons, and general practitioners, numbering upwards of two thousand members". This, however, was substantially the statement made by a deputation to Government from the executive of the Association, which was attended by Sir Charles Hastings and Mr. Wakley, the two gentlemen by whom, if I am not greatly mistaken, the Reform Committee of the Association is chiefly guided. Be this as it may, I must, in self defence, insist upon claiming my right to assert in the JOURNAL, that no Bill can be honestly called the Bill of the Association so long as the Association is destitute of a representative system, and has no means of expressing its sentiments except at general meetings, which cannot possibly represent the widely scattered members, the majority of whom can neither afford the time nor the money required for a trip to Manchester or Swansea. It is obvious that meetings only represent the neighbourhood in which they are held. It is only through a representative Council that the voices of the majority can be heard: and I would not be satisfied with representatives chosen only by the Branches, as now constituted. I am, etc., C. M. BURNETT.

Westbrook House, Alton, June 19th, 1854.

[The great length of the documents, which it was essential to give *in extenso*, obliged us to exceedingly curtail all the speeches (including that of Dr. Burnett) made at the meeting. Mr. Wakley is not a member of the Reform Committee; and when he attended the deputation, he was not a member of the Association. EDITOR.]

THE FUMES OF THE COMMON PUFF-BALL.

LETTER FROM JOHN SNOW, M.D.

SIR,—I am induced by the remark respecting the puff-ball, at page 579 of yesterday's number of the JOURNAL, to request you to insert the following brief account of the results of an examination which I made last year of the fumes of that substance.

On passing the fumes through solution of potassa, and then adding a solution of green sulphate of iron, and afterwards dilute sulphuric acid, a copious precipitate of Prussian blue was obtained, proving that the fumes of the puff-ball contain cyanogen gas. On passing the air in which puff-ball had been burnt through water, and adding solution of potassa, and then the tests mentioned above, Prussian blue was also formed. I wrote on June 20th, 1853, to inform my friend Dr. Richardson that I had detected cyanogen gas in the fumes of the lycoperdon, and he was kind enough to call a few days afterwards, when I showed him the above tests in the solution through which the fumes had been passed.

The cyanogen is a product of the slow combustion which takes place when the puff-ball is burnt in common air; for the fungus itself has no narcotic or medicinal properties, and I found, on burning it in oxygen gas, in which it is consumed briskly and with a flame, that the remaining gas had no effect on a mouse which was placed in it.

It is very probable that carbonic oxide gas is produced during the slow combustion of the puff-ball, in addition to cyanogen gas. If so, it must contribute greatly to cause insensibility; for, although carbonic oxide is much less potent than cyanogen, it is a very powerful narcotic, being ten times as strong as carbonic acid. I find that four cubic inches of carbonic oxide to each hundred cubic inches of air has quite as much effect on animals that breathe it as forty cubic inches of carbonic acid.

It was my intention to examine the products of the combustion of the puff-ball more minutely, and this was my reason for not writing sooner on the subject; but I regret that I have hitherto been prevented by want of time from carrying out my intention.

The common puff-ball is one of the numerous bodies which might be employed to prevent the pain of surgical operations, if we did not already possess more convenient agents. I do not think that it is likely to come into use for such a purpose, but I consider it not improbable that Dr. Richardson's interesting discovery of the effects of the fumes of this fungus may lead indirectly to useful results in the practice of medicine.

I am, etc., JOHN SNOW.

18 Backville Street, July 1st, 1854.

THE SELECTION OF TEXT-BOOKS FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS.

LETTER FROM ALFRED HAVLAND, Esq.

SIR,—As an Association avowedly formed for the protection of the interests of the medical profession, we are certainly called upon to use our influence towards facilitating the mode of education of those to whom the public must look for aid when the present generation of practitioners shall have passed away. We ought to regard all students in medicine with the jealous eyes of parents; for although they will, as their forefathers did before them, make their own way by talent and perseverance, we must not lose sight of the duty that we owe to them as our *protégés*. To shorten the path to knowledge, to smooth the ruggedness of the course over which each student must run ere he can attain the goal of his ambition, is not only within our power, but peculiarly our office. In the present system of education at our medical schools, there are, in common with all other human institutions, not only many imperfections, but actual evils: some, I know, are irremediable; others there are, on the contrary, whose complete removal only requires a little energy on our parts to effect. The evil to which I now shall draw attention is one felt by every student in medicine, and has for some years operated as a serious drawback on the acquirement of knowledge. One or two soldiers may, without retarding the progress of a whole regiment, suffer from circumstances which affect their own individual marching; but if the evil of which these few complain be felt generally throughout the force, the effect will at once be seriously manifested, the whole body will be arrested in their march, and their destination, although perhaps arrived at in the end, nevertheless will not have been accomplished without difficulty, a loss of time, and a sacrifice of energy. Now, we know that it will not do merely to attain an object; the spirit of the age is in favour of expedition in our pursuit, as well as of our doing everything with as little waste of time and talent as possible, in order that, with the same means, the greatest amount of ends should be achieved; and everything that retards action in the present day is inconsistent with the genius of the times.

The evil that I allude to is the fact that, although the medical universities, colleges, and other examining bodies, provide a *course of study* for students in medicine, they do not guide them in the selection of *text-books*. Where can there be found a more puzzling question than that which pours from hundreds of mouths every October and May, "*What shall I read on—y?*" Every school has its professors, every professor writes a book, but unfortunately every book is not worth reading, neither is every professor a member of the various boards of examiners. We all know how utterly worthless as *text-books* many of those works called "elements" are: they may be very scientific, very clever, very learned, and very everything but practical, so far as the student is concerned, who ought to be always regarded as entirely ignorant of the subject he begins to study. Unfit, however, as these books are for giving information, they are in their turn selected by the unwary first year's man, for several reasons, amongst which may be found many natural ones; for instance, the fact perhaps that the man to whose lectures the student has entered has written a *text-book*, as he calls it, and of course he recommends his own book, and his victim, in the absence of any *regular guide*, purchases a ponderous tome of "elements", and for a time is pleased with the novelty. Of course there are books that are too well known to admit of any doubt as to their value; but, on the other hand, there are *whole subjects* which are yet without a proper *text-book*, although whole libraries have been written upon them. How can the raw country youth be expected to know anything of the literature of his profession. On arriving in town, he wants, for instance, a *text-book* on — of —. Professor —, to whose lectures he has entered, has published his "*Elements*", or something of the kind, on that subject; so the student gets this book, and for a time contemplates the book as a wonder, the author of the book as something more than wonderful: he, moreover, has a peculiar pride in a book that is written by a man who actually condescends to speak to him sometimes. Well, all this puerile enchantment may last for a few weeks; the student enlarges his circle of acquaintance; he hears with pain this wonder of a book spoken of disrespectfully, which at first he considers heresy of the grossest sort. After a time, he becomes, however, impressed with the cleverness of a second year's man, who has created a respect in him on account of his having mentioned cavalierly the distribution of a nerve, of whose name he himself had not even heard. The idol of a