PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL

And Retrospect of the Medical Sciences.

No. 25.—VOL. II.]

LONDON, SATURDAY, SEPT. 24, 1842.

PRICE SIXPENCE.
[Stamped Edition Sevenpence.]

A CASE

UNSUCCESSFULLY TREATED BY THE HYDROPATHIC METHOD, WITH REMARKS.

By CHARLES HASTINGS, M.D., F.G.S.,

Physician to the Worcester Infirmary, and Secretary to the
Provincial Medical and Surgical Association.

It may well be doubted whether there is any country on the face of the earth in which quackery is so successfully followed as in rich and credulous England. Germany—mystical Germany—may be more favorable for the friendly reception of paradoxical systems of medical theory and practice, and for the fostering and incubating hypothetical and fanciful notions of therapeutic agents; but she must yield the palm to England in the practical application of those faculties to the gullibility of the public, and to the capability of turning these discoveries to the more homely purpose of filling the pockets of those who deal in these mysterious modes of conferring health and long life on the community at large. John Bull is himself too honest to condescend to these pitiful practices; and hence, good soul! he never suspects that the wily and the presumptuous can pluck him with impunity.

The water-cure has been introduced into this country with such pomp and ceremony, and its claims to distinction, as the most effectual means of dismissing all the pains which flesh is heir to, have been set forth with such unblushing effrontery, that those unaccustomed to consider the devious and dishonest courses, which in all ages have been resorted to, in order to prop up fallacious systems, might have been led to think, that at length some important discovery had been accidentally stumbled upon by a German peasant, and that, henceforth, the age of man was to be prolonged, and his pains and calamities would be relieved.

Malvern has become the resort of one of the heroes of this new system of delusion, and he has, of course, made many cures; in fact, he is infallible, and the following case having fallen under my observation, I deem it not unworthy the perusal of your readers.

Master D., aged five, was perfectly well on coming to Malvern on the 22nd of July. About the 27th he began to look languid, and he continued to get rather worse, but not so as to be confined to the house until the 30th of that month; on that day he appeared feverish and irritable, and the tongue was reddish; he had been frightened on that day by a donkey falling, and for some days before had eaten heartily of improper food. The water-doctor saw him on that day, and said he had gastric irritation, and that he would be well in a day or two. He ordered the bowels to be fomented with flannels wrung out of hot water, till perspiration came

No. 104.

on; he did not allow him anything but toast and water.

On the 31st the doctor said he was much better; but he remained feverish in the evening and cooler in the morning for several days. For the first four days the fomentations were continued whenever he was feverish.

He had one dose of castor oil given him on the 5th of August, which brought away a confined motion.

On the 6th he had an injection, and again on the 8th.

Up to this time he remained about the same—that is, alternately cool and rather feverish, and the appetite but little impaired.

From Wednesday, July 27, he had one or two wet sheets applied twice every day—one sheet for a quarter of an hour and the other for half an hour. This cooled him, but he screamed and struggled against it so violently every time, that the sheet was with difficulty wrapped around him. Every time after the application of the sheet he was put into a bath of water, the chill of which was just taken off. He screamed all the time he was in the bath, and struggled most resolutely, especially when the water was poured on his head, so that he was with difficulty kept in the water. He was in each bath from five to ten minutes. This process was continued till August 16th. For the last four days he became much weaker; a nervous terror came over him, and the sheet and bath became more frightful to him. From the 6th of August till the 13th there was no motion from the bowels, and the water-doctor said it was of no consequence, as he took but little, and that it was all absorbed, consequently *there was nothing to come away*.

On the 12th of August pain in the bowels came on, and increased in violence on the 13th; when he had an injection given him, which operated, and he had another in the evening.

During this day, the 13th, the bowels were moved seven times, and an immense quantity of hard motion passed away, and there was considerable pain in the bowels. All this time the wet sheet and bath were continued twice a day.

On the 14th he was pretty quiet, but on the 15th and 16th he suffered great pain in the bowels, and was a little feverish at times, and then cool.

A glyster was administered to the child on the evening of the 15th of August, and again on the morning of the 16th; after which, on the same day, in consequence of the earnest entreaties of the mother, two teaspoonfuls of castor oil were given to him. This produced several bilious motions.*

On the evening of the 16th of August I first saw the little patient, who was then certainly in a very pitiable

* In order to secure accuracy in detail, I have taken down the case so far from the dictation of the parents of the child.

ble state. I never in my life saw distress more strongly depicted on any countenance. A nervous terror appeared to have seized him, and when I went near him he screamed loudly, and subsequently when I was sitting by him, and some water in a tub near him was moved, he dreaded being put into it so much that I thought he would have been seized with convulsions. When he became a little composed I examined him carefully, and found the pulse very quick, the tongue coated, and several of the papillæ red and elevated; the skin was hotter than natural, and dry; the abdomen was rather full and tender; a motion which had passed from him during the day was bilious, and rather relaxed and mixed with some mucus.

I recommended for him a powder consisting of *hyd. c. cretâ*, Dover's powder, and rhubarb, to be taken at bed-time, and a mixture of sweet spirits of nitre (Minderus' spirit) and camphor julep to be taken every four hours, and to be sponged with vinegar and water whenever the surface was hot.

On the 17th of August I found the patient better. He had slept a little during the night, and was altogether more composed, although still under great apprehension; the pulse was quieter; the tongue rather cleaner; three evacuations had passed from the bowels, which had a bilious appearance; the abdomen was not so full, and was less tender when pressed upon. The powder was repeated at bed time, and the mixture every four hours; the sponging also was continued.

On the 18th the child was improved, but still was in a very nervous and excitable state; the pulse continued quiet, and the tongue furred; the appearance of the motions was more natural; he continued the mixture, and omitted the night powder.

I do not feel it necessary to continue the daily reports of the case, as in a few days the child became convalescent, and, although so reduced in flesh and strength as to be unable to move, yet no untoward symptom occurred, and very little aperient medicine was required. The child was, however, so far an invalid as to require my daily attendance for three weeks, as the mucous membrane of the stomach and bowels remained in a very irritable state, and the motions were unnatural, and mucus was mixed with them. A mixture of sesqui-carbonate of soda, infusion of rhubarb, and camphor julep appeared to be useful in this respect, and succeeded in relieving the mucous membrane, and keeping the bowels regular. As, however, the symptoms subsided, and the only remaining uncomfortable circumstance was an unnatural acid smell in the motions, I ultimately recommended ten drops of Brandish's alkali to be taken in decoction of liquorice three times a day, and this seemed to act favorably in improving the condition of the digestive organs. I may further remark, that during the progress of recovery great attention was paid to diet, and after the appetite became considerable, which it did as the child became convalescent, great care was taken not to allow too much food to be eaten.

On the 7th of September the child was so far recovered as to be taken a journey into Shropshire, and I saw the child again on the 15th of September, when he had nearly recovered his flesh and strength, and appeared to be well in every respect.

REMARKS.

1. The cold water system was fairly tried for fourteen days in a very simple form of gastric derangement, and completely failed; for at the end of fourteen days the child was so weak and emaciated, and in such a state of nervous terror, that in all probability had the plan been followed out for a much longer time, in conformity with the water-doctor's wishes, some serious result would have happened; and it must not be forgotten that in this very case the water-doctor assured the friends that his system would cure the patient in two days.

2. The nervous terror produced on the child, by persevering in the wet sheet and bath against his wishes, was in itself calculated to do mischief, and to retard recovery; indeed, in a child of so susceptible a nervous system, it might have produced convulsions; so that the water cure is not in all cases the *safe* remedy it is represented to be; besides which, the circumstance of allowing seven days to pass by without an action of the bowels was very injurious to the patient; and the ridiculous remark, that the contents of the bowels would all be absorbed, could not fail to be remembered by the parents, and to open their eyes to the deception that was being practised upon them; for soon afterwards a large quantity of solid fæces was discharged from the bowels.

3. There is every reason to believe, from the ready manner in which the symptoms gave way to mild treatment, that if the child had, in the first instance, been treated by mild alteratives and aperients, it would have speedily recovered, instead of having to endure an illness of five weeks' duration.

4. May we not hazard an opinion, that if death had occurred in this instance, from the very injudicious use of the water system, a jury of upright and honest men might, in the faithful discharge of their duty, have brought in a verdict of manslaughter against the author of this suffering and untimely death?

It will not, of course, be supposed from the foregoing remarks, that I, in any way, intend to deny the efficacy of water as a remedial agent in the cure of disease. The history of medicine, from Hippocrates downwards, teems with facts illustrative of its beneficial agency. It is only the monstrous doctrine of the hydropathists, that water should become a *substitute* for all other remedies, that these remarks are intended to controvert. That it is an important *adjuvant* to other remedies no reflecting physician ever dreamt of controverting. The application of cold and warm water in almost every form of disease is a practice so common, that one cannot for a moment conceive how the claim of novelty can be set up for it by the most ignorant pretender. Let any sceptic upon this point take the trouble of referring to the works of Van Der Heyden, Floyer, Hancocke, Wall, Currie, Kinglake, and Macartney, and his doubts will very soon be resolved. In short, if he be honest and really desirous for truth in his inquiry, he will be very apt to come to the conclusion that all that is new in the dogmas of this modern empirical sect is not true; and all that is true is not new.

Worcester, September 17, 1842.