important of these symptoms I will now enumerate, and 1st, The altered state of the respiration.

2. The physical and chemical change in the constitution of the blood, which is abundantly proved both by ordinary examination and by chemical analysis.

3. The depressed and irregular action of the nervous system.

4. The suspension of the functions of the liver and kidneys.

The inference which I would draw from the co-existence of the above is, that in consequence of the sudden impression made on the nerves of respiration, the lungs do not adequately perform their office, the necessary result of which is the imperfect oxygenation of the blood, and its consequent unfitness for the purposes of life. Owing to this cause also, we have the impaired action of the heart and arteries, which are thereby deprived of their ordinary stimulus, to the very existence of which a due proportion of oxygen is admitted to be essential. The same cause explains the suspension of the secretions above mentioned, the organs being unable to act upon the morbid fluid circulating through them.

The nervous derangement I consider as dependent more immediately upon the effect produced upon the cerebellum and spinal nerves, if not confined to these; this opinion seems to acquire support from the fact, that in a vast majority of cases the function of the brain itself remains unimpaired, or at all events displays no irregularity up to the moment of dissolution. In this respect the phenomena of cholera display a very striking analogy to those attending the inhalation of poisonous gases, and more especially the carbonic acid gas. If further proofs of the correctness of the views which I have now ventured to express be required, these, I feel confident, will be met with by considering the effect of remedies on the disease.

From the length to which this paper has extended, I must now bring it to a somewhat abrupt termination, and were it not that the majority of the readers of your Journal are men both practical and experienced, I would feel considerable doubt as to the propriety of trusting so meagre an outline of so important a subject to their attention. This feeling, however, is much diminished by the spirit which has invariably pervaded the pages of your Journal.

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient servant,

GEORGE FIFE, M.D.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne,

Dec. 1, 1842.

ON THE
PRETENDED CURE OF CATARACT
BY
PRUSSIC ACID.

By J. B. ESTLIN, F.L.S.,

Surgeon to the Bristol Dispensary for the Cure of Complaints in the Eye.

The readers of the Provincial Medical Journal are much indebted to Dr. Hastings (and so would the public be, had they access to his communications) for his exposure of the pretence of hydropathy to cure all kinds of disorders. A multitude will always be found

in this country ready to become the dupes of those who boast, in an unqualified manner, of the efficacy of some particular remedy in the removal of every complaint; and it is not to be expected that persons will be wanting ever ready to turn this credulity to their own advantage, especially when they can persuade the public press to assist in the delusion. From this willingness to be deceived, Perkins's metallic tractors, animal magnetism, mustard seed, brandy and salt, homœopathy, hydropathy, &c. &c., have had their rise in popular estimation, and have had (or are having) their decline. I cannot admit that these vagaries do any injury to the regular practitioner; on the contrary, those in whose cases these professed remedies have proved inappropriate, and those who have been injured by them, are often driven to solicit his advice; and notwithstanding the continual discovery of remedies which, it is affected, will cure every complaint, and which should render the farther study of medicine a work of supererogation, there never was a period when our art was cultivated with more industry, when more minds of a high caste were devoted to its improvement, or when it held a more elevated rank in the estimation of the intelligent part of the community, than at the present moment.

A duty, however, appears to devolve upon the regular practitioner, and especially upon those who cannot be supposed to have any personal interest to serve in the matter, to prevent, as much as they can, a valuable remedy from getting into disrepute from its abuse, and to show the fallacy of ascribing curative powers to others totally destitute of the agency attributed to them. But is it not the case that those to whom the community have a right to look up for guidance in these matters, are too reluctant to come forward to disabuse the public mind on the subject of such pretended remedies?

Dr. Hastings has set a good example in this respect, and I am induced to follow it in illustrating by a case the folly of trusting to the promise which has been held out that *cataract* may be cured by the external application of the vapor of prussic acid, without operation.

To any educated surgeon it must be unnecessary to prove the futility of attempting the removal of a cataract—a hard tumor nearly in the centre of the eye, covered by a tough membranous capsule, ceasing probably from disease to have any organic relations with surrounding parts—by the application of a vapor to the cornea. The removal of opaque deposits upon the cornea itself by similar means I believe to be equally impracticable, but I now confine my remarks to cataract.

Though frequently asked by patients if I had heard of the powers of prussic acid in removing some of the most incurable or difficultly managed diseases of the eye, I was not aware of the monstrous pretensions that had been set up, and widely disseminated in newspapers and other periodicals not devoted to medical subjects, until the following case had come under my care:—

Mr. C., lately established in business as a draper, came to me from a town in Somersetshire on the 13th of October last to consult me respecting the state of his left eye. He was laboring under an acute attack of sclerotic inflammation, extending to the chambers

of the eye, with the usual symptoms of pain and intolerance of light, &c. &c. The anterior chamber was rather hazy, the lens was opaque, but its surface too clouded to be distinctly defined. The mode of treatment was clearly indicated. I recommended leeches, fomentations, mercury till the gums were affected, and the application of an opiate solution within the lids. The patient gave the following account of himself:—

He had for some time been the subject of cataract in the left eye; being desirous of its removal, he had consulted Mr. John Soden, of Bath, who advised him, as his power of seeing with the right eye was very perfect, not to undergo an operation upon the left. Having seen in the Bath newspapers an article copied from the "*Literary Gazette*," stating upon the *authority of the editor* of that periodical, that a certain physician in London cured cataracts by the application of the vapor of prussic acid, he went to London and placed himself under the care of this practitioner, who gave him every encouragement to believe that the cataract would speedily be dissolved, and who daily applied the prussic acid, expressing himself satisfied with the progress of the cure. At the end of two or three weeks, finding his eye not improved, Mr. C. said he could remain no longer in London; the physician then *performed an operation* upon the cataract with an instrument, which was followed by the violent inflammation I saw, and while suffering from it he was obliged to return into the country.

This is the history with which my notes of Mr. C.'s case, when I first saw him, furnish me. But that I might not misstate his account I will quote his own words, subsequently conveyed to me in a letter, omitting some natural expressions of indignation, and giving him credit for sincerity in declaring his wish to have publicity given to his case, not for "the gratification of private revenge," but "for the benefit of others."

"For four consecutive weeks did he apply the prussic acid to my eye. The method which he practised was this. I applied to him; he examined the eye, and professed to restore it to perfect health in a few days by the external application of prussic acid. He applied it to the eye; each successive day he appeared to discover an improvement, and repeatedly declared to me that he had known a cataract dissolve in twelve hours after the application of the acid. I consequently expected to awake some morning in the full possession of brilliant sight. He did not perform the operation which has caused me so much agony till three weeks had expired, because not till that time had the prussic acid *made the cataract to form on the surface of the eye*." Mr. C. states that during this attendance he paid the usual physicians' fees. After pursuing the plan I had prescribed for him, Mr. C. writes me word, the pain and inflammation gradually subsided, and at the date of his last letter (November 16), he expected in a few days the inflammation would be entirely removed: neither the prussic acid, however, nor the operation had dispersed the cataract.

Such, then, is one of the attempted cures of cataract by means of prussic acid. Had it been merely an instance of the failure of ordinary means, or even of a reasonable experiment in effecting the desired end, I should not have brought it forward; for all medical men have

occasionally to lament the failure of the best intended efforts for the relief of their patients. I adduce it as an example of measures utterly inadequate to the professed object, recommended and employed with the most unwarrantable promises of success, their insufficiency being admitted by recourse to an operation, which also proved unsuccessful.

The above case induced me to refer to the published statements which tempted this unfortunate patient to disregard the judicious advice of Mr. Soden, and to submit himself to the prussic acid treatment. I have in vain tried to procure in this city the opportunity of referring to the back numbers of the "*Literary Gazette*;" but "*Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*" for July 16, 1842, speaks of the "*Literary Gazette*" for July 11, 1842, as containing the account of the wonders performed by prussic acid, "the name of whose editor," says the "*Edinburgh Journal*," "is a sufficient guarantee for the accuracy of the statements." These statements are, that the editor of the "*Literary Gazette*" "*saw*" the various stages of cure advanced by the application of hydrocyanic acid to the eye in "opacities of the cornea, inflammation, cataract, amaurosis, iritis, &c. &c." The editor witnessed "the various appearances of films removing, cataracts breaking up and being gradually reabsorbed, pupils being redeveloped, and other altogether extraordinary symptoms of remedy and regeneration." "Other cases there were of the wonderful production of vision to those born blind." The editor exclaims, "Why not at once make known this discovery to the Prince of Hanover!" and concludes his article by saying, "We hesitate not strongly to recommend the wonderful discovery for the cure of blindness."

I should not have encroached upon your space with such extracts as the above had they not been from papers of good reputation, whose respectable editors cannot be aware of the extent to which they are misleading the public, the articles having no appearance of being inserted as ordinary quack advertisements.

It would be well if the conductors of our respectable periodicals would consult some judicious medical friend before they gave circulation to such extravagant statements, relating to the cure of diseases, as those now presented to the readers of the *Provincial Medical Journal*.

Bristol, November 30, 1842.

ON PREPARATIONS OF THE CITRATE OF IRON.

By M. MIALHE.

The "*Journal of Chemistry*" gives the following formula for the preparation of the citrate of iron:—Take, of crystallised citric acid, three parts; hydrated peroxide of iron, two parts; distilled water, twelve parts. Boil together until the oxide is completely dissolved; then filter and add enough of water to replace what has been evaporated, and make up twelve parts of fluid. If we wish to obtain the citrate dry, a layer of the fluid is placed on a square of glass and evaporated in the stove. The citrate of iron thus obtained is of a fine rusty red color; dissolves perfectly, though slowly, in water; is of a strongly acid taste, astringent, and slightly styptic.