NOTES

ON

ALPINE SUMMER QUARTERS FOR INVALIDS IN 1869.*

By CHARLES J. B. WILLIAMS, M.D., F.R.S.

WHEN it is authentically stated that several consumptive patients have passed the winter in the upper Engadine, not merely without suffering, but with considerable benefit to their general health, and with marked diminution of the symptoms and signs of disease in the lungs, the matter becomes one of fact, not of reasoning or opinion. But it is of the utmost importance to test the accuracy of the fact by adequate investigation. I have had no opportunity of personally examining any of the patients who are said to have benefited by passing the winter in the Engadine. Dr. Berry, the intelligent resident physician at St. Moritz, informed me that he had the history of ten or twelve such cases, several of which had been formerly under my care. My recollection of most of these is imperfect, but the following I have been able to identify.

Mr. S., aged 20, consulted me on August 2nd, 1865. At the age of ten, he had glandular swellings in the neck, which gathered and remained open for twelve months. Last autumn, he was much reduced by a local inflammation, and leeching for it; and remained weakly through the winter, with a slight cough. In May, he coughed up three ounces of blood; and, a few days afterwards, half a pint. He was treated with lead first, and subsequently with iron. The bowels were often constive. I found some dulness and rough breath-sound in the upper right back. There was slight bronchophony above the right scapula. I prescribed for him cod-liver oil in a mixture containing phosphoric acid, hypophosphite of lime, and strychnia; an occasional aloetic pill; and tincture of iodine externally. To winter at Torquay.

I heard nothing more of him till August 1869, when his father called on me at Samaden, and told me that his son had continued my treatment with considerable benefit, and passed the winter at Torquay. He had little cough; but there were occasional recurrences of hæmoptysis, and he several times expectorated calcareous matter.

In June 1866, he went to Silvaplana, in the upper Engadine; and from that time there was no recurrence of hæmorrhage. The pulse gradually was reduced from 108 to 70, and the respirations from 28 to 18, with a corresponding improvement of strength and activity. The three subsequent winters he has passed at St. Moritz, going out daily, and enjoying skating, sledging, and other winter exercises, with impunity.

In this case, there had never been much cough or other symptoms of bronchial or pulmonary irritation. The disease was in a quiescent state when he first went to the Engadine; and, going there in the summer season, there was time for acclimatisation before the severe weather set in. Such, in truth, seem to me to be the chief conditions most favourable to safety and success in trials of the *Alpine cure* of consumption. To send patients in advanced, or even recent, *active* disease, with its attendant local inflammations and congestions, and with the general weakness of circulation and no power of resistance against cold, to such a climate as that of the Engadine in the beginning of winter, does seem most rash and irrational. But, in cases where the pulmonary deposits are moderate in amount, and attended with little vascular irritation, and especially when the system is relaxed, and there is a consciousness of refreshment and invigoration in a dry cool air—under such circumstances, a mountain residence offers the best promise.

Such a condition, favourable for the *mountain cure*, is not unfrequently presented by pulmonary invalids who have passed the winter in a warm situation, such as Mentone, Cimiez, Hyères, or Pau. By these means, and by appropriate treatment, the disease has been brought into a quiet state; but the patient may have become more or less relaxed and weakened by the increasing heat of May and June. Then, with proper precautions in the way of clothing and choice of weather, the ascent to the higher region may be made with great probable benefit; and, should that benefit continue during the summer months, with improved strength and breath, and power to endure the changes of temperature occurring even at that season, there will be encouragement to

prolong the stay through the winter, and thus prove the further efficacy of the mountain abode.

And now a few words as to the selection of this mountain residence; for other points besides altitude require consideration. What absolute height—whether at 6,000 or 5,000 feet above the level of the sea—may be best, is yet to be determined by experience; but there can be little doubt that *shelter from the coldest winds, an aspect favourable to receive all the sunshine obtainable in the winter, a dry unswampy soil, and a comfortable house, with well regulated stoves to warm, and a well supplied larder to feed, the winter inmates—will be essential to their well-doing.*

Of the villages in the upper Engadine—St. Moritz, Samaden, Camper, Silvaplana, and Pontresina—all have hotels and boarding-houses; but the latter three of these are open only during the short summer season of three months. Pontresina, from its exposed situation, open to north and east, and its proximity to the snow-mountains and glaciers of the Bernina range, is wholly unsuited to invalids even in summer. Silvaplana and Camper are sheltered from the north; but, being higher up the valley than St. Moritz, and between the lakes of the Inn, they are draughty, and liable to evening chills from the sheets of cold water. The Kurhaus of St. Moritz is in even a worse position; for it stands on a flat ground, very little above the lake. In fact, when I first visited it, seven years ago, this ground was little better than a swamp. Part of it has since been raised, and converted into a garden and croquet-ground; but the whole establishment is so far from the mountains which protect the village of St. Moritz to the north, is so much under the shade of the huge pine-clad Piz Rosatch to the south, and so open over the lake to the east and up the valley to the west, that it may be said to be open to every wind that blows; and, even in the summer, it must be both damp and draughty. The village of St. Moritz is much more favourably placed, being 400 feet above the lake, and 6,085 above the sea, and considerably sheltered to the north by the mountains of the Julier pass, and to the east by a wooded hillock, which bars the valley, and forms the east bank of the lake. The hotels and boarding-houses here have more or less the advantage of this shelter, and of a declivity fully facing the south. The Rev. Mr. Stretzell has built a comfortable house above any of the others on this slope, and he believes it to be the highest gentleman's residence in Europe. He told me that so warm are the sun's rays, even in winter, in this high yet sheltered spot, that the inmates have sometimes been able to sit with open windows, and even in the open air. The rooms are well warmed by means of the ordinary German stove; but this causes an excessive dryness and close feeling in the air, which is neither healthy nor agreeable. It is said that ventilation may be safely supplied by occasionally opening a window; and the extreme dryness may be prevented by placing on the stove shallow vessels of water. It appears, however, that as yet only one of the hotels has been kept open during the winter; and, as there have been hardly enough guests to make it profitable, it is doubtful whether any will be available for the coming winter.

The remaining village in the upper Engadine is Samaden, which stands at the height of 5,600 feet above the sea, and about 100 feet above the valley of the Inn. It is well sheltered by the grassy slopes of high mountains to the north, and less completely to the east; and has the advantage of a fine view of the Bernina range to the west, which, being distant, does not shut out the Inn so much as the nearer mountains to the south of St. Moritz. Still there is a high range due south of Samaden; and this is the common disadvantage of the whole Engadine during the winter, that high mountains to the south shut out much of the sun's light and heat. Another objection to Samaden is the somewhat marshy character of the valley at this part, the waters of the Inn sometimes spreading over its flat alluvium. I have seen, in the early morning, a thin stratum of fog brooding over this, like that on the lake and flat about the Kurhaus of St. Moritz. Still the Bernina Hotel stands sufficiently high above this not to suffer materially from its influence. I have already spoken favourably of this hotel and its manager, M. Franconi; and, as it is the only hotel which is constantly kept open during the winter, it must be considered the head-quarters of those who intend to make a long sojourn in the upper Engadine. I found in the *livre des voyageurs* several testimonials from those who had wintered there, speaking in strong terms of the benefit which they had gained in their health, and of their entire satisfaction with the care and attention bestowed on them by M. and Mme. Franconi.

I have already adduced many proofs that the upper Engadine is too high and too cold even in the summer for the comfort and well-being of delicate invalids, and even of some persons in health; and it becomes a question whether sufficiently cool and bracing summer resorts may not be found at a somewhat lower elevation, and so accessible, and with such comfortable accommodation, as to make them available.

* Continued from page 552 of last number.

Lower down in the valley of the Engadine, at an elevation of 4,000 feet, is the large newly built bathing establishment of Tarasp-Schuls, with accommodation for three hundred persons. The mineral waters, both for drinking and for baths, saline, chalybeate, and sulphurous, are the great attraction; the saline, which are also alkaline, being stronger than those of Carlsbad or Kissingen. But the situation may also be recommended as a cool summer residence, being shaded by lofty and well wooded mountains to the south, with varied walks and drives on a dry soil, and with pure air. The high southern screen, however, unfits it for a winter abode; and it has no protection from the eastern blasts which come up the valley.

There is a considerable hotel, or Kurhaus, at Davos am Platz, situated in a high valley to the north of the Engadine, near the Strela pass. It stands about 5,000 feet above the sea, and is much frequented, on account of its cool pure air, and the whey-cure which is carried on there. I have passed some days there, and found the air pure and invigorating, where not contaminated by the effluvia of *liquid manure*, so profusely laid on the pastures in many parts of Switzerland—no doubt very good for the vegetation, but wholly spoiling the fragrance of the mountain breeze. How the composts or cesspools for these manures haunt you wherever you go among the high Alps! Even at Zermatt, that village of glaciers, at Brenil, on the other side of the Matterhorn—places from six to seven thousand feet high—and at most of the high mountain *châlets*, where you might expect to be above such nuisances, and to breathe the pure air of heaven, you find it poisoned by the stench from these cloacæ, in which purity and health are sacrificed on the altar of utilisation! However, although I happened to encounter this nuisance at Davos, it might have been accidental. The place has a reputation for great purity of air. One of my phthisical patients spent six weeks there this summer, and improved in appetite and general health, but without change for the better in the lungs; and he complained much of the dulness of the place. It is not likely to be suitable for winter-residence, as it has little or no shelter from cold winds.*

It was a chief object of my present tour to find a high site for summer sojourn, less in extremes than the Engadine, better sheltered from the bleak north and eastern winds; and the new baths of Bormio, on the south ascent of the Stelvio pass, seemed likely to answer to this description. The pamphlet of my friend Dr. Fedeli (*Sulle Acque Termali e Fianghi di Bormio*), and the fuller treatise of Drs. Meyer-Ahrens and Brügger (*Die Thermen von Bormio*), both published in the present year, had directed my attention to this place; and to these I must refer for details respecting the composition and properties of the waters, and their sundry applications for the cure of disease. My concern was chiefly with the situation as a mountain-residence for the many in summer, and possibly for the few in winter also.

I may as well take the reader with us in our way from the Engadine. On the 23rd of August, we left Samaden at five o'clock, to cross the Bernina, on a fine morning, with not a cloud to be seen; but the valley of the Inn and the grass-fields of Pontresina were white with frost. And, mounted on the *banquette* of the diligence, and whilst gazing with admiration on the magnificent views of mountain-peaks, pine-woods, snow-fields, and glaciers, which the zigzags command in such variety, I was right glad to rise above the cold shade of the Piz Languard group into the sunshine of the little valley in which lie, side by side, the Lago Nero and Lago Bianco—the one pouring its waters into the Adriatic, the other into the Black Sea. Above these, near the summit of the pass, at a height of 7,600 feet, stands the new Bernina Hotel, with fair accommodation, to tempt those aspiring individuals who do not find the Engadine high enough. It is a bleak dreary spot, more suitable to Alpine Club men than to invalids.

Beautiful as are the views in the ascent of the Bernina pass from Pontresina, those on the descent to Poschiavo are even more striking, from the greater depth and steepness of the valley into which the zigzag and serpentine versatility of the road carried us. At first, from the giddy heights of savage mountain-tops, diversified only with snow-peaks and glaciers, we gaze down into the blue haze beneath, and, in the far distance, discern the tracery of a rich valley, speckled here and there with buildings and towers, looking like a fairy-land below us. Not many minutes elapse, as we are rapidly whirled down, before we find ourselves among trees and shrubs—quite novelties, after the scanty silva of the Engadine. Birch, beech, ash, elm, oak, and chestnut, now appeared in succession; then acacias, contrasting their varied hues of verdure with the sombre pine and dark brown rocks; and soon the vine, the gourd, and other luxuriant creepers, gave tokens of the entire change of climate which we had made in this rapid descent. Poschiavo, the first town in the valley, is only 3,300 feet above the sea; so that, in little more than an hour, we had made a descent of more than 4,000 feet.

* Dr. Mayer-Ahrens gives the mean temperature of the whole year at Davos at 37° Fahr.

Poschiavo is not a good halting-place; but three miles beyond, on the brink of the lovely little lake of the Posciavino, stands the very comfortable hotel and bathing establishment of Le Prese, in the manager of which I was pleased to recognise an old acquaintance, M. Mella, formerly the proprietor of the Grande Bretagne at Bellagio, on Lake Como, who had made that delightful hotel so attractive to travellers. The mineral water is alkaline, sulphurous, and very slightly chalybeate. It is a cold spring; but there is a steam apparatus for heating the water for the baths, which are newly constructed of Italian marble. The waters are said to be particularly efficacious in dyspepsia, skin-diseases, chronic rheumatism, and scrofula.

The moderate height of Le Prese—about 3,000 feet—and its situation in a narrow valley flanked on either side with lofty mountains, would prevent us from considering it a very bracing or invigorating place; but it is much cooler than the Italian lakes generally, and presents a pleasant intermedium for spring and early summer, between those and the higher stations, and may prove cool enough in summer for many who have passed their winter in the Riviera or in South Italy.

From Le Prese the road descends 1,500 feet in ten miles, to the opening of the Val di Poschiavino into the Valtelline at Tirano, a thoroughly Italian town. From this the road gradually ascends all the way to Bormio; and the sooner travellers can get up the Valtelline, the better; for, like all the low Italian valleys, it is as malarious and unhealthy to animal life, as it is luxuriant and rich in vegetation. The tumultuous Adda, fed by a thousand mountain-torrents, is continually depositing an alluvium of mud on all the flatter parts of its course, which, forming a rich swampy soil, becomes, in the summer-heat, a hotbed for vegetable growth, but a reeking source of miasmata to man. It is, indeed, a sad and striking contrast to see under luxuriant vines, hanging in rich clusters among the gigantic maize-stalks, all teeming with fertility, the sallow peasants, with haggard faces and goitrous necks, many stunted and deformed, and very few presenting the complexion or configuration of health. This remark applies more to the lower Valtelline, from Tirano to Colico, than to the upper portion; and the improvement in the aspect of the inhabitants as we ascended the valley was very remarkable. At Bolladore, the flat part of the valley, with its exuberant fertility, ceases; and, after passing through a fine grove of Spanish chestnuts, the road enters the narrow defile of La Serra, with its stupendous walls of perpendicular rock, separating the rich Valtelline from the *paese freddo*, as the upper or Bormio end of this valley is termed. This, although bounded on every side by lofty mountains or savage rocks, is not wanting in brightness or fertility. The valley, emerging from the gorge, is first narrow, with wooded knolls beneath the towering mountains, but above expands into an undulating plateau of green fields, beyond which, on the right front, stands the dilapidated little city of Bormio; and to the left, on a rocky slope, the large establishment of the Bagni Nuovi, with the irregular buildings of the Bagni Vecchi beyond, at a greater height; niched at the foot of the great rocky barrier of the Stelvio mountains, which here terminate in perpendicular cliffs, as rugged and savage as weather-scarred limestone can make them.

[To be concluded.]

TWO CASES OF SUDDEN BLINDNESS: OPACITIES IN VITREOUS HUMOUR.

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THE following cases will, I think, prove interesting from the peculiarity of their history. After diligent search, I have failed to find the record of any similar case.

CASE I.—A woman, who had the appearance of enjoying good health, and who stated that she was only 45 years of age (although she seemed considerably older), gave the following history.

On March 6th, 1867, when in the enjoyment of perfect vision, she looked for a length of time through a piece of smoked glass at the sun (eclipse). Directly afterwards, she commenced washing some clothes, when, much to her surprise, they appeared black and yellow. This curious condition of coloured vision lasted an hour; then her sight again became normal, and continued so three days. Early on the fourth day, she experienced "a curious sensation in the head", and immediately afterwards the left eye became dark, and remained so up to the time of examination (March 19th).

The eye was well formed, the cornea was bright, and the anterior chamber normal in size. The iris was healthy, but the pupil was fully dilated and motionless. Tension,—1. The movements of the eye were well performed. The ophthalmoscope showed a large floating body in