

MALIGNANT CHOLERA.

TREATMENT OF ITS ADVANCED STAGES
WITH PHOSPHORUS.—PREPARATION OF
A PHOSPHORUS PILL.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I should feel much obliged by the insertion of the following in your invaluable journal. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. BATTEN, Surgeon.

Tooley-street, Borough,
14th August, 1833.

Since the re-appearance of cholera in this part of the metropolis, I have been in the habit of employing, with extraordinary success, a remedy, which, as I have neither heard nor read of its application before, may, perhaps, be considered worthy of mention in the treatment of this disease. I mean *phosphorus*. Reflection on the chemical properties as well as the medical history of this extraordinary substance, first induced me to make trial of its effects in cholera; and to illustrate the result I shall briefly mention two or three cases.

Case 1.—The first was that of a girl, ætat. 14, labouring under all the worst symptoms, excessive purging and vomiting, intolerable cramps, &c. I first gave her, by way of experiment, a pill, containing half a grain of *phosphorus*; in two hours another pill; and in two hours more two more pills. The result was highly satisfactory. The first pill was administered at eight p.m., and from that time all the symptoms gradually subsided. Next morning the patient was so far recovered as to allow of her being removed home, a distance of two and a half miles, and she bore the journey remarkably well.

Case 2.—In the next case the results were still more striking. The patient was a sailor, ætat. 30, and my brother, by whom he was first seen, considered his condition altogether hopeless. To the incessant purging, vomiting, and excruciating cramps, which had existed for some time previously, were superadded all the horrors of collapse, without any abatement in the violence of the primary symptoms. This was certainly the most appalling case I ever saw, and it may be worthy of remark that it was brought on by a dose of salts.

To this man, a pill containing one grain of phosphorus was immediately given and repeated every two hours until four or five had been taken. The effect was extraordinary. From the moment the first pill was taken, the poor fellow began to evince

signs of improvement; the vomiting ceased; a slight degree of warmth became perceptible on the surface of the body; the voice, which had been lost, gradually returned; the purging and cramps subsided; no consecutive fever followed; and in less than a week the man was in perfect health.

These results appeared so convincing of the superior efficacy of the remedy, that we determined to follow up its use in every case of confirmed cholera that might thenceforward fall under our care. Since then we have treated a considerable number of cases of the worst description, and, I am happy to say, with uniform success, not having lost a single patient where the medicine could be taken. One instance occurred in which no medicine could be administered, the poor fellow dying within an hour from the first attack.

Case 3.—Not many doors from the house in which this happened, a strikingly similar case occurred on Sunday evening last. We saw the patient in half an hour from his first attack, and with difficulty got a pill down his throat. The man was evidently moribund, and in all human probability a few minutes' delay would have consigned him to a fate similar to that of his unfortunate neighbour. The effect of the medicine was really astonishing, and truly gratifying to those around. The patient was soon enabled to speak, and animal heat quickly returned. The medicine being repeated, all the bad symptoms gradually subsided, and next morning the patient might have been pronounced out of danger.

I have now, perhaps, stated enough to ensure for phosphorus sufficient investigation into its merits to determine its value as a remedy for malignant cholera. I shall say a few words on its pharmaceutical preparation, periods of administration, dose, &c.

There can be no doubt that the difficulty of preparing phosphorus into an efficient, safe, and convenient form for exhibition, is the chief, if not the only, reason why it has not been much more extensively used in medicine than it has.

All the various formulæ which have been proposed, with the exception of that of M. Lescot, are decidedly objectionable. The principle of his plan seems good, but the preparation being *fluid*, seems to me ill adapted for administration in cholera.

Seeking to embody M. Lescot's principle of *fixed solution* with that of *moderate solidity*, the following occurred to me as not unlikely to answer my views;—

R Ceruminis alb. ʒss;
Phosphori ʒss.

To be put into a large iron mortar, and thoroughly incorporated by means of pressure and trituration, a sufficiency of water being present to guard against combustion during the process. The mass is to be divided into ten pills, which are to be preserved for use in a phial of distilled water. This is the formula I have used, and without entering into any discussion of its pharmaceutical merits, it will suffice for my present purpose to state that I have found in it a convenient, safe, and efficient medicine.

One of these pills forms a dose for an adult, and should be given every one or two hours, according to the urgency of the case, until four, or perhaps six, have been taken. In many cases, however, three, or even two, doses will suffice, and the cure may be completed by other means. The premonitory diarrhœa may be removed with certainty, also, by other means. It is when the fluids of the body are rapidly draining away, when racking cramps have nearly exhausted the nervous energy, and the powers of life are evidently fast setting in death, that the effects of this remedy have appeared to us most conspicuous,—in fact, so decided and extraordinary, that should the experience of others at all bear out what we have observed in our own practice, phosphorus cannot fail to become the means of disarming this deadly pestilence of much of its fatality.

THE LANCET.

London, Saturday, August 24, 1833.

THE CHOLERA-PREVENTION BILL of last year has been re-enacted by the legislature during the past week, with a few alterations. The changes, although trifling, are, nevertheless, improvements. We trust that the measure will work beneficially for the public, but we much question whether it will be attended with any *immediate* advantage to the profession.

It certainly would appear, that medical practitioners, as public functionaries, are never to be adequately rewarded for their services. The importance of the duties they discharge—the risks they incur in the execution of their professional labours,

are not of sufficient weight to be thrown into the scale of compensation. But such omissions on the part of the legislature, cannot be considered as extraordinary, when we see daily, or, rather, weekly, that medical writers denounce as "unprincipled" such men as Sirs WILLIAM RUSSELL and DAVID BARRY, *because* they held office in the Central Board,—*because*, and, apparently, merely *because*, they occupied stations which were supposed to have attached to them valuable emoluments. It is difficult to conjecture what can be the *objects* of such scribblers—if objects they have any, which, indeed, we very much question. Undoubtedly, their curdled brains, their jerk-and-dot style of writing, would indicate that their motives are without blame, as there is not a sufficient display of mind in their abortive reasonings to constitute *intention*. An editor of a medical journal who is, literally, *stupid*, may be likened to a harnessed horse, which has had the misfortune to fall prostrate in the mud. The miserable condition of the animal excites the compassion of the friendly driver and all surrounding spectators. Every one, in turn, attempts to raise the fallen creature, and, in turn, every one receives a splash of mud, or a kick, as a reward for his compassionate exertions. Why this ingratitude? No. It is not ingratitude. It is the result of blindness. It arises from a want of knowledge. If the horse understood the *situation* or the *feelings* of his friends, he would not thus act.

But, our great discoverers of mares' nests have all at once ascertained, "that the *whole* profession are *unanimously* of opinion, that the malignant cholera is "not a contagious disease." At the same time they acknowledge that the disease exists as an epidemic. On what grounds are such statements hazarded? None that we can perceive, except the laudable desire of being consistent in the display of