

remained open, discharging freely for about a fortnight, during which time he took freely of port wine and generous diet. He then made a trip to Paris, and returned quite well, again stout, his health and vigour being completely renewed.

The only comment I would make upon the two cases thus hurriedly and imperfectly recorded, is my opinion, that the iron, by renewing the red globules of the blood, enabled the vital powers to throw out, by critical discharges, the morbid matters which had been deteriorating and debilitating the constitution of each patient for months before, and that it is by an analagous action that we must attribute the benefit derived from the free exhibition of iron in cases of scrofulous disease.

Harrow-road, Paddington, November, 1854.

## ON CRETINISM AND IDIOTISM.

By JOHN TATAM BANKS, M.D.

ON a recent tour through Switzerland I was induced to visit the Hospice of the Abendberg. Many motives prompted me to do so, especially the desire to see a little patient (the child of a lady residing in England) now staying there, and also to judge for myself of the advantages and benefits arising from this institution.

Most of the readers of *THE LANCET* are perhaps aware that the hospital on the Abendberg was opened in 1840 by a benevolent physician, Dr. Guggenbühl, for the reception of patients afflicted with cretinism—a numerous class of human beings hitherto too much neglected, and suffered to live and die like the lower animals. In Switzerland alone there are, I believe, 20,000 persons afflicted, to a greater or less extent, with this fearful malady—a malady presenting the greatest mental imbecility, combined frequently with the greatest bodily degeneracy—a melancholy spectacle, the description of which is painful, the sight dreadful.

The fact that goitre and that cretinism in men and also in animals, occur in the lower confined grounds, and in narrow damp valleys, where the due circulation of air is interrupted, and that at 3000 English feet above the sea these diseases in Switzerland are seldom found, led Dr. Guggenbühl to build his hospital on the Abendberg 3500 feet above the sea level. A more favourable and beautiful spot could scarcely be selected amidst the chain of the Bernese Alps. It is well exposed to the sun, on the southern slope of the mountain, and to the dry, pure, bracing air, but sheltered from severe cold winds. The views from it are exceedingly grand.

Dr. Guggenbühl appeared to take great pleasure in showing us over his establishment, and in explaining his system. He presented to our examination many of the pitiable objects whom his unwearied exertions are striving to raise from helpless idiotism to mental intelligence.

As Dr. Guggenbühl considers cretinism as the consequence of an enfeebled physical condition,—in other words, the effect of an abnormal or diseased state of the bodily organs,—his treatment consists in improving the general strength, thereby developing and strengthening the different organs of the system, and thus bringing all the functions of the body into a healthier state, amongst the rest that of the brain, and so to rouse the mental faculties into more vigorous action to admit of moral training and judicious instruction.

In addition to the natural advantages of an elevated situation, where the mountain air, peculiarly beneficial from its strong electric properties, can be freely breathed, (remote from the noxious influences of the lower grounds and valleys,) physical, medical, and moral treatment are assiduously observed.

Gymnastic exercises in the open air, the cultivation of little gardens, and the occasional use of baths, electricity, and frictions are carefully attended to.

The medical treatment of course varies according to the indications of the disease. In some the skin is much affected; in others the glandular system; in others the nervous. Many are rickety, and I saw two or three children with their bones so soft that their limbs could be easily bent. Many are atrophied, and numbers hydrocephalic.

From the conversation I had with Dr. Guggenbühl, I entertain no doubt that the remedies best calculated to correct disordered, and to promote healthy actions of the system are well selected, and judiciously prescribed.

Great attention is paid to regulate the propensities, to improve the manners and habits, and to awaken the affections of these unfortunate beings, and, from the reports, we have

reason to believe with much success; and that not only in numerous instances has the infirm and torpid frame being strengthened, but intelligence kindled in the once dormant mind of the degraded cretin. In this generous effort “to restore to its higher condition the ruined tenement of the idiot’s frame,”—enabling him to join in the amenities of social life,—the persevering and self-denying founder of the Hospice on the Abendberg devotes his life and property.

Unquestionably, in many cases the peculiar conformation of the brain bids defiance to any improvement in the mental manifestations; but experience has shown that in numerous instances the imperfect senses of the once-neglected idiot may, by training and education, be strengthened and developed.

The aid of the benevolent is alone wanting to remove the chain which binds the idiot’s mind, and rescue him from his bondage, in this our own beloved country, as well as in the poor cretin’s Alpine home.

Hougham Lodge, near Dover, Kent, November, 1854.

## ON THE

## TREATMENT OF CHOLERAIC DIARRHOEA BY OLIVE OIL.

By C. RODNEY HUXLEY, Esq., M.R.C.S.

FOR several weeks past I have read many opinions on the treatment of cholera published in *THE LANCET*, all of which have been opposed to the simple means employed in distant parts, and in my own practice, which have effectually and invariably checked the premonitory symptoms in this fearful malady—viz., half-ounce doses of olive oil, given every three hours till the diarrhoea ceases. When surgeon to the British Seamen’s Hospital at Lisbon, I had frequent opportunities of testing this invaluable medicine in the most stubborn cases of diarrhoea, and in no instance have I known it fail.

I was induced to adopt this treatment, hearing from an influential merchant in Lisbon of two alarming cases of cholera, both sufferers personally known to my informant, who rapidly recovered by the simple use of olive oil taken as described. And so surely will it yet be learnt that the remarkable escape of the Jews in seasons of cholera, is attributable to the frequent use of this oil. The fact is so notorious that I am surprised the subject has been past over as little more than the result of accident.

I will not enter into the philosophy or physiology of this treatment, more than by reference to its invariable effect upon the mucous membrane of the alimentary canal, which is to allay its universal irritation. In this respect, I look upon olive oil as a specific, for it has never failed to check the excess of mucous secretion, so constant a symptom in the first stages of cholera. My conviction is, if you can succeed in soothing the irritation, you check the disorder, and neither cramp nor other fearful symptoms will follow. The danger of the blood ceasing to circulate, owing to the waste of its fluid ingredient, is no longer anticipated, and the patient is soon pronounced out of danger.

In conclusion, permit me to state that my only object in soliciting insertion of these remarks in *THE LANCET*, is the conviction, and no less hope, that the treatment by olive oil in cholera will receive, as it merits, an universal test.

Greenbridge, Nov. 1854.

## A CASE OF DEATH FROM THE ABSORPTION OF “WASHING SODA” (BICARBONATE OF SODA.)

By HENRY HANCOX, M.D.

NOT being aware of any case having been recorded of the injurious effects of “washing-soda” upon the tissues of the human body, when absorbed into the system, I submit the following case to the readers of your widely-circulated journal, should you consider it worthy of a place.

I was called to attend Mary A—, aged forty-eight years, a washerwoman, of spare habit of body, on the 3rd inst, when she gave the following history of her case:—A little more than a fortnight from the above date she received a small cut from a penknife, on the outer side of the little finger of her right hand; being merely a small scratch no notice was taken of it: she shortly after commenced to wash some linen in water containing “washing soda.” The day following great pain was experienced in the part that had been cut by the penknife, and swelling soon after made its appearance, which induced her to

Brynmawr, Breconshire, November, 1854.

\* Since the above was written, the patient has died of purulent deposit.