A SINGULAR CASE OF PUERPERAL CONVULSIONS, SUCCESSFULLY TREATED WITH THE ERGOT.

BY DOCT. HENRY S. WATERHOUSE.

[Communicated by John Stearns, M. D. of Albany, for the New-England Journal of Medicine, &c.]

As the operation of the Ergot upon the human system has recently excited much enquiry and some collision of opinion, it would be highly useful for every practitioner to collect for publication such facts as may correctly define its real qualities. It is with that view that I now communicate the following case.

JOHN STEARNS.

Extract of a Letter from Dr. Henry S. Waterhouse to John Stearns, M. D. dated, Malone, Franklin County, 5th Sept, 1815.

FROM reading your letter to Mr. S. Akerly published in the Medical Repository, vol. xi. and from information received from my medical friends at the eastward, I have been induced for four years past to make trial of the Ergot in lingering and tedious cases of parturition, and in every case its exhibition has been attended with manifest advantage.

In every instance where I have made trial of it, I have been extremely cautious to ascertain by careful examination that the labour was delayed only from want of regular and forcible parturient pains. The following curious and to me perfectly unexpected effects of the Ergot, I think would be interesting to the medical faculty in general.

Mrs. L—— H——, of this town, of nervous temperament and rather delicate habit, aged 19, was on the 24th of June, 1814, seized with the usual precursory symptoms of parturition. I found her with wandering pains of the back and abdomen, some throbbing pain of the head, and a tense pulse, though natural as to frequency. The loss of 15 ounces of blood, fomentations with bitter herbs to the abdomen and a proper dose of opium gradually gave her relief, and at evening she fell into a quiet and refreshing sleep. The next morning at 9 o'clock a messenger came for me, in the utmost haste, who declared that Mrs. H. was certainly dying. I saw her in a short time, and on enquir-

ing, learned that she had passed the night in a pretty quiet state for one in her situation, and that between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning, some degree of mental derangement was, for the first time, discovered by her attendants. She complained of wandering pains in her abdomen, and the same throbbing sensation in her head. These symptoms increased till muscular spasms of the most violent kind were brought on. She was now labouring under the most horrid form of puerperal convulsions that I ever witnessed. She was constantly talking and muttering over things in a perfectly disconnected and incoherent manner—her eyes were rolling from side to side and turning up in their sockets—she had so frequently bitten her tongue that blood was running in considerable quantities from her mouth; her extremities were of a deadly coldness, and the spasmodic contractions of the muscles of her limbs, back, abdomen, neck and lower jaw were truly alarming. The only difference from health discoverable in her pulse was that they were somewhat diminished in frequency. After several fruitless efforts we at length succeeded in placing her lower extremities in warm water, and after making several abortive trials, I finally got her to swallow a large quantity of Tinct. *Assæ foetid.* with Tinct. *Opii*, her abdomen was wrapped round with flannels wrung out of a decoction of bitter herbs, her extremities were smartly embrocated with stimulating substances, &c. &c. But all to no purpose. There was no flooding, but from the situation of my patient it was impossible to make that accurate examination *per vaginam* which I could have wished. I could however ascertain that the *Os Uteri* was in a small degree dilated. Circumstances were such that I could not with safety to my patient (as her general strength was rapidly wasting) defer the use of means till I could procure the medical aid of some of my neighbouring practitioners. Her pulse had become small and much more frequent, her breathing was laborious and her countenance ghastly. The Ergot presented itself to my mind as the only probable means of saving her life. I mixed about thirty grains in a small quantity of warm water and gradually insinuated a table spoon between her teeth, worked the medicine into her mouth and in two or three minutes she had swallowed it. The effects were almost instantaneous and truly astonishing—her spasm gave way, the opera-

tions of her mind became regular and she awoke as she supposed from a fatiguing, disturbed and painful state of sleep. She complained of much weariness and soreness. A strong cup of tea was given her, together with some light nourishment, and she soon fell into a quiet sleep. In the evening following, true and forcible labour pains came on, and I delivered her in a short time without the occurrence of any remarkable circumstance."

CASE OF MALFORMATION.

BY DR. DAVID ALEX. TELFAIR.

[For the New-England Journal of Medicine, &c.]

On the 13th July last I was called to Mrs. Mc Gowns of this vicinity, aged about 35 years (having had eight healthy and well formed children) to assist her in parturition, the account given me by the midwife was, that she had been in labour with very strong but ineffectual throes about 12 hours, that then the waters broke and a foot presented very much deformed; this circumstance having never before occurred to her, although a person of considerable experience in her line of business, alarmed her so much, that she recommended my being sent for, when I found her in the following situation. But previous to describing which, it may be proper to give the form of the child or monster, as it may tend to account for the difficulties attending the delivery.

The fœtuses as they may be called, since nature attempted the formation of two, are about one and a half feet long; the heads, which were two with their necks, shoulders, and arms, are united (entire and well formed) nearly on a line with the ensiform cartilage, thence becoming a single body and having the appearance of being natural, except the size being that of two full grown fœtuses, the abdominal viscera terminated in a natural anus, but which was turned very much inward, for the purpose of receiving a central thigh, which seemed to have its attachment in the articulation of the os. coccygis, so as to form a right angle with the other legs, which were in their natural positions. The supernumerary member was well formed until it arrived within an inch of the ankle, when it became abruptly bent interiorly, termi-