

would be serviceable. If not indicated, they are likely to be injurious, from their debilitating effects on the system. At all events, their indiscriminate and unlimited exhibition, may be productive of pernicious consequences. It cannot, however, be too strongly impressed on the minds of young practitioners (and to such only do I presume to direct my remarks,) how necessary it is for them, before they prescribe in such a case, to ascertain accurately the state of the bowels. It will not only be useless, but highly pernicious, to attempt the exhibition of tonics, or heating medicines, until the intestinal canal be restored to the due performance of its functions. When the latter shall have been effected, the former, though sometimes proper, will often be unnecessary.

It may not be thought irrelative to the present subject, to mention a case of hysteria, which occurred in my practice, and which was cured by purgatives. I shall therefore shortly state the most prominent parts, referring those who have not read Dr Hamilton's Treatise, "on the Utility and Administration of Purgative Medicines," to that valuable work, for further information on this important subject.

In the beginning of February 1806, I was called to visit a daughter of the barrack-serjeant of the cavalry barracks, Ipswich, who was then affected with hysteria. I found that she had arrived in England about a week before, from Goree, on the coast of Africa. The vessel in which she sailed had made the passage in twenty-eight days, from Goree to Portsmouth; during that time this woman had not had a stool. She did not taste animal food during the voyage, having lived on tea and biscuit. It did not require much sagacity to discover that purgatives and clysters were indicated in her case. I may add, that by their use she got perfectly well in the course of ten days.

February 23d 1809.

IV.

A Case of Purulent Ophthalmia occurring in an aged person; with remarks on the Origin of that Disease. By W. SIMMONS, Surgeon, at Manchester.

THE subject of the present communication was Abraham Roscoe, a man seventy-five years of age, of an athletic make, who became an in-patient of the Infirmary, on the 6th February 1809.

1809. About a fortnight before, he went out in the morning, in his usual good health, to work as a labourer on the high-way, at the distance of a few miles from Manchester, when he first perceived the invasion of this disease. To use his own words, 'all at once,' and without any assignable cause, he was seized with a violent pain in both his eyes, which soon increased to a state of high inflammation. What means had been previously used, I know not; but when he first came under my care, both eyes were very greatly inflamed, the palpebræ were much tumefied, and the discharge was purulent, and very copious.

To repress this complaint, the usual means were applied with assiduity, and increasing advantage; but, owing to his great age, he grew peevish and discontented, and, at the end of ten days from his admission, he was at his own request made an out-patient, since which, I have heard nothing of him, and therefore I am ignorant of the termination of the case. However, what I have seen has supplied materials for a few remarks relative to the origin of this disease, which may prove not altogether undeserving of attention.

As an authority, then, highly respectable, I may be allowed to quote the opinion of Mr Ware, who has assigned the origin of the purulent ophthalmia to an *acrimonious vaginal discharge*; and this can be supposed to operate only upon the principle of inoculation, by forming a lodgement upon the child during birth. And I must confess, that where the mother had been affected with the fluor albus at the time of labour, and the purulent ophthalmia had ensued in the child, such an opinion might seem specious at first sight; but when we have considered the frequency of that female affection, and the comparative rareness of this species of ophthalmia, we shall, I think, be inclined to doubt the validity of the opinion. Within my own observation, the purulent ophthalmia has occurred, where the existence of leucorrhæa was denied; and a medical friend, to whom I had communicated the contents of this paper, has informed me, that, in his whole practice, and he has been in the habit of delivering from thirty to fifty women annually, for many years past, he has never met with more than two or three instances of the purulent ophthalmia; yet many of his patients had the fluor albus upon them, preceding delivery.

In Roscoe's case, doubtless the disease (than which I never saw one more distinctly marked) must have had a different origin; for it is impossible to suppose, that, at such an advanced age, an acute disease could have sprung from, or been at all influenced by such a cause.

But

But admitting, for the sake of argument, that the discharge of fluor albus had possessed a property adequate to the alleged effect, the increased mucous discharge preceding parturition, would dilute, or carry off any former collection of this noxious fluid; and the vagina, greatly shortened, undergo a process similar to ablution, by the dribbling, or sudden flow of the liquor amnii, after the bursting of the membranes, so as to render the opinion still less and less probable.

My own conviction therefore is, that the ophthalmia occurring in a child, whose parent, at the time of its birth, was affected with leucorrhæa, is merely a coincidence of circumstances, in themselves wholly unconnected, rather than the result of cause and effect; and consequently, that this supposed origin of the ophthalmia purulenta is purely *hypothetical*.

But, perhaps it may be asked, whence then would you deduce the origin of this disease? To this question, however, I am by no means prepared to give a direct answer; nor is it often easy, after having demolished an hypothesis, to replace it by an opinion that shall be deemed incontrovertible. But I should be disposed to reason thus: that the organ of vision, at so tender an age, is very sensible to the stimulus of light; that the system in general, is possessed likewise of a greater share of irritability than in the adult, rendering it susceptible of an impression from any occasional cause, such as injury in the birth, or sudden exposure to cold, and moisture (without great care), immediately on its extrusion from an equable and moderate temperature, in which it had been so long confined. And I must confess, that the more frequent appearance of the ophthalmia purulenta, at certain seasons of the year, more than at others, has induced my belief, that, occasionally at least, it has partaken of the character of an infantile epidemic; to account for the production of which, I should then refer to a cause more general in its operation than any before recited, namely, to a *peculiar constitution of the atmosphere*.

With regard to the treatment of the purulent ophthalmia, I have nothing new to offer: nor is it of any consequence, since the plan recommended by Mr Ware has with me been invariably successful.

March 7th 1809.