COLICA PICTONUM

TREATED WITH

WARM WATER.

By JOHN WILSON, M.D.,

PHYSICIAN TO THE MIDDLESEX HOSPITAL.

READ MAY 11TH, 1841.

CONSTIPATION is a symptom always present in painters' colic, or colica saturnina, and in many instances it persists to such a degree as to require the most energetic purgatives to be employed in order to subdue it.

Along with these purgatives other modes of treatment have frequently at the same time been combined; and to such an extent have these remedies been complicated by some, that others have regarded such modes of treatment as empirical. With these the celebrated mode of treatment adopted at the Hospital of La Charité has been classed, yet it has been found so successful there, that authority, sanctioned by long experience, has prescribed this treatment to be adopted in all cases of *colique de plomb*.

On going round the wards of that hospital, I have heard the physicians remark, that in such a case

of colic they could have wished to have prescribed differently from what they had done, but that in such cases they were not at liberty so to do. This prescribed mode is too detailed to be given here, but it can easily be referred to. It consists of a variety of remedial agents, differently combined in the forms of emetics, purgatives, enemata, sudorifics, diluents, narcotics, and baths ; all of which are employed during the six or eight days the disease may continue.

After having myself been in the habit of using different remedies to promote the evacuation of the intestines, it occurred to me that if an enema were given during the time the patient was in a warm bath, it might then possibly be allowed to pass up the intestinal tube, and be retained so long as to accomplish the object of evacuating the intestines of their morbid secretion, and ultimately of restoring to them their healthy action ; accordingly I first made trial of this treatment in the following case.

May 15, 1838.—Matthew Proctor, age forty-five, for thirty years has been a plumber and painter ; ill five days, with severe pain coming on in fits over the abdomen, so as to bend him double ; has had no evacuation for five days past, though he has had mercury given, to which he attributes the present soreness of his mouth (but I have noticed in others suffering under a like attack of colic, tenderness of the gums, with a mercurial-like foetor, where no mercury had been given) ; afterwards he had five

doses of castor oil ; yesterday he had 3 grs. of opium in the morning and castor oil in the afternoon, when a mustard poultice was applied over the abdomen : still the bowels persist in the same state as they have been for the last five days. Now, abdomen very hard, but the severity of its pain is mitigated by pressure ; tongue white ; has had much sickness and frequent vomiting. This is his fourth attack of colic, but he has never had drooping of the wrists.

On admission he was put into a warm bath, and when he had been in it for some time, an elastic injecting tube was given him, with directions to employ it in trying to inject the water of the bath gradually up the intestines, and to persevere, should he feel no pain, nor unpleasant sensation, till he felt a sensation of fullness of the abdomen. In this he succeeded while he continued immersed in the bath ; shortly after, and before he quitted the bath, he had an evacuation of lumpy fæces. After leaving it, he was purged four or five times, and relieved from the pain. The next day he had an ounce of castor oil, with ℥. xx. Tinct. Opii, and a sinapism to the abdomen. The third day the bath and enema while in the bath were repeated ; after which, while he remained in the hospital, his bowels never required more than the mistura alba (sulph. mag. ʒss., carb. mag. gr. v., in mint water), two or three times a-day.

21st.—Free from pain ; bowels regular ; no complaint.

27th.—Quite well ; has had no relapse since the first enema in the bath : discharged.

July 19th, 1838.—John Winter, age thirty-nine, painter. Ill a month,—began with shooting pains in the back, stomach and belly ; weakness of the knees and ancles ; sensation as if cold water was running down them, accompanied with a gnawing pain. No appetite for the last ten days. Has had pains in the abdomen occasionally, for a month past ; while the pains lasted he could scarcely bear the abdomen to be touched with his hand, from its causing a painful and cold sensation. After these fits of pain had ceased he felt so drowsy, that he could fall asleep while standing ; when the pain was the most excruciating, he says the belly was drawn inwards towards the back. Six days ago he began to vomit for the first time, but felt sickness before at times. For the last four days the bowels have been confined, and he has suffered from severe cramp-like pains in the thighs, knees, calves, and ankles, to the end of the toes. Has had colic four times, three of which he has been under my care. The last time he says his bowels had been confined for nine days ; I then gave him small pills, and next day the bowels were opened. Three years ago when under my care, he says he was brought up in a chair, having then colic and paralysis of both arms and legs ; got well of both before leaving the hospital.

This time, on admission, he was immediately put

into a warm bath, and while there the water of the bath was used as an enema, in a short time he felt as if he was going to have a motion in the bath. Ten minutes after he had been out of the bath, he had a copious dark motion, with immediate relief from pain of the abdomen and lower extremities. The same evening the bath and enema were again given; shortly after leaving the bath he had three copious evacuations, and felt still better. A sinapism was applied to the abdomen, but he did not sleep well in the night. The next day the bath and enema were repeated: shortly after quitting the bath, he had two motions. Then the tongue became clean, skin moist, and abdomen supple.

23rd.—Continues free from pain; had a motion yesterday, and another to-day, without either bath or injection.

26th.—No pain in abdomen, but some pain and redness of the ankles and joints of fingers on the right side since yesterday.

30th. No return of the colic; complains of weakness, particularly in the hands; also of pain in the forehead and left side of the face. Teeth loose, gums swollen and vascular, has a nasty bitter taste in the mouth.

August 6th.—Discharged.

From the 20th to 30th, he had the *mistura alba* only. From the 30th till he went out, he had from one to two drachms of the carbonate of iron thrice a-day; and gr. v. of compound aloetic pill at bedtime.

In this and the following cases the water of the bath was injected by the attendant. It was only Proctor who injected it himself.

Thomas Graves, painter, admitted 22nd October 1839, age thirty. Ill six months ; began with sickness and vomiting ; for the first three or four days the bowels did not act, when his hands and legs became affected by cramps. Has suffered from sickness and vomiting, also from burning sensation in the stomach, almost every day since. Now is unable to straighten the last three fingers of the right hand ; left hand is weak ; has full use of the lower extremities ; never suffered from paralysis before, though he has had six or seven attacks of colic during the last six years. Bowels act by medicine.

The tendency to constipation here seemed only to be slight : but as the sickness continued frequent, and paralysis had commenced, also as he had now laboured so long under this, and had suffered so frequently before from other attacks of colic, a warm bath and enema were given, on supposition that there might be a retention of fecal matter in the intestines.

Had a copious lumpy evacuation in the bath, followed by others afterwards. Next day he felt greater relief than he had experienced for the last six months, and even longer, for he had previously not been entirely free from the effects of former attacks. A few days after, the appetite was better than it had been for six years past.

A fortnight after he complained again of sickness, which he now attributed to a blister that was applied to the wrist for the relief of the paralysis. He had two more baths and enemata, followed by copious evacuations both in and out of the bath.

December 4th.—Discharged.

William Laracey, painter, age forty, admitted 7th February 1840. Ill five days; began with pain over the lower part of the abdomen, followed by constipation and rejection of all ingesta. Now, slight weakness of the right wrist: has had colic several times before.

On admission, as the bowels had not acted for three or four days, he had a warm bath and enema, followed by a copious lumpy motion in the bath, and another in a quarter of an hour after he had left it; though he had no medicine, he had three more motions during the night. Strong foetor of breath, like that caused by mercury, but to which it cannot be traced; gums red and shrunk—blue at the edges of the teeth, which are loose. Mouth worse now than on former attacks. Next day he had another bath, without enema.

10th.—Very much better: to have Olei ricini ʒss. Tr. opii m. x.

12th.—Bowels have not acted for three days: to have the bath and injection; bowels were freely opened after he had been out of the bath a quarter of an hour, and twice more during the evening and following morning.

14th.—No pain ; abdomen supple, wants sleep ; breath continues bad, and teeth loose.

March 2nd.—Quite well ; discharged.

Richard Rawlins, painter, age forty-five ; admitted 13th August 1840. Ill a month ; began with violent head-ache ; sickness and vomiting at times, when the bowels were confined ; only slight pain over the abdomen : has been a painter for eighteen years, but has never had colic before. Now complains of sickness, vomiting, and confined bowels ; gums blue along the edges, breath foetid. For three days, previous to yesterday, the bowels had not acted, when they were opened by medicine.

On admission, he had the warm bath and enema ; after he had been an hour out of the bath the bowels acted ; and once again next morning, but only slightly ; then the bath and enema were repeated with effect.

17th.—Free from complaint ; discharged.

Elizabeth Hughes, age sixty-three, admitted 19th May 1840. Ill six weeks ; began with sickness, heart-burn, and frequent vomiting ; afterwards the bowels were confined. She first became ill at the time her rooms were being painted. Now the vomiting continues, and the bowels have not acted for three days. On admission she had the bath and injection ; while there passed a lumpy motion, and again, about half an hour after leaving the bath, she had a free evacuation, very dark, but not lumpy. After this she felt very comfortable, but had some griping pains in

the night. Next day she had *Pil. saponis cum opio* gr. v. ; *Olei ricini* ʒss.

21st.—*Haust. sennæ* co.

22nd.—Bowels freely opened.

June 5th.—Discharged, well.

I have also at different times used the same treatment in other cases of constipation, not attributed to lead. I shall only state one of these, the last of such cases so treated.

Jane —, aged thirty-five, admitted 21st Dec. 1840. Taken ill last night with violent pain in the ileo-cæcal region ; pain also in the limbs and back ; sickness, but no vomiting. Previously to this attack her bowels had been confined for a week, and have not yet acted. Subject to attacks of constipation since last June, when she suffered much from the effects of oxalic acid, and was under my care. On admission had a bath and injection, followed by a motion in the bath. After which the bowels were easily regulated by aperients.

Jan. 11th.—Discharged.

In concluding this paper, I may briefly notice that in all the preceding as well as other cases of constipation not here detailed, similar results have been obtained from the same treatment, and in no instance has there been a failure ; so that others may possibly be induced to try this simple method of treatment. If after their own experience of it, they should feel satisfied with its results, it will be for them to decide how far it may be extended to the prompt relief of sufferings, which, however severe,

are only trifling and transient in comparison to the paralysis which this disease, when neglected, or imperfectly cured at the commencement, so frequently entails on those whose subsistence depends on their manual exertions.