ON THE
OCCURRENCE IN PERSIA
OF THE
EPIDEMIC CHOLERA OF INDIA.

BY JOHN CORMICK, Esq.

COMMUNICATED IN A LETTER TO

H. L. THOMAS, Esq.

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Tabriz, Persia, October 3d, 1822.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE spasmodic cholera of India reached last year as far as Shiraz; and this year we have had it here, and in almost every other city of Persia. At this moment, it has gone as far as the western frontier of Persia, and, having come thus far west from Calcutta, who can say that it will not reach as far as Europe? This disease differs from the cholera morbus of nosologists in this respect, that there is not a vomiting and purging of bile, as its name would imply, but of a whitish water, without taste or smell, and resembling that in which rice had been boiled.

The general symptoms were a vomiting and purging of immense quantities of the above whitish li-

quid: the surface of the whole body become cold, more particularly the hands and feet, which assume a dark blue colour, approaching to black: pulse entirely lost: violent spasms of the muscles of the legs, thighs, and abdomen; eyes sunk, great thirst, countenance fallen, and more that of a dead than a living man; extreme restlessness: anxiety and oppression of the præcordia; the palms of the hands and soles of the feet corrugated, as if they had been a long time immersed in warm water; a total cessation of the secretions of the urine, bile, and saliva. The blood recedes from the surface, and accumulates in the cavities of the abdomen, thorax, and cranium: the heart is felt to palpitate and labour hard, to propel forward the mass of blood that is pressing upon it from the large veins. While every thing indicates a want of circulation, and the stagnant venous blood gives a dark colour to the whole body, the eyes alone are of a bright red colour and covered with arterial blood, indicating the fatal accumulation that is taking place within. In many cases, the attack was so violent that the sufferers sunk, and, with a few efforts to vomit, expired.

In the treatment of this disease, I allowed (when present at the commencement) the vomiting, &c. to go on for some little time, while I perceived that the discharges were copious, and unattended by severe straining and exertion. When I perceived the discharges diminished in quantity, the first object was to allay the vomiting, in order to gain time for

the administration of such other cathartics as would most speedily bring on alvine evacuations of a dark colour or bilious nature; for, until this was effected, a cure could not be anticipated with any certainty, and this object once gained, two thirds of the difficulty and danger of the disease are removed. Calomel, sometimes alone, sometimes combined with opium, and at other times opium alone, had this effect. Occasionally, when all these failed, injections twice or thrice repeated, of laudanum and warm water, or rice water, one dram in a pint, succeeded. I always gave calomel the first trial, as it possessed the additional advantage of bringing on a healthy action in the liver, which was gorged with blood and a secretion of bile, more readily and more effectually than any other medicine with which I am acquainted. As soon as the state of the stomach admitted of it, I gave six to ten grains of calomel, with ten grains of compound extract of colocynth every hour, administering at the same time a stimulating injection, generally of salt and water. This medicine I used as, being small in quantity, it was less likely to bring on a recurrence of the vomiting. After three or four repetitions of it, if copious evacuations were not produced, which was seldom the case, I gave an ounce of castor oil, with as much peppermint water, every hour till this object was attained.

In many cases, recovery was so slow that strong purgatives were necessary every five or six hours for

two or three days. It happened but seldom that I was called in at the very commencement of the attack to try copious bleeding, when the best effects might reasonably be expected from it. I tried it in some instances during the violence of the attack, but found so much difficulty in procuring the flow of five or six ounces, that I gave it up. During the secondary stages of the disorder, however, I found it of infinite use in relieving the head, removing the disposition to coma, and facilitating the return of the healthy secretions of the hepatic system. Topical bleeding by cupping, leeches, and opening the temporal arteries, I had frequent recourse to, and never without beneficial effects. It was with warm bathing as with blood-letting; during the greatest violence of the attack I often tried it, but the patient never felt any relief; on the contrary, he complained of increased sufferings, and always felt more exhausted afterwards. When, however, this stage had passed, it greatly expedited his recovery, and seemed to me to be particularly serviceable in restoring the secretion of urine.

As far as my own experience has gone, I am inclined to place but very little confidence in large and repeated doses of laudanum and æther, so freely administered in India on most occasions. Indeed, the inflamed and ulcerated state in which the stomach has been found in a great many cases, examined after death, would seem to contra-indicate them. I am inclined to believe that inflammation

of the stomach, though very common, does not however exist in all cases, and, if we could distinguish those in which it does not, then indeed, the above medicines would produce beneficial effects. I tried them in two or three cases when the disease first made its appearance here, and I am now sorry for it, as valuable time was thus lost.

Externally, I went through the usual routine of volatile and stimulating liniments, frictions with laudanum, spirits, &c. but cannot say that they produced any obvious good effects. Latterly I was led, by repeated experience, to place most confidence in pieces of blanket moistened in water, almost boiling, and constantly rubbed and tied about the legs and arms. This kept up heat in the extremities better than any thing else I saw tried.

The disease first began in that part of the city which is most low, filthy, and crowded with poor inhabitants; and advanced from quarter to quarter of it; finishing its ravages in one before it commenced them in another. It was most destructive in the houses which were low, and possessed most inhabitants. In no case did I see a patient abandoned by his friends, under the idea that this epidemic was contagious. This idea seems, indeed, to be very generally abandoned. The family of the Prince quitted this city after the violence of the disease had already begun to abate. They, however, carried the epidemic along with them, and con-

tinued to be attacked, from four to six a-day, for about ten days, wherever they went, although not a single person of the villages through which they passed, or where they slept, took the disease. Was it that they carried the contaminated atmosphere along with them? or, being in a healthy climate and amidst healthy people, 35 miles from the city, they continued to suffer from their previous exposure to the unhealthy air of Tabriz? During our sufferings, ten or twelve thousand of the King's troops passed this city. They were prevented, by guards stationed at the gates, from entering it, but several of them passed the day under the walls. During the following day, however, the disease manifested itself among them, and they suffered from it very severely. So far for the spasmodic cholera. We have just received the accounts of its re-appearance at Shiraz and Bushire, where it rages at this moment. As yet we do not know that it has shown itself in any part of Turkey; but, no doubt, they will have it among them next year, and, as they have a much more crowded population, and are naturally less alert than the Persians in running away from it, its ravages among them are likely to be the more severe.

As this destructive disease seems to be approaching Europe, and is likely to excite considerable interest in the medical world there, I thought I could not fill a letter with matter more interesting to you than communicating what I knew of this epidemic.

If I have failed, you will, I trust, give me credit for good will at least. In this city, water boils at 204° of Fahrenheit. The atmosphere is generally clear, cold, and healthy; and if, in such a climate, this epidemic commits such ravages as almost to equal its effects in many parts of India, I much fear it will extend to Europe, where the crowded cities and great population will make it more severely felt than it has been in the scattered cities and scanty population of Persia.

Believe me, my dear Sir,

Ever sincerely yours,

JOHN CORMICK.