ON THE EFFECT
OF
NITRATE OF SILVER
ON THE
COMPLEXION.

BY DR. BADELEY,
OF CHELMSFORD.

COMMUNICATED

BY SIR HENRY HALFORD, BART.

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ON reading the last Volume of your valuable Transactions, I was much pleased with seeing so many cases of successful treatment of epilepsy by argentum nitratum. They excited more than usual interest with me, from the peculiar dark colour of the skin agreeing exactly with one lately under my care. As the similar cases published by Dr. Roget are chiefly in foreign countries, and my patient is in this neighbourhood, retaining his saturnine colour, and willing at my request to wait upon the members of your Society for their inspection, I thought the case might be acceptable

to them. His name is Stephen Martin, of the Society of Friends, a young man about eighteen years of age, sensible and temperate. He had always good health till he was attacked with these fits. The first was previous to his leaving school, at the age of fifteen. From that time they returned at uncertain periods; but generally about three or four weeks. He could assign no reason for them; but they appeared to me to originate in the stomach: he had great acidity there. This symptom has always been so prevalent in those cases of epilepsy which I found curable, that it always gives me some hope of success. One of the nuns at a convent in this neighbourhood never went to sleep for some years without having a fit. She had acidity to the greatest possible degree, and said she could compare it to nothing but vitriol: it affected her teeth. This lady, from having fits every night, now has not one oftener than twice or thrice in a year; but I cannot ascribe this approach towards a cure solely to the Nitrate of Silver, because she took magnesia every night, and lime water twice a day. It however strengthens my hope of success when I meet with great acidity in cases of epilepsy, from the probability that the cause is then seated in the stomach.

As there was nothing uncommon in Martin's fits, I need not trouble the Society with a particular description of them. They left a violent pain in the head, and particularly in the eyes,

which continued the next day. Between the fits, and sometimes on their approach, he felt (to use his own words) “sensations, like flashes, or quick passing vapours behind his eyes, followed by a bewildering feeling, with a violent pulsation in his head, and a temporary deprivation of sight, so that he could see only a small part of an object at a time.” These sensations were removed with the fits by the use of *Argentum Nitratum*, *unassisted*, after leeches, blisters, emetics, mercurials, bark, steel, zinc, valerian, and turpentine had failed. The turpentine he soon discontinued, from the violent irritation it excited in the bladder. The *Argentum* was taken in doses of a grain to a grain and a half, three times a day, made into pills with crumb of bread, and continued a year and a half. By this alone the fits gradually lessened in frequency, till they entirely left him.

I have found it successful in other affections of the head, in which I was induced to try it, from their seeming approach or propinquity to epilepsy. In all these cases (four in number) it operated briskly on the bowels, producing four or five motions in a day. In Martin’s case it did not; but I have found it generally most successful when it purged. These cases were all attended with very great vertigo; and bleeding, both general and local, emetics, blisters, and (what seems extraordinary) purging by other medicines, had produced no good effect. It was remarkable, that in one of these cases, a

young man, who was very weak, partly from evacuations, and from having no appetite, although he had four or five motions from his medicine, they did not increase his debility ; and he begged of me not to check them, as he felt himself daily getting better. This man had been frequently purged by other cathartics without the least benefit.

Martin's case, added to those published by Dr. Roget, proves the efficacy of the Nitrate in many cases of epilepsy, when taken with patient perseverance in small doses ; and its failure I have thought probable, in as many, from the doses having been increased too fast and discontinued too soon. The dark colour in Martin's skin did not make its appearance till some months after the fits had left him. As there had been no return of his complaint, I had not seen him for a quarter of a year ; but upon calling, as I passed through the village, his mother desired me to observe the alteration that had taken place in his complexion. Not having then seen, or read of a similar effect from that medicine, and having given it in such small doses, I did not impute it to that cause. Indeed, the disease being cured, I paid little attention to his colour, till I read the cases published by Dr. Roget in your seventh Volume. These induced me to take an early opportunity of calling again, when I found the dark colour of his skin very greatly increased, although he had discontinued the Nitrate of Silver six months. It is now

near two years, and his face still retains the leaden colour: his bosom rather darker, with a purple hue; the roof of his mouth, inside of his cheeks, and back part of his tongue dark; the tunica sclerotica much discoloured. As blisters on negroes rise white, I applied two to Martin, and found they did the same, which, I think, proves the seat of the colour to be in the rete mucosum. He has been now perfectly free from any symptom of epilepsy during two years and a half.

As the Nitrate of Silver is so diffusive, and extends its effect to every part of the surface, may it not be beneficial in some cutaneous diseases? or be made, by combination, the conductor of some medicine more efficacious than itself? Might we not make one medicine the vehicle of another, through the medium of air, more frequently than we do? Medicated air is seldom used except to correct that which is mephitic; but as all medicines naturally impart their virtues to the air when exposed to it; why should we not more frequently make use of what nature takes every opportunity of so liberally offering? We know that turpentine quickly communicates its odor to the urine of a person sitting in the same room with it; and many painters have told me, that they do not feel the pernicious power of lead when they paint with it unmixed with turpentine, but soon feel its deleterious effect when united. A maid-servant of mine lost her speech and became paralytic from be-

ing six hours in a newly-painted room, but quickly recovered upon being removed. If then turpentine so soon convey the pernicious power of the oxide of lead, may it not in like manner be made the beneficial conductor of the oxide of mercury? May not children, and patients who cannot or will not admit mercury in any other mode, receive much benefit in many diseases by sleeping in rooms, the air of which is strongly impregnated with turpentine, or with æther, loaded with mercury?

I beg pardon of the Society for deviating from the original subject of this paper; but I wish to call more attention to this neglected part of the practice; and it is no weak argument in its favour, that administering medicines through the medium of air, will be inlisting so many more auxiliary *light troops* into the service, without superseding the use, or interrupting the march, of the *heavy artillery*.