A RELATION
OF
SOME CASES
OF
MENTAL DERANGEMENT,
SUCCESSFULLY TREATED
BY THE
ACETATE OF MORPHIA,

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READ DECEMBER 23D, 1834.

It has been observed by many persons accustomed to the investigation of the bodies of maniacal patients after death, that the proportion in which appreciable organic disease is found is very small, compared with those cases in which no distinct alteration can be discovered in the substance of the brain, its membranes, or its vessels ; and that organic disease of the brain has been seen to exist to the greatest extent without necessarily impairing the functions of the mind.

Physicians have long since discovered, that inflammatory action, either acute or modified, which has long been looked to as the universal agent in the pro-

duction of disease in other parts of the body, has rarely any thing to do with the perverted perceptions and deranged appetites of the lunatic. To each of the great systems which maintain the body in health, peculiar functions are allotted, and the alterations of these functions constitute the peculiar diseases of such system. All are liable to inflammation, but the muscular system is provided with the peculiar function of contractility, which may be simply destroyed, as by the poison of lead, or greatly increased by employment and action, while the peculiar inherent qualities of the brain, perception and volition, may likewise be destroyed, diminished, or increased, and augmented beyond measure. The feeling transmitted by the sense of touch may be infinitely magnified or may not be perceived by the brain at all, and a series of hurried and irregular actions may be the result of the hasty manner in which volition is exercised.

Physicians, in treating mental diseases by blood-letting, were perhaps biassed by the observation of the peculiar structure of the veins of that organ, rendering stagnation of blood, consequent on any obstacle being presented to the return of the vital fluid to the right side of the heart, of frequent occurrence, and also from the prevalence of apoplexy, which has been more generally attributed to determinations of blood to that organ than to its true causes,—increased thickness of the left ventricle of the heart, and diminution of the elasticity of the smaller arteries of the brain by deposition of bone in their coats.

Experience has shewn that blood-letting in maniacal cases, unconnected with disease of other organs than the brain, is seldom attended with good effect, and of late years the soothing system has very generally been adopted by medical men, and founded as it is on true principles of pathology, is more likely to lead to success than any other. To diminish the increased and morbidly acute perceptions, and to effect a decrease in the sensibility of the organ, and to reduce the exaggeration of its natural functions, seems to be the great object; and so far from such a condition being always the result of too great a flow of blood to the head, morbidly stimulating the organ, it often occurs in those who have rather less blood than usual for the maintenance of life in the brain, occasioned by excessive evacuations, watching, anxiety, and bad living.

About three years ago I published some lectures on this subject, in which I spoke of the great advantage which had been derived at the large Lunatic Establishment on Bethnal Green, by the use of the preparations of morphia, under the care of Messrs. Beverley and Phillips, the superintendant and resident surgeon. Several cases have since occurred to me in private, in which the advantage of this practice has been so evident that I lay it before the Society, with the hope that in other hands it may be more extensively useful.

A lady, aged about forty-eight, was attacked in the month of August, 1833, (after exposure to severe

distress by the death of a relation who expired in her presence,) with mental derangement. Her usual habits of thinking were those of great deliberation; she had lived much in society, and from her station, mixed much with the world, nor had there at any time been any, even the slightest, indication of eccentricity or weakness of mind. Her mind was, at the time I saw her, filled with gloomy ideas; imaginary neglect of great and solemn duties, and a belief of having committed indescribable and even ill-defined crimes, constituted the principal features of her malady. Her bodily health was unusually robust, and she had scarcely ever suffered even from trifling bodily ailments. In the first instance the patient was bled, and took repeated doses of purgative medicine, but without any beneficial effect. The pulse was not weak; the nights were sleepless, and there was constant watchfulness present; there was no pain in the head, but a sense of weight was described, and there was restlessness of the body always present, so that the patient would often endeavour to jump out of bed and run about the room. During an unavoidable absence from London, the patient was seen by my friend Dr. Southey, and she was kept under nauseating doses of tartar emetic without any satisfactory result*.

It was now resolved to try the morphia, and a grain of the acetate was ordered to be taken every night, the bowels to be kept open by small doses of castor

* The patient was also twice seen, when in a state of progressive improvement, by Sir H. Halford.

oil ; the severity of the symptoms became greatly diminished, and it occurred to me that the sedative effect of cold would greatly assist the operation of the remedy. Ice was therefore kept to the head in a bladder, day and night. The morphia never failed to procure a good night, and thus by degrees, without any other remedy, except those mentioned, the mind cleared up. The use of ice was gradually abandoned, but the morphia continued to be administered every night during three months, although all trace of insanity had disappeared six weeks from the commencement of the employment of the remedies, during ten days of which the ice was kept constantly to the head. No relapse whatever has occurred in this patient.

CASE II.

A married lady, æt. about 34, the mother of several children, was attacked in October, 1833, on her journey to London, with maniacal derangement. I saw her first at about fifty miles from London, and the history of the attack was very confused. She had over-exerted herself previous to leaving a distant part of the country, and at this time the catamenia were present. They were, as it was reported, suddenly checked. She had been ill some days ; and there prevailed an idea in the minds of her medical attendants that there had been inflammation of the lungs. She had been purged, bled, and blistered ; the blood did not shew the inflammatory coat, and notwithstanding the evacuations her mind continued estranged ; the prevalent idea being fear of some ob-

ject near her, or of some serious accident having happened to those she most loved.

She was ordered half a grain of acetate of morphia immediately, to be repeated the same night. Great relief was experienced by sleep ; but the remedy was not repeated, and I was obliged to leave the patient, after seeing her once only.

About a fortnight from this time, the patient was removed to London and placed under my care. The mind was seriously affected, the patient was violent, and her imagination strangely disordered. She fancied her children were murdered, and their spirits returned to torment her, and that some similar evil menaced her husband. Her sleep was broken, and her conversation incoherent. The pulse was 100, and not strong. The tongue white, but not loaded ; there was no fever, but occasional flushing of the face. The catamenia had returned at the usual period. A grain of the acetate of morphia was ordered every night at bed-time, in the following draught :—

R Acet. morph. gr. j.

Acet. distillat ꝑ vj.

Misce et adde

Aquæ cinnamomi.

Aquæ fontan. āā 3 vj.

Tinct. Card. comp. 3 j. Misce.

Ft. Haustus omni nocte sumend.

Ice was also directed to be applied in a bladder

to the head, and the bowels were kept open every alternate morning, with either castor oil, or as much sulphate of magnesia in *infus. sennæ*, as would produce two dejections.

In three weeks from this time, I had the satisfaction of seeing the patient begin to recover. Her restoration to sanity was very gradual, and she required quiet during several months, but no perverted imagination was perceived during this period. No other treatment was adopted, with one exception, which is worthy of observation, as showing the different effects of morphia and opium in the same constitution, and the same disease.

When the patient was advancing towards convalescence, she was anxious to take an opiate draught, which had formerly been prescribed for her after her confinements, and from which she had derived much comfort, instead of the draught containing the morphia, and she was indulged in her desire; but the effects were widely different, the night was restless, and she awoke in great alarm, her tongue was furred, her head ached. Her imaginary misfortunes and crimes returned, and it was not until she had repeated the morphia for several nights that she regained the state of comparative quiet which terminated in recovery*.

There has been no relapse in this case.

* In this case I had the pleasure, on one occasion, of meeting Mr. Stone.

CASE III.

I was desired in August last to see a lady under the following circumstances. She had borne a child about six months previously, at a time when she was in great affliction by the desertion of her husband and pecuniary distress. Her confinement was followed by mental derangement, and when I saw her she was in a state of imbecility, unconscious of all which passed around. Aroused occasionally by the importunities of those who watched her, she uttered a short quick cry and relapsed into her usual state. Her fæces and urine were passed all unconsciously. The skin was cold, the pulse feeble, she never seemed to feel pain, nor did her hand wander to her head as if any painful affection of the brain existed.

I ordered her the acetate of morphia in the dose of a grain every night, and half an ounce of castor oil every alternate morning. In a week a slight amelioration of symptoms occurred, and at the expiration of a month she was manifestly conscious of my presence, took food of her own accord, and had been seen to open a book, and appeared to peruse it during some short time.

The recovery was now gradually progressing : at the expiration of the month of September she could understand every thing said to her, she was quite conscious of the calls of nature, she wrote a coherent and sensible letter, was enabled to see her friends,

her child, and to converse on her own prospects. Her mind is now feeble, though not insane ; she works, reads, and plays on the pianoforte, but does not appear to be capable of any considerable bodily or mental exertion. She still continues to take the morphia, and has done so uninterruptedly during four months*.

I will not detain the Society by more examples of the utility of this medicine in diseases of the mind, although I have seen several of a more chronic form experience great relief from its employment.

It appears to have been of more use in what is termed melancholia, where the mind is tortured by imaginary want, ruin, or crime, than where the derangement partakes of more brilliant ideas, as of super-human knowledge, dexterity, or wisdom ; or in those cases in which one single idea occupies and absorbs the mental powers.

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Dec. 20th, 1834.

* Since this paper was read before the Society, I have learned that no trace exists in this case of the malady under which the patient laboured ; she resides in the country, and is in perfect health.