OBSERVATIONS

ON NITRATE OF SILVER STAINS OF THE CONJUNCTIVA.

CASE OF ABSOLUTE BLACKNESS.

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THE application of a solution of nitrate of silver, if long and injudiciously applied to the conjunctiva of the eye, produces a discolouration which is indelible. The sclerotic conjunctiva becomes of a dusky brown, or of an olive colour; the palpebral linings, more particularly of the lower lid, assume a brownish or livid hue, or, as will be presently shown, may become black; the sulcus between the inferior lid and globe is more deeply dyed than the other parts. In the majority of cases which have come under my notice, the conjunctiva of the superior lid retains its natural colour. In a few rare instances the salt becomes incorporated with ulcers of the cornea, forms a subchloride of silver, and perpetuates one or more black lines in their cicatrices.

A still more uncommon, and I believe hitherto unrecorded change of colour, consists in absolute blackness of the conjunctiva, an instance of which, the only one that has ever come under my notice, is probably of sufficient interest for publication in the *Journal*.

Case.—A young woman, aged 29, came from a small town in Radnorshire to consult me for a dimness of vision. Both cornea were extensively covered by opacities, which were irregularly streaked with black lines. The caruncula lachrymalis and tarsal borders were of a jet black colour, giving the appearance, at a cursory glance, of soot or dirt settled on those parts. The palpebral conjunctiva was smooth, and in colour not quite so black as the margins; the sclerotic conjunctiva was of a deep olive colour. I found on inquiry, that she had at one time suffered from strumous ophthalmia, for the cure of which a strong ointment and some drops had been prescribed and freely used; these applications were continued for three or four months.

The black streaks which traversed the opacities of the cornea and the olive sclerotic conjunctiva, decisively indicated the nature of the other discolorations. There is a much greater susceptibility to these stains in some individuals than in others. They are more common to adults than children; possibly because ophthalmic disease among the latter is for the most part either of the strumous or purulent kind, in both of which the surface of the eye and its appendages are continually bathed in secretion.

If we excise a portion of discoloured sclerotic conjunctiva, a white cicatrix is formed, indicating that the fibrous membrane retains its natural colour.

As we are at present unacquainted with any means for removing the stains under consideration, our obvious duty is to prevent their occurrence by vigilant attention and care, which may be accomplished by prescribing the preparations of nitrate of silver, in short and intermittent courses, and by frequently noting the condition of the

lining membrane of the inferior palpebra. In public ophthalmic practice, it would be well if the solution were not dispensed in larger quantities than two drachms at one time.

Since writing the above, a man, 60 years of age, who has been all his life a martyr to rheumatism, has become my patient at the Eye Infirmary. The right globe is collapsed; the left eye retains some vision, it has been repeatedly inflamed; the iris is of a dull leaden colour, and convex towards the cornea; the pupil is puckered, adherent to the lens, and filled within a third of its area by opaque lymph (artesia iridis imperfecta); near the centre of the cornea is a leucoma.

Fifteen or eighteen months ago, he for the first time consulted a surgeon, who prescribed caustic drops, which he has ever since applied. The conjunctiva of the inferior palpebral sinus is of a greenish black colour. The inner surface of the superior lid has lost somewhat of its natural polish; a few black dots assume an aborescent shape near the superior punctum; a light brown and well-defined narrow stripe extends along the concave aspect of its tarsal cartilage.

I have cited this case to show the impropriety of allowing patients to use the preparations of lunar caustic *ad libitum*; and as an interesting example of how well the superior lid escapes serious change of colour, even in the very worst and most neglected cases. It also illustrates the destructive character of uncontrolled rheumatic ophthalmia.

ON

MEDICAL DELUSIONS & CHARLATANIC PRACTICES.

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I. HOMŒOPATHY.

OF the thousand popular medical delusions, that have at various times been brought forward, there are few that have taken so firm a hold upon the public mind, as the one known under the name of homœopathy. This arises mainly from the fact, that the science of legitimate medicine, during the last century, has advanced so much, and the information of medical men has become so great, that the public generally are lost in attempting to follow the scientific physician; but being at the same time anxious not to feel ignorant, in a matter that so greatly concerns themselves, they are ready to turn their attention to any system which they think they can comprehend, however backward or however dangerous that system may be.

Now, the homœopathic system answers this purpose: it falls back upon the medical knowledge and the medical ideas of the people; it also makes use of plausible arguments, and works upon that powerful element of the human mind—the love of the marvellous.

In the days of the famous Greek physician, Alexander (Trallanias), there practised at Constantinople another physician, called Uranius, a man so far behind his scientific friends in information, that they justly laughed at him and treated him as a buffoon. This man went with the Ambassador Arebindus, to Persia, where, by artfully concealing his deficiencies and assuming the gravity of a philosopher, he so pleased Chosroes, the Persian King, that the Magi were assembled to consult with him on questions of natural philosophy. Uranius, though ignorant of these matters, by his *confidence*, supported his reputation, having this advantage over his adversaries, that if he knew little on the subject, those he disputed with knew much less; and the king was so charmed with him, that he pledged him at table, and declared, that of all the philosophers he had seen, (and the most famous had visited his court,) Uranius was the most acute and accomplished. "The reason," (for this admiration of the King) says the sensible old writer from whom the account is borrowed,* "is plain and natural, which is, that we have a great inclination to everything that resembles us, and an aversion to whatever is above us. It must be owned that Chosroes had all the qualifications necessary to form a great captain, but for what relates to learning, it must be confessed that he could attain to no greater height than what a scholar of Uranius could arrive at."

Now, the non-professional part of the public hold just the same relation to medical science as Chosroes did to natural philosophy. They may be great captains, learned in law, giants in theology, admirable historians or politicians, and skilled in other branches of learning; but of medical science they can know nothing without spending their whole lives in the study of its principles. Hence, to the public, the reasonings of a medical Uranius are logic itself; it seems to them that by comprehending these reasonings, they have attained suddenly to a perfect knowledge of what they before considered a mysteriously intricate science, and many of them prefer the new plan to all others, because it adapts itself to their capacity.

One can almost imagine that there exists a kind of balance in the world of knowledge, as in the world of nature. It would seem that men must progress, *en masse*, not in sections. This man represents a body of men, and has advanced too far, and if he continues to progress at his own rate, his comrades will not be able to follow him or appreciate the benefit of his services. The event is foreseen with the evil of it. So a clog is attached to the man. He is galled by it; as indeed, well he may be, for he knows he is acting rightly, and sees the clog to be in itself a very foolish thing—an idiot pulling at his skirts. But bear it he must; and the good will follow. His friends will in time march to their proper position; he will then be allowed to go on unimpeded, and will feel none the less safe, in not being too far ahead. Now, of all sciences, medicine is the one most commonly clogged from this cause; the people are very much concerned by it, and they will have it at something like an understandable distance from them,

so that if it dares to advance beyond a certain limit, some visionary system springing up behind it is sure to meet with great patronage. In this manner a Morison rises, and assuming to himself the character of a medical Saviour, mixes at random a powerfully dangerous nostrum, and holds it up for sale. The trick succeeds: Morison's pills are bought as fast as green peas in June; and the innocent babe at the breast has thrust down its throat a dose of medicine large enough for a middle-aged elephant. But by-and-by this delusion goes the way of all fallacies; and now, by a strange exhibition in the rule of contrary, there rises another fashionable system—the homœopathic, by listening to the doctrines of which, full grown persons are induced to swallow a dose of medicine so small, that the same dose suspended in the throat of a gnat, would show a proportion similar to a pin's head suspended in the dome of St. Pauls.

The object then, of these papers, is to show, in simple language, and by an appeal to common sense, the absurdity of this last variety of popular medical delusion—homœopathy.

For this purpose, several of the most prominent homœopathic assumptions are first noted down and then discussed. The assumptions are all to be found in the numerous books put forth by homœopathic writers.

Concerning the sincerity of homœopathic practitioners no mention will be found in the following papers. They are written against the system, not the men. Neither does it form any part of their object to recal such practitioners into the pale of legitimate medicine, because it is believed that all who *heartily* practise homœopathy as a profession, are past all recal, even though a Plato should reason; while for others, if others there be, who practise the system for lucre's sake only, believing it not, these stand at so low a figure in the moral barometer, that the dignity of any man would be sullied even by thinking of them. Finally, while the attention of the public is respectfully directed to what follows, it is deeply regretted that in this enlightened day, any writer should have the occasion allowed him of fighting with a shadow, and that too, in defence of science, reason, and truth.

The Homœopathic Assumptions.

The assumptions of homœopaths about to be considered, are six in number; many more might be added, it is true, but these will be found to embody all the leading doctrines of the Hahnemannian system, together with the most popular arguments used by homœopathic writers. The assumptions are:—

1st. That diseases arise from two sets of agents, viz., natural agents and medicinal. Thus, the ~~disease~~ *ague*, as it arises from marsh miasmata, is a natural disease. Salivation, as it arises from the effects of mercury, is a medicinal disease. And that this distinction of diseases was first made by Hahnemann, the founder of homœopathy.

2nd. That three plans are followed by medical men in the application of medicines for the treatment of diseases:—

(a.) *The antipathic*, in which the axiom *contraria, contrariis curantur*, is acted upon, which translated implies, that in disease contraries are cured by contraries. Thus a patient suffers from constipation, and a medicine is given which, in health, would produce the opposite of constipation—relaxation.

(b.) *The allopathic*, in which *one disease is tried to be cured by setting up another*. Thus, a man suffers from what is called determination of blood to the head, and a seton is inserted into the nape of the neck; the allopath, says the homœopathists, hoping by this means to set up a new disease in the neck, and so to cure that in the head.

(c.) *The homœopathic*, in which the axiom *similia similibus curantur* is followed, meaning, that similar diseases are cured by similar, which axiom is combined with a second, *that no two similar diseases can exist in a state of intensity in the same body, at the same time*. Therefore, if the lungs suffer from inflammation, a remedy is given which would, in health, produce inflammation of the lungs. Or, if the nose suffer from bleeding, a remedy is applied that in health would produce such bleeding, (a smart tap on the organ for instance;) or the bowels are constipated, and a remedy is given that in health would produce constipation.

3rd. That Hahnemann, the founder of homœopathy, and his followers, have, by experiments on themselves and others in a state of health, discovered that for every natural disease a similar disease is capable of being excited by a medicinal agent. Thus, Peruvian bark is said to possess the power of producing a disease similar to ague, nux vomica of producing a kind of palsy, and so on; therefore, on the strength of the last assumption, these experimentalists have discovered the means of cure for the same diseases.

4th. That in prescribing medicine, the more minute the dose administered the better, and the more safely will it act, so that medicines may be divided into doses consisting of the millionth, trillionth, or decillionth part of a grain, and yet retain their efficacy.

5th. That to homœopathists is due the credit of first calling particular attention to diet, cleanliness, and exercise, as curative means in the treatment of various diseases.

6th. That the practice of homœopathy is safe and effectual; that it places medicine amongst the fixed sciences; and that it is destined to become the practice of all truly scientific men.

The Correctness of the Assumptions.

The first assumption treats of diseases as arising from natural or morbid, and from medicinal causes.

Of the correctness of the doctrine, that certain morbid agents are capable of producing certain diseases, no doubt can be entertained. Marsh miasm produces ague; scarlet fever contagion produces scarlet fever, &c. Nor can it at all be doubted, that medicines carried to an excess in their administration, produce sometimes a powerful effect on the body, a disease in fact; therefore the division of diseases into natural and

medicinal is a proper one. But let no one conclude that homœopathists were the first to make the division here spoken of. The division has been known and used for nearly two thousand years. Thus Hippocrates, the father of medicine, who lived more than 400 years before the birth of Christ, spoke of the effects of impure states of the air as productive of disease, and also of the classes of symptoms, that is to say of the diseases induced by remedial agents, and in this he has been followed by all other writers; indeed the study of the diseases produced by medicinal agents was, without doubt, almost the first step made in medical science, and has ever held a distinct and important position. At the present day there is not a school of medicine existing that does not possess one teacher at least whose only office it is to give instructions on the natural causes of disease, and another teacher to give instructions on the effects or diseases that may be induced by medicinal agents.

This first homœopathic assumption, therefore, is utterly at variance with truth, in so far as it speaks of Hahnemann as being the first person who divided diseases into natural and medicinal, and of the followers of Hahnemann as being the only persons who use such a division.

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[To be continued.]

ON THE PROGRESS OF PUBLIC HYGIENE AND SANITARY LEGISLATION IN ENGLAND,

AND THE ADVANTAGES TO BE DERIVED FROM THEIR
FURTHER EXTENSION.*

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Read before the Leeds Philosophical Society, March, 1851.

A recent enterprising proceeding, which will tend strongly to advance the cause of hygiene, as well as to benefit the public generally, is the "Inquiry of the Analytical Sanitary Commission," and the publication of its results in the *Lancet*; the Editor deserves our best thanks for such exertions. Their utility is already being felt in London and elsewhere. This Commission furnishes information as to the quality, composition, and adulteration of the various articles of food in common use, as well as that of the water; and it promises to examine wine, spirits, drugs, &c. It appears from these reports that ground coffee, so called, is very rarely, indeed, to be procured pure, and that it is adulterated not only with chicory but with many other substances not near so harmless; for chicory is adulterated with carrot, parsnip, mangel-wurzel, beans, roasted corn, biscuit powder, burnt sugar, red earth,

* Concluded from page 575.