discovery. Sulphuric ether has long been used as an anti-hysterical remedy of ordinary power; the inhalation of the weak vapor of ether was known as a toy, and sometimes used by chemical youths for mere frolic; and it was known, also, in a concentrated state, as one of the narcotic poisons. By a new and happy application and generalization, this drug, or toy, or poison, has been invested with fresh powers, which almost realize the fabled Lethe. From being one of the playthings of knowledge, it has been metamorphosed to one of its greatest triumphs; it has been, at one leap, transferred from the pages of toxicology to the latest, and almost the fairest, page of the healing art. That its discoverer should be an American is a high honor to our Transatlantic brethren; next to the discovery of Franklin, it is the second and greatest contribution of the New World to science, and it is the first great addition to the medical art."

"A patent has been taken out for the discovery, the American patent standing in the names of Dr. C. T. Jackson, of Boston, one of the most celebrated physicians in the United States, and Dr. Morton, the discoverer. This question of patent is a stain upon the whole matter. We trust it will speedily be relinquished; and we are assured, that for the patentees to attempt to maintain it by law would be most preposterous, and impossible. If it should realize all the present anticipations of temperate and calm-judging men, the thing is far too noble to be clogged with a mere commercial transaction. Not that Dr. Morton should pass unrewarded; he deserves, if his discovery stand the test of time, the gratitude and reward of every civilized people and government upon the face of the earth: he will have, we should hope, too strong a claim on their spontaneous gratitude, to need to resort to compulsory reward. How much more imperative would his claim be than the demands of those who have merely invented some new engine of destruction!"

MERCURY AS A REMEDY

By J. B. Harrison, Esq., Eng.

NEXT to bloodletting, mercury perhaps stands in the estimation of British practitioners. Few medicines have been so largely employed, so greatly valued, and so much deprecated, as mercury. In this country, at least, it enters largely into our prescriptions, and is considered by the majority of practitioners as one of our most valuable and efficacious medicines. Mercury, according to its administration or mode of preparation, is used with various objects. In many instances, the action of mercury as a purgative seems to be more effectual than that of any other medicine. Whether, in such cases, it have any specific effect on the biliary secretion I cannot say; but certainly much good arises from its use. The combination of calomel with colocynth, or a few grains of calomel, followed by a black draught, are eminently useful in many nameless states of indigestion—probably more useful than any other cathartic. Again, mercury

is extensively employed in the treatment of inflammation; and after bloodletting and the adoption of other measures designed to relieve the early and more acute symptoms, it is considered as chiefly to be relied on. I believe this opinion to be deserving of credit; but I imagine the confidence commonly placed in it much exceeds what it really deserves. In the majority of cases in which mercurials are pushed with a view to arrest morbid action, or to restore parts which have suffered lesion, it is impossible to say what may be the true amount of relief afforded; and it should never be forgotten that most of the effects attributed to medicine in this, as in many other cases, would probably have been brought about by the unaided operation of natural causes. Of mercury as an anti-syphilitic, there is great difference of opinion. Large treatises and numerous volumes have been dedicated to the discussion, and it may appear presumptuous here to attempt to decide a controversy which has been so long and warmly carried on. Yet every practitioner must, in point of fact, decide this question for himself, so that an individual cannot be wrong in expressing his own convictions on the subject. For my own part I have seen nothing to give me that undoubted confidence in mercury which it was formerly common to repose in it. The bad cases of syphilis which I have seen have been cases in which mercury was or had been employed; some of them, I think, have been greatly aggravated by it. When the disease has been early discovered, I have generally treated it without mercury, and have had no reason afterwards to regret that I have not had recourse to it. In most of the chronic cases, I have met with, mercury had been given previously, or I was induced to make use of it, being unwilling that the patient should not have immediately the benefit of a line of treatment in which it is common to confide. Respecting the reputed *alterative* effects of mercury I cannot say much. The word *alterative* is, undoubtedly, a very flattering one to the patient; but it should be remembered that it is only a name. When a person has suffered for years from an obstinate complaint, and is fairly worn out by watching and unrest, it is evidently pleasant to him to imagine that he is taking an *alterative*, to *alter*, as he presumes, the condition of his system. But the case is far from appearing of so promising an aspect if the term *poison* be substituted, which is often quite as appropriate. Perhaps the patient may be taking minute doses of the bichloride of mercury; and if the practitioner were candidly to confess, he would be as much astonished as the patient would be pleased, if a cure were really accomplished ascribable fairly to the medicine employed. But what, then, does the practitioner expect? Why, if the truth must be spoken, he anticipates nothing whatever, and if any effect do happen to manifest itself, he is in great haste to withdraw the remedy. I grant that in some cases of chronic enlargements, as those of the testicle or mamma, the exhibition of small doses of mercury may be greatly beneficial, even curative; but here its influence is directed to the arrest of inflammatory action, or, more properly, to the removal of its consequences.—*London Lancet.*