Dr Good on the Tread-Wheel.

in my opinion, would greatly contribute to the preservation of the health of the prisoners in this establishment.

Allow me, Gentlemen, to conclude with the assurance, that, in giving you the trouble of perusing this letter, I am actuated solely, I trust, by a proper sense of my duty as medical attendant of the Nottinghamshire House of Correction; a part of which duty I believe myself to be discharging by submitting to you my opinion of the salutary operation of the instrument in question. I am fully aware that I am opposing the sentiments and assertions of gentlemen whose talents I must admire, and by whose labours and learning I have been essentially instructed. Yet permit me to repeat, that I trouble you with a detail of facts only; the subject admitting neither of discussion nor argument.

I have the honour of subscribing myself, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

BENJ. HUTCHINSON,

Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

Southwell; June 1, 1823.


I am glad to find, by an introduction of Mr. Hutchinson's letter to you on the discipline of the tread-wheel, that you feel this subject of sufficient importance in a medical point of view, to be brought before the public. The short address from Sir John Cox Hippisley, Bart. to his friend the Minister of the Home Department, upon which this letter is founded, and in the drawing up of which I was called upon professionally to take a part, was written with considerable haste, and when the subject was new, in order that its contents might be laid before the assembled magistrates of most of the counties of England, at the last Epiphany sessions; and for this purpose it was put gratuitously into circulation, but never published. Since this period, so much additional matter of considerable importance, and fully establishing the facts and opinions of the unpublished address, have been obtained by the same distinguished statesman, that he has felt it his duty to put the whole together in a second address to Mr. Peel, and to lay it before the public. I herewith beg your acceptance of a copy of this address, and shall take care to forward another copy of it to Mr. Hutchinson, in order that he may be put into possession of the whole case; and shall leave it to your own judgment to bring the entire question before your readers, in whatever way you may think
best adapted for the purpose of free discussion; and, so long as such discussion is conducted in the spirit of candour and liberality which Mr. Hutchinson has evinced, it cannot fail of being highly instrumental to the improvement of prison discipline, and of developing many points of importance within the range of forensic medicine.

How long the tread-wheel has been established in the House of Correction at Southwell, or how many are, upon an average, employed upon it, though points of the utmost moment in the present enquiry, are not even glanced at by Mr. Hutchinson in his letter upon the subject; who seems also to have forgotten to mention whether females are sentenced to the same labour or not. As no communication from the visiting justices of the Nottinghamshire House of Correction appears among the official returns, by order of the House of Commons, made to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, respecting the use of tread-wheels in all gaols or houses of correction, in which they were established on January 18th of the present year, it is most probable that this establishment has taken place since; and, as one of the chief difficulties we have had to encounter is the very short period of time in which this instrument has been at work anywhere, it is obvious that no general conclusion could be drawn from what has occurred in the house of correction before us, had the scale of employment been even much larger than there is reason to calculate it at, and had female prisoners been subjected to the labour; which it does not appear that Mr. Hutchinson has ventured to recommend, notwithstanding his general approbation of the tread-wheel discipline.

Beyond the walls of this prison, and the period of time in which the tread-machine has been working there, Mr. Hutchinson's experience does not seem to have travelled; and hence, so far as relates to the facts he has been an eye-witness to, they form no collision whatever with the mass of general facts and opinions brought forward in Sir John Hippisley's publication, which makes ample allowance for exemptions and procrastinated evils; while the tendency to mischief still continues to operate, and has sufficiently shown itself wherever there has been time and opportunity.

How far Mr. Hutchinson's views of the effects of such a kind of exercise as the tread-wheel imposes, in relation to hernias and varicose tumors of the legs, may be correct, he will learn, and the public also will learn, from an extensive and interesting branch of inquiry, contained in Sir John's pamphlet, directly bearing upon this subject, and probably new to many of your readers. Mr. Hutchinson, however, is quite correct in stating
that the prisoners at work upon the wheel have it in their power, instead of treading with their toes, or the fore-part of the foot only, to twist their knees outward, and bring a larger portion of the foot into action, without which he is ready to admit that the exercise 'could be continued but a very short time, and would be productive of never-ending lameness and misery to the prisoner who had suffered this torture.' In the pamphlet now sent you will find, however, that, though this change of position can be accomplished, and is accomplished, for a few moments at times, it is not persevered in by the prisoners in Cold-bath Fields, who are as dextrous as most of the kingdom, and cannot be persevered in for more than a few moments at a time, on account of the pain such a twist of the knees produces, and which compels the prisoner to return abruptly to his original and ordinary bearing upon the fore-part of the foot alone: and hence, indeed, the violent heat, exhaustion, and perspiration, into which he is constantly thrown by an exercise of more than ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, although his progression is so slow, that his entire day's walk up hill, and this without any burden to carry, does not exceed two miles or two miles and a half for the whole day: and hence also that necessity which is found every where, on the introduction of tread-wheels, for a richer diet. This at present consists, in the House of Correction in Cold-bath Fields, of half a pound of solid flesh every other day, with good animal soup in the intermediate day, besides a sufficiency of bread and other farinaceous food; and Mr. Webb, the prison-surgeon, whose official Report shows ostensibly that he is not unfriendly to the tread-wheel, has told me, within a very few days, that, without this increased diet, the workers on the wheel would be soon in the situation of the convicts at the Millbank Penitentiary. All which facts speak sufficiently for themselves.

It was in order to determine how far it might be advisable to enforce the erection of tread-wheels in all our prisons by a parliamentary enactment, that the visiting magistrates were lately called upon, by the order of the House of Commons just adverted to, to make returns to the office of the Home Secretary of the effects actually produced, wherever they had obtained an establishment. Mr. Hutchinson conceives that 'this mass of most respectable evidence speaks loudly in favour of the highly salutary and safe operation of this mode of preventing a repetition of crime.' He will find, in the pamphlet I am about to send him, that there are others who have examined it very accurately, and think differently; and, by turning to the third
Contagion of the Spanish Yellow Fever.—The Diario di Barcelona, No. 208, contains an interesting document of the opinions of several Medical Corporations and distinguished practitioners in Spain with regard to this much agitated question. This document professes to be the result of an investigation appointed by the Cortes in December 1822, to be undertaken by the authorities of the cities which had been infected by the epidemic. The Junta of Physicians and the Medico-Chirurgical Junta of Cadiz, the Junta of Physicians at Malaga, and at Antequera, and the Supreme Junta of Minorca declare, that the fever is eminently contagious. The municipality of Coin, however, observe, that though several persons affected with fever had arrived there from the districts where it prevailed, no one in that city had been infected. At Barcelona thirty-two physicians believe it is contagious, and ten that it is not. The Junta of Malaga assert, that if the air is charged with effluvia, it may infect at the distance of thirty or forty paces. The Juntas of Cadiz, Malaga, and Antequera maintain, that it is always exotic. And all agree that there is no safety but in flight.—Bulletin de la Soc. Philom. Oct. 1823, p. 153.