OF
THE CATARRHUS ÆSTIVUS,
OR
SUMMER CATARRH.

By J. BOSTOCK, M.D. F.R.S. Etc.

Read 22d April, 1828.

IN the tenth volume of the Society's Transactions there is an account of a disease which I conceive to be of a specific nature, and which from its symptoms, and from its occurring only at a certain period of the year, I propose to name the catarrhus æstivus. In my former communication, I detailed the symptoms as they occurred in my own person; my present object is to extend my remarks to the affection as it occurs in other individuals, to inquire into its cause, and to make some observations on the mode of treatment.

The number of cases which I have either seen or of which I have received a distinct account, amounts to eighteen, besides about ten others, which are less correctly ascertained. They all agree in the complaint making its appearance at the same season of the year, in its seat being the

membrane lining the nose, the fauces, and the vesicles of the lungs, and, for the most part, in the paroxysms being excited and the symptoms aggravated by the same causes.

One of the most remarkable circumstances respecting this complaint is its not having been noticed as a specific affection, until within the last ten or twelve years. Except a single observation of Heberden's*, I have not met with any thing that can be supposed to refer to it in any author, ancient or modern. I have at various times stated the particulars of my case to some of the most eminent physicians in London, Edinburgh, and Liverpool, and have very gratefully to acknowledge their kindest sympathy and attention; but, until very lately, it was always considered by them as an anomalous train of symptoms, and no one appeared to have witnessed any occurrence of a similar kind, and the same sentiment I recollect to have prevailed in this Society nine years ago, on the reading of my former paper. The first intimation which I received of a contrary opinion, was from the late Dr. Baillie, who, in the summer of 1822, related to me three cases which he considered as similar to my own. Yet, as there ap-

* "I have known it (catarrh) return in four or five persons annually in the months of April, May, June, or July, and last a month, with great violence." This passage was pointed out to me by Dr. M. Hall: I am also indebted to Dr. Hall for the account of a well-marked case of the *catarrhus æstivus*.

pears to be nothing, either in the cause or nature of the complaint, which can induce us to suppose that it is actually a new disease, we are obliged to conclude that it had been regarded as a mere modification of the common catarrh.

The twenty-eight cases referred to above, all agree in the complaint commencing about the end of May or the beginning of June, and continuing from four to eight weeks. Most of them are attended with fulness of the head, stoppage of the nose, sneezing, watering of the eyes, and discharge from the nostrils. In about half of the whole number the respiration is considerably affected, and in three or four instances it is almost the only symptom. Some of the cases are attended with distinct cough, most of them with irritation of the fauces, and some with a degree of sore throat. Actual inflammation of the eyes is not a very common occurrence, and in some of the cases there is not even the discharge of tears, or the irritation of the eyes. The degree of general indisposition varies very much in the different cases; in some, the patient, during the whole period, is unable to use any exertion, or to continue his ordinary occupations, while, in other instances, he feels no inconvenience, except what arises from the fits of sneezing, and the copious discharge from the nose.

I have not been able to trace any decided con-

nexion between the peculiar symptoms and any circumstance of age, sex, constitution, or mode of life in the patient. For the most part, indeed, I have found, that in very young persons, the first symptoms that are observed are sneezing and running of the eyes, that the chest is not affected until a later period of life, and that, as age advances, the purely catarrhal symptoms decrease, while the pectoral symptoms have a tendency to increase. With respect to age, I have no account of the complaint commencing earlier than it did in myself, at about eight years, nor have I heard of any very old persons being affected with it; for the most part, however, it seems rather to increase with the advance of life than the contrary, and I have no account of any one who has been once affected by it, ever afterwards losing the tendency. It is remarkable, that all the cases are in the middle or upper classes of society, some indeed of high rank. I have made inquiry at the various dispensaries in London and elsewhere, and I have not heard of a single unequivocal case occurring among the poor. A considerable majority of the cases are males, but I have an account of some females, who suffer severely from the complaint. There is no decided evidence of the complaint being hereditary, except that there is an instance where three members of the same family are affected by it.

I have not been able to ascertain with any

great degree of precision, whether any specific temperament is peculiarly subject to it. Those cases that have fallen under my own inspection have been generally of a spare habit and liable to stomach affections, but I have met with exceptions to this rule. It does not appear to be confined to any particular situation ; it occurs alike in towns and in the country, and I have not heard of any districts, the inhabitants of which are peculiarly subject to it.

The immediate cause of the symptoms seems to be sufficiently obvious ; it consists in an increased action of the vessels of the membrane which lines the eye-lids, the nose, the fauces, and the pulmonary vesicles, by which it becomes acutely sensible to external impressions, has its natural secretions augmented, and probably its bulk increased ; to this last cause I think we may ascribe the very distressing sense of dyspnœa which exists in some of the cases. Although this membrane is continued without interruption over the different organs that are the seat of the affection, yet it is observed that the different parts are affected in different degrees. Hence we may divide the disease into four varieties, according as the eyes, the nose, the fauces, or the lungs is the part more immediately affected. It is in the last variety only, that I have observed the constitutional symptoms of fever and the subsequent debility to exist in any considerable degree ; and in this case I think we may account for the effect, by supposing

that the thickened state of the membrane which lines the vesicles, prevents the oxygen of the inspired air from duly acting on the blood.

With respect to what is termed the exciting cause of the disease, since the attention of the public has been turned to the subject, an idea has very generally prevailed, that it is produced by the effluvium from new hay, and it has hence obtained the popular name of the hay-fever. As it is extremely important to ascertain the truth of this opinion, I have made it the subject of distinct observation, as far as regards my own person, and by minutely attending to the accession of the symptoms, for a number of successive seasons, in relation to this supposed cause, I think myself fully warranted in asserting, that in my own case the effluvium from hay has no connection with the disease. The following observations will, I think, be sufficient to prove this position.

In consequence of the benefit which I always experienced from fresh cool air, I made choice of Ramsgate as my residence during the summers of 1824, 1825, and 1826. The last two of these years will be long remembered for their excessive heat; but by procuring a house on the cliff, exposed to the German ocean, and commanding complete ventilation, by avoiding bodily exercise, and indeed seldom leaving the house until evening, during the year 1825 I nearly escaped the disease. In the year 1826, I have reason to be-

lieve that the disease was much mitigated by the comparative coolness of the situation, but still I had many decided and some severe paroxysms. Now it is well known, that there is not an acre of meadow ground in the whole of the Isle of Thanet, and in the year 1826, in consequence of the great drought, all the little patches of grass, which may be supposed to exist on road sides or elsewhere, were completely burnt up. Nor is this all; during many of the hottest days, the wind blew steadily from the south-east, so that the nearest land to windward of the house which I occupied, was on the French coast, a little to the north of Calais. Yet during this time, whenever I relaxed from my plan of discipline, and exposed myself to the sun's rays, or by any means quickened the circulation, the symptoms recurred in full force.

The last year, 1827, with the exception of a short period in July, was cold. I could not conveniently remove to any great distance from London, and I spent the summer at Kew. This situation might have been chosen for the purpose of the experiment, for almost the whole of that part of the country consists of hay-grass, which was cut while I was in the neighbourhood. In consequence of the coolness of the season I did not confine myself to the house, but walked out daily, occasionally in the Kew gardens, and was surrounded by many hundred acres of hay-grass in all its different states, yet except during

the few hot days, when I suffered as usual, my complaint was in a much less degree than the average.

But although I think the evidence, as far as respects myself, to be quite decisive, I acknowledge that I have received accounts from various quarters, of individuals, who have felt no doubt that the complaint was brought on by the effluvium from hay, and was relieved or prevented by avoiding this effluvium. I will not venture to assert that this opinion is incorrect, but I believe that in most cases we may explain the facts more naturally by supposing, that the patients, at the time when they conceived themselves to be inhaling the effluvium from hay, were also exposed to heated air or sunshine, or had been using bodily exercise. Experience, however, must decide the question, and when the subject is once fairly brought into view, it will not be difficult to collect a sufficient number of facts to enable us to form our opinion.

With respect to the cure or mitigation of the complaint, I regret to say, that except in so far as we are able to avoid those circumstances which bring on the paroxysm, I have been able to obtain very little satisfactory evidence. Most of the patients have tried a change of residence, some from town to country, others from country to town, and some have removed to various parts of the island, or even to the continent. In two cases

of considerable severity, the patients have felt convinced that they were better in London than in the country ; in another case the patient conceived that he derived great advantage from exposure to sea air, but, in other instances, similar trials have not proved successful.

As far as regards medical treatment, an anxious desire to obtain relief from an annual indisposition of several weeks' continuance, and sometimes of considerable severity, has induced me to try, with the greatest perseverance, every remedy which held out the least prospect of advantage. I think myself warranted in asserting, that, on the whole, the depleting system is injurious, and that some benefit is gained by a moderate use of tonics. This is the only point in which the various accounts that I have received from others and my own experience appear to agree, and in general it would seem that the symptoms proceed nearly in the same way under very opposite plans of treatment, and are very little influenced by medicines of any description.

The experience of many years has taught me not to expect a cure for the complaint, so that I now only aim at relieving any peculiarly urgent or distressing symptom. Bathing the eyes in tepid water, and fomenting the face generally, occasionally applying small blisters to the chest, mild purgatives, small doses of ipecacuanha, Dover's

powder, squills, and digitalis, bathing the feet in warm water, a moderate but not spare diet, perfect rest, and carefully avoiding all extremes of heat, comprise the whole of the means that I have found useful to myself. In order to prevent others from making useless experiments, I may remark that among those things which I have tried without success are bark, iron, opium, mercury, large blisters, topical bleeding, the waters of Harrogate and Leamington, the baths of Bath and Buxton, sea-bathing, the shower bath, abstinence from wine and animal food, and a more free use of them; each of these having been made, as it may be said, the subject of distinct experiment, and persevered in, until some circumstance rendered it necessary to discontinue them, or until they produced a decidedly injurious effect.

While this paper was in the press, I was informed by a friend, on whose accuracy I could place implicit confidence, that great relief had been experienced in two cases of the complaint, by applying to the eyes and nostrils a very weak infusion of tincture of opium, in the proportion of one or two drops of the tincture to an ounce of water. I regret to say, that in the trial which I have hitherto made, it does not appear to produce the same beneficial effect on my symptoms.

Upper Bedford Place,
June 9th, 1828.