CASES
OF
DESTRUCTIVE INFLAMMATION
OF
THE EYE,
AND OF
SUPPURATIVE INFLAMMATION OF THE INTEGUMENTS,
OCCURRING IN THE PUERPERAL STATE,
AND APPARENTLY FROM CONSTITUTIONAL CAUSES.
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IT has occurred to us to witness together, at distant periods, the progress of several cases of the singular morbid affection about to be described: and if the disease be as little known to the profession generally, as it appears to be in this populous town, an account of it cannot fail to be interesting to the members of the Society.

The affection has occurred, in the cases to which

we have alluded, from five to eleven days after delivery. It has always been preceded by some serious indisposition : in one case there were all the well-marked symptoms of intestinal irritation, and of exhaustion from uterine hæmorrhagy ; in a second there was continued and protracted diarrhæa ; and in the others much fever, with derangement of the functions of the bowels. In one case the patient had been bled ; in another calomel had been freely given ; in a third opium ; and in a fourth the spt. terebinthinæ. In these respects all the cases were dissimilar. In one remarkable circumstance, however, they all concurred ; the left eye, and not the right, was always the one affected. It may be remembered as a possible cause of this fact, if indeed it be not accidental, that patients are always delivered lying on the left side.

In one case the eye was affected but a day or two, and but slightly, when the patient died. In two there was great chemosis, the transparency of the cornea was destroyed, and the eye appeared collapsed, during life ; and in a fourth the patient survived the ulceration and sloughing of the cornea, the total destruction of the organ, and the subsequent healing of its anterior part.

Soon after the appearance of the disease in the eye, there has also appeared a local inflammation situated in the integuments, and first observed on

the hand, but found, on a careful examination, either at the same time, or soon afterwards, on the inferior as well as superior extremities. In one of the cases only, there was no such cutaneous inflammation ; but the patient having been bled, there were inflammation and suppuration of the vein. In two of the cases the cutaneous inflammation was observed on the hands and feet, rather diffuse and little elevated, but extremely tender to the touch ; in the fourth, that in which the patient survived the loss of the eye, the patches of inflammation were very numerous and extensive, and led to equally numerous and extensive formations of pus.

All remedies appeared to be unavailing. Early bleeding, mercury, and purgatives, and afterwards bark and opium, were fully tried without effect. The sinking of the vital powers alone appeared to suspend the course of this terrible disease.

From the preceding observations it may be conjectured that this morbid affection has a constitutional origin. This inference seems warranted by all the patients having previously experienced some indisposition, chiefly a deranged state of the function of the bowels, and by their all suffering from more than one local disease at the same time.

We have reserved the more particular description

of the morbid appearances observed in the eye and in the integuments, to be detailed in the individual cases. Although these are only five in number, they present great variety. This variety appears chiefly to have arisen from the state of the vital powers, the morbid action in the part being influenced by the strength of the patient. Thus, in the patient who died soon after the appearance of the affection of the eye, the disease presented itself in a slight, although a very characteristic form; whilst in the patient who survived the total destruction of the organ, it pursued a regular progress, and assumed the most marked character.

CASE I.

Mrs. A. aged 23, of a delicate constitution, was delivered after a natural labour, on the 27th of October, 1823. Before the time of her confinement she was affected with continued diarrhœa, for which she took occasionally a dose of rhubarb. On the ninth day after delivery, an affection of the left eye was first observed; red vessels were seen proceeding across the conjunctiva, and converging towards the cornea; the pupils were extremely contracted, and there was great intolerance of light.

On the succeeding day the course of the enlarged vessels was completely obscured by great

tumefaction of the tunica conjunctiva ; the transparency of the cornea was somewhat lost, the pupil enlarged ; the pulse was very frequent.

On the third day of this disease the chemosis, or tumefaction of the conjunctiva, was greatly augmented. Large red vessels were observed passing in all directions; the cornea was still more opaque, uneven on its surface, covered with a film of mucus, sunk in the chemosis, and surrounded by a ring of ulceration about a line in breadth, and covered with white pus. The pupil was still more enlarged, but seen obscurely through the opaque cornea; there was still intolerance of light; and the vision was very imperfect. The eye-lids were greatly swollen, partly perhaps from the application of leeches; the pulse 144.

On the fourth day the eye was nearly in the same state; the pulse was only 120, and the patient expressed herself as feeling much better.

On the morning of the fifth day the pulse was 100, in the evening 120. During the night there had been slight delirium; the chemosis was less, the ulceration round the cornea greater, the cornea more opaque, uneven in surface, and irregular in form; the pupil could not be distinguished. A little pus was observed in the lowest part of the anterior chamber; there was less appearance of mucus over the eye.

On examining the eye in the gentlest manner on the sixth day, the cornea gave way, and the aqueous humour and crystalline lens escaped and flowed down the cheek. The chemosis now subsided, and the remaining portion of the cornea collapsed.

In a day or two afterwards chemosis increased, and there occurred great pain, redness and tumefaction, and complete closure of the eye-lids. This again subsided, and when the eye-lids could be separated, the eye-ball appeared of a brownish hue, the space previously occupied by the cornea presenting the appearance of a white ulcer. In the course of a week or two the swelling totally subsided, the conjunctiva became white, and the ulcer healed.

About the second day of this affection of the eye, the wrist and arms became affected in five distinct points by a diffused redness and great tenderness. In the course of a few days suppuration took place, and each part required to be opened by the lancet. Afterwards most copious suppurations took place in the integuments in different parts of the surface of the body, along the thigh and legs, in the axilla, and above the clavicle. These suppurations eventually exhausted the patient, and she died in a state of extreme feebleness and emaciation.

This patient took opium for the diarrhoea, was bled and took mercury in the beginning of the affection of the eye, and afterwards had cinchona and wine.

CASE II.

Mrs. B. aged 27, of the sanguineous temperament, was delivered after an easy labour, and without much hemorrhagy, on the 13th of November, 1823. On the second day after delivery, she became affected with fever and derangement of the bowels, which continued but with varying degrees of severity until the eleventh, on the morning of which day a slight redness of the left eye was observed, occupying and being confined to the external canthus. At the same time a slight blush of redness was observed first on the back of the right hand, and afterwards along the ulna. In the evening the eye was affected with slight chemosis, the conjunctiva protruding in a loose flabby state, and with scarcely any redness. On the succeeding morning all the morbid appearances were augmented; the chemosis was extensive, but the conjunctiva was loose, flabby, and pale rather than red; the cornea was clear, but covered with a slight film of mucus; there was no appearance of ulceration at the junction of the cornea with the tunica conjunctiva; the eye-lid was very slightly swollen; the pupil not contracted. The inflamed parts of the hand and arm were extremely

red and painful, with perhaps a slight fluctuation over the ulna. There was also a little redness and swelling on the outer side of the right angle, perhaps arising from pressure. The patient was at this time evidently in a sinking state, and did not survive long.

It will be plain, on contrasting this case with the preceding and succeeding ones, that the disease of the eye was arrested in its progress by the failure of the energies of the constitution. The remedies employed were principally purgative medicines, calomel, and the spiritus terebinthinæ, in full and repeated doses.

CASE III.

Mrs. C. aged 30, and delicate, was delivered on the 20th January, 1821, after a tedious labour, during which it was deemed necessary to take away fourteen ounces of blood, in consequence of rigidity of the os uteri.

On the morning of the 21st, she was seized with much shivering, followed by great heat, sickness, and frequency of the pulse. An injection and opening medicine evacuated much hardened fæces, and afforded great relief. In the evening, however, there was great heat, restlessness, slight delirium, and head-ache, with faintishness on attempting to sit erect. On the 22nd and 23rd,

the symptoms were much the same, but on the latter day there appeared some inflammation in the course of the vein from which she had been bled. On the 24th, 25th, and 26th, the general symptoms were less severe, but the inflammation pursued its course along the vein. On the morning of the 27th, the eighth day from delivery, there appeared slight inflammation of the left eye, which increased during the day. The inflammation of the vein increased rapidly, being attended by pain, tenderness on pressure, swelling, and a watery discharge from the punctured orifice. Amongst other remedies calomel and opium were given every three hours, and ice was applied locally. On the 28th, the conjunctiva was much tumefied, and the cornea somewhat opaque. On the 29th, the cornea was still more opaque and sunk in the swollen conjunctiva. On the 30th the eye appeared to have burst, the cornea being still more sunk and shrivelled; the arm and axilla were much swollen; the patient was evidently sinking, and she died in the night.

No examination of the body could be obtained.

C A S E IV.

Mrs. D. aged 40, deformed, habitually weak, and subject to dyspnœa on any exertion. She was the mother of several children, and had suffered much in every pregnancy from increased difficulty

of breathing (being obliged to raise herself upright in bed, to prevent a sense of suffocation), and from cedematous swelling of the legs. Her nights were generally restless, and she was in the habit of taking the black drop to procure repose.

On the 15th of Nov. 1822, she was delivered of her fourth child, after a difficult labour, requiring the use of instruments, and attended by considerable hæmorrhagy. Her delivery was followed by great exhaustion and great frequency of the pulse, but did not occasion syncope. On the 17th she complained of much heat, and of pain of the head with noise in the ears, and the pulse was very frequent. Purgative medicine and an enema were prescribed, an anodyne draught was directed after the bowels should be well opened, and a liniment was applied to the abdomen. From the 18th to the 22d the symptoms were nearly the same; heat of surface, frequency of the pulse, violent pain of the head, and sometimes slight delirium. On the evening of this last day she ate two eggs and took some wine, contrary to a strict injunction. On the 23rd, the eighth day after delivery, she began to complain of pain of the eye, and on examination the conjunctiva was found inflamed, and there was a constant flow of tears; there was more delirium and more pain of the legs. On the 24th the conjunctiva was swollen, the pupil enlarged, and the cornea somewhat opaque. On the legs several streaks of redness were observed, attended by

much sensibility and pain. She complained much of the head, and the pulse was 150 or 160. On the 25th the conjunctiva was still more humid, the cornea more opaque and apparently sunk; the vital powers were evidently sinking fast, and the fatal event occurred in the evening, on the third day of the affection of the eye.

CASE V.

SINCE the preceding cases were transmitted to the Society, we have been called to witness the course of a fifth example of this fatal malady: and as it differed from the rest by a still more early sinking of the vital powers, and consequently by a less marked form, we think it right to append it to them.

Mrs. E. aged 22 years, was delivered after a rather lingering labour of sixteen hours duration, on Wednesday night, May the 25th, 1825. The succeeding day was passed without any symptom of complaint; but the patient had exerted herself far too much in seeing visitors, and care of the infant.

Early on the Friday morning she was taken with shivering, which was followed by profuse perspiration and a rapid pulse. The bowels were freely moved, and were in the most healthy state, having been particularly attended to during the whole of her pregnancy. The perspiration gradually sub-

sided, but 'on Saturday morning the pulse still remained at 120, and the abdomen was rather full, and painful, and tender under pressure, on the right side. These appearances of abdominal affection were, however, entirely subdued by the application of leeches, and by again evacuating the bowels. In the evening, and on Sunday morning, there was no tenderness or fulness of the abdomen at all, but the pulse remained frequent, though less so than on the preceding day.

In the evening of Sunday the pulse became more frequent, and the abdomen again tumid, and two red tender spots appeared in the inside and fleshy part of the left fore-arm. Very early on the Monday morning the pulse was found to be still more frequent, and the abdomen more tumid, while the vital powers were evidently failing. The bowels had been evacuated during the night freely and without uneasiness by the spiritus terebinthinæ. The arm remained as before. About eleven o'clock a.m. the left eye was observed to be inflamed, and the tunica conjunctiva to be red and tumid. The state of sinking increased rapidly, and the patient expired at one.

POSTSCRIPT.

In conclusion we beg leave to give the following short account of a case of this morbid affection

by Mr. Ward, surgeon, of Ollerton, in this county. Mr. Ward observes, "about eighteen years ago I was requested to visit the wife of William Aikin, of Eakring, aged 36, who had been confined about a week. Her labour had been tedious, and much hæmorrhagy followed the extraction of the placenta. She had complained of great pain of the head and eyeball for several days. She had taken opening medicine which acted well. On inspecting the eye I found that it had already burst, that its humours had escaped, and its coats collapsed; leaving only the appearance of a thick white substance on its anterior part. In addition to this affection of the eye, there were two large abscesses, one situated in the left axilla, the other above the calf of the left leg, which on being opened discharged much sanious matter. The patient was in a state of stupor, quite insensible to any object around her. I prescribed the cinchona with camphor, and port wine in gruel. In a few days diarrhœa came on, and soon afterwards the patient expired."

The first case detailed in the preceding pages was visited by Mr. John Wright, the eminent surgeon of this place. It has neither occurred to that gentleman nor to some others to whom the subject has been named, to have met with any other example of a similar puerperal disease.

Nottingham, July 1, 1825.