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BLOOD-LETTING¹

... The experience is gained now; the experiment is tried; and it is time to begin to draw some practical results out of it. If we do not, it will probably be tried all over again, by a senseless reaction in favour of what we are now rejecting.

Many of those who habitually practised blood-letting as a daily means of cure in the last generation were careful and shrewd observers, as is shown by their writings; and it seems scarcely possible that such men should have been utterly mistaken in assigning advantages to this powerful means of modifying vital actions. It would be more reasonable to conclude that the advantages must be very great to have blinded their eyes to the accompanying evils.

The operation has in itself much to recommend its use. ... immediate application; quick invariable effects ... under control ... graduated amount.

This is enough to make the detraction of blood a thoroughly scientific proceeding. ... Let us review the facts on which its general employment was grounded. Let us try to enter into the minds of the great blood-letters, in place of continuing to condemn, unexamined, the staff on which they leant.

Physicians observed of old, and continued to observe for many centuries, the following facts concerning blood-letting: ... pain relief ... diminished swelling, redness, congestion, heat, spasms ... roused from coma ... stopped [other] haemorrhage ... sometimes ended disease.

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Extract and edit by Nick Child

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2260507/>