REMARKS

ON

THE TINCTURE OF THE MURIATE OF IRON.

By C. BELL, M.D., F.R.C.P. Ed.,

Lecturer on Midwifery and the Diseases of Women and Children, Edinburgh School of Medicine, etc.

HAVING purchased the last edition of Dr. Garrod's work, called the *Essentials of the Materia Medica and Therapeutics*, under the impression that it contained all the most important medicines now in use, I am much surprised to find that it contains no reference to the tincture of the muriate of iron—a medicine which has long been held in high estimation by our most eminent practitioners in Scotland. In example of this, the late celebrated Sir Robert Christison states, in the last edition of the *Dispensatory*, that it "is a favourite preparation with many for obtaining the tonic action of iron, and it is an exceedingly convenient form for administration. It has also been thought by some to possess specific virtues in disease of the urinary organs, and is used somewhat indiscriminately in this class of affections. It is serviceable in dysuria, connected with loss of tone of the bladder, and it has been found to diminish the mucous secretion of that organ. Sometimes it acts as a gentle diuretic."

After reading this description it does appear remarkable that it should have been so entirely ignored and an attempt made to supersede it by the comparatively inert preparation of the tinctura ferri perchloridi.

Had Dr. Garrod condescended to consult the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, he would have discovered, that in addition to the merits assigned to the tincture of the muriate by Sir Robert Christison, it possesses others of great value, as it has a powerful influence in purifying the blood, as is fully illustrated in its effect in zymotic diseases, more especially in erysipelas, diphtheria, and puerperal fever.

In illustration of its effects in erysipelas, my brother, George Hamilton Bell, who was one of the most successful practitioners of his time, and I wrote a paper many years ago, which I read to the Medico-Chirurgical Society, and afterwards published in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* (vide the *Edinburgh Medical Journal* in 1851). Very soon after the publication of the said paper I met the celebrated Dr. Begbie, then President of the Royal College of Physicians, when he informed me "that he had been induced to try my new remedy in a severe case of erysipelas, and it far exceeded his expectations, as it cured the case in three days, although he had anticipated an attendance of three weeks."

As a further proof of its influence I may cite the case of an elderly English gentleman, who, in passing through Edinburgh on his way to Shetland, was attacked with erysipelas. I was sent for, and found him in high fever, his face much swollen, and his right eye closed. He said it was a source of great distress to him, as he required to go to Lerwick in three days. I told him that I did not think it was possible for him to travel so soon. He was quite convalescent in nine days, and was able to proceed on his journey.

Being strongly impressed with the idea that diphtheria is a blood-disease resulting from inhaling impure air, I was induced to employ in its treatment the tincture of the muriate of iron, and I have had the gratification of finding that it acts as a specific in the disease (vide the *London Medical Review*, March, 1861). In illustration of this fact I find that Dr. Begbie, in his interesting history of the disease, states that in his practice the mortality was equal to that of cholera, eleven having died out of twenty, while in my practice the mortality was only one in thirty. The last case which came under my care was seen by two medical practitioners, who declared that it was hopeless, and that it would prove fatal in a few hours; but this rash and injudicious opinion proved erroneous, as the patient made a good recovery.

Considering that puerperal fever, like erysipelas and diphtheria, is obviously a blood-disease resulting from exposure to impure air or inoculation of polluted matter, I suggested many years ago that it should be treated with the tincture of the muriate of iron; but I had no opportunity of employing it myself until a comparatively recent period, when I was requested to see a patient in the Maternity who was considered to be in a hopeless state. She was put under the tincture of the muriate of iron, and she left the hospital in health (vide *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, June, 1872).

I might refer to several other cases of the disease which were successfully treated; but I shall satisfy myself with referring to the last which came under my treatment. It occurred in a woman, aged 20, who lived in an ill-aired locality. She was delivered with forceps on November 21st, and seemed to be doing well until the 25th of the month, when she had a rigor, followed by pain in the abdomen, rapid pulse, and high temperature, scanty and fetid lochia. In a few hours the pulse rose to 130 and the temperature to 103.5° F. She was put under the salicylate of soda, and had the vagina washed out with tepid milk and water, but with little benefit, as on November 26th she was suffering severe pain in the left iliac region, tympanites, and the temperature was 102.5°.

I was now requested to see her, and I ordered her to have 30 drops of the tincture of the muriate of iron every two hours, and to have the vagina washed out with a solution of Condy's fluid, in proportion of 1 to 8, twice a day. By the time she began the tincture the pulse had risen to 135, and the temperature to 103.5°.

On the 27th the pulse had fallen to 100, the temperature to 100.6°, and the lochia were quite free from fetor. The bowels were moved with castor-oil, and a quantity of offensive matter with flatus was discharged. In the evening the pulse rose to 120 and the temperature to 102°, but in other respects she was the same as in the morning.

November 28th. The patient had passed a good night, and was free from pain; the lochia natural; pulse 100, and the temperature 100°. To have a dose of Gregory's mixture.

November 29th. Doing well.

November 30th. She had had a return of fever. The face was flushed and anxious-looking; pulse 120, temperature 103°. She had had a slight rigor. On inquiry, it was ascertained that the tincture had been neglected to be given. It was renewed, and ordered to be given regularly, and a linseed poultice to be applied to the abdomen.

December 1st. She had had several hours' sleep, and perspired freely. She had less pain, but the pulse still kept high, being 100, and the temperature 103°.

December 2nd. All her symptoms were relieved; the pulse was 96, and the temperature 98.7°. From this period she gradually recovered her health and went to the country.

I might add other circumstances in illustration of the important merits of the tincture of the muriate of iron; but I consider that I have said enough to satisfy every unprejudiced and judicious person on the subject, and to show the egregious error of having ignored so precious a medicine and attempting to supersede it by the tincture of the perchloride, the medicinal properties of which, according to my observation, are so much more limited, especially as a remedy in erysipelas and diphtheria.

On several occasions I have been satisfied in regard to this fact. In one case of erysipelas I was exceedingly disappointed and disgusted. It occurred in a lady who had come from the Highlands, where she had been laid up for a length of time with a severe attack of rheumatic fever. Soon after her arrival in town she was attacked with erysipelas. I ordered her to have the tincture of the muriate of iron, and I attended her day after day, for some time without any abatement of the disease. I was therefore induced to look at the medicine she was taking, and I discovered that the apothecary had stupidly sent her the tincture of the perchloride. The tincture of the muriate was immediately substituted, and in three days the disease was subdued.

As to its efficacy in diphtheria I have to record that I was requested to attend a case of the disease by a friend who was about to attend a lady in her confinement, and who was afraid that he might carry infection to her. I found that the patient had been treated by the tincture of the perchloride; but without any benefit. I put her under the tincture of the muriate of iron, and she was rapidly restored to health.

I have not a doubt that were scarlet fever treated in the same manner as I have recommended in diphtheria, it would be equally successful in both diseases.

THE distribution of prizes to the students of the Medical School of St. Thomas's Hospital will be made by Sir Henry Wentworth Acland, K.C.B., M.D., F.R.S., Regius Professor of Medicine in the University of Oxford, in the Governors' Hall, on Wednesday, the 15th June, 1887, at 3 P.M.

FRENCH ACADEMY OF MEDICINE.—The prize (£40) for an essay on a subject connected with the diseases of childhood will be awarded in 1888 for the best essay on "Paralysis during Childhood." The paper must be based on clinical observation as to the causes and nature of the disease. The papers must be forwarded to the Academy before March 1st, 1888.