NOTES

OF

ONE HUNDRED CASES OF CHOREA TREATED
IN THE WORCESTER INFIRMARY.By WILLIAM STRANGE, M.D.,
Senior Physician to the Infirmary.*[Concluded from page 70.]*

IN stating that chorea has alliances with other disorders of a neurotic character, I was not quite accurate. It would be more proper to say that there are cases of a mixed kind; some of which show a leaning towards chorea, others towards hysteria, and others, again, towards pure eclampsia. Moreover, do we not often meet with cases in which the moral faculties are even less under control than the centres which govern the muscular motions—cases in which the emotions and passions are so little under the control of the judgment and the will as to constitute a true moral chorea—if I may use such an expression? There are children, and young people, whose bent and inclination for mischief and wickedness are so active and persistent, that they cannot keep from evil-doing. The feelings are as mobile and unstable in these subjects as the muscular movements are in true chorea.

Nay, may we not carry the analogy a step further, and say that the very highest centres—the intellectual faculties themselves—sometimes become dominated by the choreic element? that there are cases in which the judgment is so vacillating, and the association of ideas, and the reasoning from those ideas, are so grotesque and inane, that no dependence can be placed upon the conclusions at which such persons will arrive from given data, nor upon the actions which may result from their conclusions? And this I would venture to call chorea of the mind. It is not pure insanity, because the symptoms are not the same. There are no persistent delusions, nor that entire absence of power to weigh their thoughts and actions in the scale of right and wrong (conscience) which generally obtains in the really insane.

In the *Medical Times and Gazette*, about three years ago, Dr. Octavius Sturges made some remarks bearing upon this point in the nature of chorea, which may be profitably read in connection with what has been stated above. Dr. Sturges advocates almost exclusive attention to the moral treatment of choreic patients, and thinks that sufficient in a great many cases, without any physic at all. It is the satisfaction I feel in agreeing generally with such an observer as Dr. Sturges, that emboldens me to differ, in some measure, from the conclusions which he draws from the facts narrated. In advocating the sufficiency of mere moral treatment of chorea—which, by the way, can only be successfully applied in hospitals—Dr. Sturges appears to me to be combating his enemy with one arm tied behind him. He makes little of cardiac mischief, embolism, and profound injury to the motor nervous centres, thinking them of very rare occurrence. It is sufficient for him (as for myself) that his little patients are generally weak and delicate children, chiefly girls; and that the symptoms have a general resemblance to those of hysteria and its congeners in functional nerve-disorder, which we are in the habit of attributing to malnutrition, either primary, or secondary to some other disturbing accident. If this be the true pathology of chorea, it appears to me to be an error in logic to discard the use of therapeutic means of improving the nutrition of the nerve-centres, whilst we apply moral training to strengthen the judgment and the will. We have to deal, as Dr. Sturges admits, with a weak and delicate frame, a nervous and timid temperament, and a feeble circulation, often accompanied by palpitations, resulting from rapid growth. There are also pallor, loss of appetite and flesh (one never sees a plump girl the subject of chorea), and deranged or suppressed menstruation, if the period of the latter have arrived.

Whilst agreeing, then, with Dr. Sturges, that the child should be treated with kindness and gentleness, and that its confidence should be gained by evident solicitude for its welfare; the judicious strengthening of the system by a tonic course of medicine, and the training of the limbs by frictions and gymnastic exercises, will be found equally valuable remedies, which will go hand in hand with the moral treatment. All this can be best carried out in hospital. Home influences, whether in the houses of the rich or of the poor, are too often antagonistic to the child's recovery; scolding, on the one hand, and weak indulgence, on the other, must be alike prejudicial.

If these ideas as to the nature and causes of chorea and its congeners be founded in fact, little need be said as to the medicinal treatment of the disease. There being nothing special in the coarse pathology of chorea, no specific remedy is required, or likely to be found if required. We must ring the changes upon the so-called nervine tonics, and vary them according to the temperament of the child, or to the collateral symptoms accompanying the choreic movements. If pallor, palpitations, and loss of weight exist, iron, or arsenic, or both, will be necessary. If, on the contrary, the vascular system be sufficiently full, and the motile element prevail, then the bromides with ammonia, or the succus conii, will be of most avail. Frequently, whatever the condition of the vascular system and of the general nutrition, no good arrives until we have succeeded, by sedatives, in calming the excessive mobility of the nervous system. In these cases, I have used the ice-bag to the spine, and the ether spray to the nape of the neck, but not with much success. Direct calmatives—digitalis, belladonna, cannabis Indica, with the bromides—answer the best.

The nervous symptoms once quieted, iron or arsenic may now be given, and carried to a somewhat high degree. Some have recommended large doses of arsenic, ten to fifteen minims of Fowler's solution; but I have seldom found that the stomach will tolerate these large doses, and have contented myself with much smaller, in combination with iron or zinc.

But, whatever be the remedy we select, it will be necessary to continue its administration until it has produced its special physiological effect. Especially is this necessary with the neurotic sedatives. Children bear large doses of belladonna and conium; and I have never found this class of remedy do much good until their full physiological effects (consistent with safety) have been produced.

Up to the year 1868, I had treated all my hospital cases of chorea with wine alone, the ordinary port wine of the hospital. After clearing out the *primæ viæ*, to make sure that we were not worried by entozoa, or depraved alvine secretions, I began to give wine in doses of three to six ounces daily. I do not recollect that this plan failed of curing the patient in one single instance, and that in a much shorter time than by any other remedy, or than has been the case since. On reading my experience of this plan at the meeting of the Association at Oxford in that year, it was suggested to me by the late Dr. Anstie that the wine should be mixed with some bitter infusion, such as quassia, to ensure the patient getting it instead of the nurse, or some other occupant of the ward. It is a curious fact that, after mixing the wine with quassia or gentian, it did not answer anything like so well as the wine alone had done. At all events, it took much longer to cure the cases than had formerly been the case. I was, therefore, led to believe that the cases with which I now had to deal differed in some way from those treated up to the time of the Oxford meeting. I therefore substituted some other kind of medicament. I have since recurred to the wine without admixture with a bitter; and find that it now answers quite as well as formerly. I can only account for this fact on the supposition that, when mixed with a bitter tonic, like quassia, the wine was not so grateful to the stomach, and, therefore, had a less rapid effect. From three to six weeks is the time for a cure to be effected in the average of cases of chorea by this mode of treatment.

Nothing need be said about the treatment of this disease as given by the older authors. Their pathology of it was wrong, and the treatment altogether to be condemned. Thus Hamilton of Edinburgh purged, as he did in almost every other disease; Trousseau bled his patients; whilst still older authors ordered the patient to be taken to the side of a river and suddenly pushed in, so as to give him a sharp shock or fright—in this respect, forestalling the doctrines of homœopathy.

BEQUESTS AND DONATIONS.—Mr. William Edward Buck of Torquay bequeathed £500 to the Earlswood Asylum for Idiots, £100 to the Warwick Dispensary, and £100 to the Warneford Hospital, Leamington.—“L. A. W.” has given £100 to the Hospital for Women.—The Great Northern Hospital has received £80 from the Ladies' Association of the Hospital (£40 for the general fund, and £40 for the building fund).—The Grocers' Company have given £50 to the North-Eastern Hospital for Children.—“A Grateful Patient” has given £50 towards the rebuilding of the Hospital for Diseases of the Throat and Chest.—The Middlesex Hospital has received £100 from Miss Ellen Priestley (£50 for the Cancer wards, and £50 for the Samaritan fund); £50 from the Rev. H. R. Haweis, being the half of a collection at St. James's, Marylebone, on Hospital Sunday; thirty guineas from Mr. Charles Thurburn towards the general fund; and £20 from Mr. Joseph Hoare for the Cancer wards.—The National Hospital for Consumption at Ventnor has received a legacy, with interest, of £536 10s. 8d., under the will of the late Mrs. Caroline Batty.