extensive mesenteric disease was but too unquestionably present, and further he had lost a brother under very similar circumstances.

Besides the cases above-detailed, others, of which I have not kept any record, might be mentioned. The above, however, from the complexity of their character, and the serious organic causes on which they depended, seem better adapted to demonstrate the utility of the medicine, as under such circumstances hardly any benefit was to be anticipated from any means that could be employed, and certainly not to the extent which was obtained. As to the termination of the two last cases, no other result was to be anticipated, nor can they be regarded as in any way militating against the efficacy of the remedy in question, seeing that in neither did the patient die of dropsy, but, on the contrary, that in both, all dropsical symptoms had been subdued, and so far the actual condition of the patients improved. In another case, at present under treatment, the improvement which has taken place is also very marked; although the progress of the case at present does not justify me in saying more than that the prognosis is certainly more favourable than, on first seeing the patient, could be anticipated.

From the limited experience which I have yet had of the medicine, I do not wish to impair the value of facts by blending with them theories, perhaps hypotheses might be a more applicable term, a practice by far too prevalent, and pregnant with evil to the advancement of real science.

In conclusion, it may be briefly remarked that the croton oil possesses one very decided advantage over elaterium, viz., that even when its extreme action is manifested, it is not followed by the depression inseparable from the effective action of the latter, but that where the greatest "vis inertie" has prevailed, accompanied by absolute incapacity for exertion, a sensible amelioration in these respects has followed its continued employment. In proof of this, it may be mentioned that in the case at present under its influence, where the slightest exercise was productive of extreme fatigue and languor, the patient can now walk three, four, and five miles in the day without suffering serious inconvenience. For some future occasion I must reserve my opinion as to the causes of its superiority over other cathartics in the class of cases under consideration, as however strong my opinions may be, and however satisfactory to my own mind, facts are too limited in number to warrant me in laying them in their present crude state before the numerous readers of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Journal.

GEORGE FIFE, M.D.

Bishop Wearmouth, Sept. 12, 1844.

CASE OF POISONING WITH HYDRO-CYANIC ACID.

By JAMES GODFREY, Esq., Surgeon to the Bristol General Hospital.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,

The narrative of the accompanying case was deemed worthy of being placed on record by the members of the Bath and Bristol Branch of the Provincial

Medical and Surgical Association, to whom I communicated it. I accordingly have the honour to forward it to you, and remain,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JAMES GODFREY.

Bristol, September 11, 1844.

There is, perhaps, no point in toxicology of greater interest to the medical jurist, or of more general importance to the practitioner, than the question of the limitation of voluntary power after a fatal dose of hydrocyanic acid. It is remarkable to observe the discrepancy of opinions on this subject, and the paucity of facts connected with man, which it is ever in the power of the medical witness to adduce. An opportunity was afforded me of observing the dying moments of a person who swallowed a fatal dose, and of carefully noting several facts which occurred in the interval between the taking of the poison and death. I have thought it worth while to detail at length, first, the points presented to my notice up to the time of death; and secondly, the facts which came to my knowledge afterwards.

On the morning of December 15, 1843, I was summoned to the shop of a druggist, to a person "who" as the messenger said, "had poisoned himself there." Running thither with a stomach pump, I found Mr. P. supported in an easy chair, and was informed that it was supposed he had taken half an ounce of prussic acid before he came into the shop, he having purchased that quantity at the same shop two days before. He entered the shop and asked a question, and it was stated that he almost instantly fell, and was raised "gasping and heaving much." I found him in a quiet, easy posture, evidently dying; he was insensible, pale, cold, the jaw fallen, the tongue slightly protruding, and of a natural colour; the pulse perceptible; a faint forcible respiration repeated after an interval of five or six seconds; the eyes of almost natural appearance, dull rather than bright, not prominent; the pupils large; there was no convulsion nor apparent venous turgescence; there was a pale brown stain over his shirt front as if he had vomited; no perceptible smell of prussic acid about the mouth.

At the same time of making rapidly these observations, the collapse became more complete, and I felt the pulse dropping, and the surface becoming momentarily and markedly colder.

A degree of hesitation was in my mind as to prussic acid being the agent, but, reserving speculation, I felt that whether or no, nothing but powerfully and rapidly stimulating the system could be of service; we therefore, (for several surgeons had by this time arrived,) immediately introduced into the stomach, my finger being bitten while opening his mouth, a strong mixture of the compound tincture of ammonia and water, during which he became rapidly colder, and by the time the first fluid was injected, entirely pulseless. On withdrawing the fluid, immediately the smell of prussic acid was evident; we instantly injected a renewal of ammonia with brandy, and endeavoured, by alternating pressure upon the thorax and abdomen, to aid the respiratory powers. By this time I was struck by the increase of temperature of the surface, but there was no pulse, nor sigh, nor sound of heart. I thought that

in this point there might have been a source of fallacy, from my hand having been laid upon his forehead for some time before the period when I remarked the increase of temperature, but on feeling his hands they were likewise warmer. I hoped,—we persevered,—re-introducing ammoniated stimuli, injecting a strong terebinthinate enema, and endeavouring to excite by galvanism those portions of muscular system in immediate connection with the vital organs, without the slightest effect, and we then with reluctance gave up our efforts, nearly an hour having elapsed since our summons. I believe that death took place within four minutes after my arrival, probably within three, and perhaps within ten or twelve minutes from the period of swallowing the poison.

Mr. P., who was a tall, well-made man, of bilious temperament, about 44 years of age, had been in a distressed state of mind for some time; three days previously, he came to the druggist's shop for half an ounce of prussic acid, and having had a partial medical education, and been furnished with it before, as well as with other medicinals, the druggist had no hesitation in supplying him, removing half an ounce from the usual form of ounce phial stoppered, and giving him the remainder. On the same night he exerted himself most energetically at a fire, and on the day preceding his death transacted the business of his office as usual. On the fatal morning, one of his daughters accompanied him to his office, where they were seen standing together; he sent her away with a message, and taking off his great coat, proceeded to a room upstairs. After a short interval he was seen to walk rather quickly out of the house, in the direction of the druggist's shop. He must have swallowed the poison on thus proceeding upstairs, for the bottle was found in the fire-place on the following morning, the stopper on the table. It is presumed he took the acid before placing the bottle in the fire, as no glass nor similar utensil was found in the room; he then must have gone to the head of the stairs, a distance of ten average paces, descended the stairs, seventeen in number, and proceeded as described to the druggist's shop, forty-five paces, making a total of fifty-five paces and seventeen stairs. He entered the shop in his usual manner, which was slow and easy; the druggist (a personal friend of his) asked him how he did; he replied in his usual tone of voice "I want some more of that prussic acid;" the druggist passed round the side and end of his counter to speak to him, and then perceived that he was in the act of placing his hands upon him as if for support, his eyes being fixed upon him with a stare. The druggist said to him "You have been taking the prussic acid;" he could make no answer; the druggist backed him towards a chair, placed him in it, and ran to the door for help. Before he could return, Mr. P. had fallen to the ground, with his head lying against the counter; some ipecacuanha was given him while surgical aid was sought. The ipecacuanha he in part swallowed, as also some antimonial wine, at which he was described to have shuddered; the stain upon his shirt front was most probably produced by the rejected portion of the emetics given before my arrival.

This case presents many evident points of interest, but having trespassed at such length I will only add the remark, that it is not only possible, but somewhat probable, that a person desirous of concealing the

crime of suicide, and acquainted with the properties of this energetic agent, might hold the poison in his mouth for a period before swallowing it, and so be enabled to cork a bottle or dispose of the same; at all events an ingenious counsel might avail himself of the supposition, to the confusion of a medical witness, and to the benefit of his client arraigned at the bar on a charge of murder.

PROVINCIAL

Medical & Surgical Journal.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1844.

The new Medical Bill continues to engage the attention of the members of the medical profession, and its principles are undergoing consideration and discussion at meetings called for the purpose in different parts of the country. In addition to those we have before reported, several others have been held or are in contemplation. Among these the one which has recently taken place at Hereford, an abstract of the proceedings of which will be found in another column, is especially worthy of notice on account of the judicious plan adopted for gaining access to and thus influencing the members of the legislature in their future decision on the subject. Petitions to either House of Parliament, however they may make known the views of those from whom they emanate, have generally, we fear, but little weight with those to whom they are addressed. Indeed from the way in which they are disposed of—read hurriedly and often inaudibly, amidst the noise and confusion of the House, ordered to lie on the table, or thrown under the table, as the case may be, and treated only as so much useless verbiage which the forms of the House render it necessary to get through, we see not how it can be otherwise. The hearing however which it may be impracticable to obtain from Members of Parliament in their collective capacity, it is quite possible to procure from them individually, and the seventh and eighth resolutions of the Hereford meeting, appointing deputations to their county, city, and borough members, ought to be adopted into the proceedings of every similar meeting which shall hereafter take place.

We cannot close this brief notice without mentioning another feature of the Hereford meeting. Many of the gentlemen present, as