MR. HIGGINBOTTOM'S
TREATMENT OF ERYSIPELAS
WITH THE
NITRATE OF SILVER.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I observed in THE LANCET of the 22nd of April last, that Mr. Erasmus Wilson in his lectures has not stated my method of applying the nitrate of silver in erysipelas quite correctly, and I am desirous, through the medium of your Journal, to correct the error.

Mr. Wilson says, "Mr. Higginbottom recommends its employment in a weak solution; the strength of the solution may vary from five to fifteen grains of the nitrate of silver to the ounce of distilled water." In my essay on the use of the nitrate of silver I have nowhere recommended the application of it in solution, but always in a solid form. The following is the direction I have given:—"The part is first to be washed in soap and water to remove any oily substance from the skin, and then it is to be wiped dry; the inflamed and surrounding skin is then to be moistened, and a long stick of the nitrate of silver is to be passed over the moistened surface, taking care that not only every part of the inflamed skin should be touched, but the surrounding healthy skin to the extent of an inch or more beyond it, in severe cases. The nitrate of silver may then be passed over these surfaces once, twice, thrice, or more times, according to the degree of inflammation; once in slight cases, twice or three times in common cases, and more frequently if quick vesication be required."

The use of a weak solution, as named by Mr. Erasmus Wilson, as an application in erysipelas would, I imagine, very soon bring the remedy into discredit, as it could not possibly succeed in extinguishing the inflammation or preventing its progress. In my own practice, for the last eight or nine years, since the second edition of my essay, I have, for convenience, used a solution of the nitrate of silver, but of a very different strength to the one mentioned by Mr. Wilson, viz., eight scruples of nitrate of silver, with twelve drops of nitric acid, in one ounce of distilled water. This concentrated solution I have used in the same manner as I would the solid stick, according to the various degrees of inflammation, applying it with a dossil of linen tied on the end of a small stick, in preference to a camel-hair pencil. I would here also remark that Mr. Nunneley, of Leeds, in his work on Erysipelas, has fallen into the same error in reference to my essay, in recommending the use of a weak solution of "eight or twelve grains of the nitrate to one ounce of distilled water, or six grains in the same quantity of rectified spirit."

The success of the nitrate of silver in external inflammation depends upon its strength and its proper application. The method of applying it by some practitioners appears to me to be quite trifling with the remedy. Instead of covering the whole inflamed surface and the surrounding healthy skin with the nitrate of silver, so as to cover the whole of the inflammation, they simply apply it around the inflamed surface,—a mode of proceeding which has seldom the power of even preventing the spreading of the disease, or the deeper mischief when the inflammation itself is unarrested. Sometimes, even after the most decided application of the nitrate of silver, the inflammation may spread, but it is then generally much feebler in character, and easily checked by the repeated application of the remedy.

In severe cases of inflammation, in which there may be a suspicion of deep-seated suppuration, a poultice of bread and water, or a plaster of neutral ointment, may be applied after the nitrate of silver, to keep the surface soft for a future examination.

In conclusion, I would add that I consider the application of the nitrate of silver as perfectly safe. I have seen no case of metastasis or any other bad effects from the use of it during upwards of twenty years. I purpose, at a future period, to make some further statements in corroboration of the success of the external application of the nitrate of silver, in an addendum to the second edition of my essay. I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. HIGGINBOTTOM.

Nottingham, June 27, 1843.

NAPHTHALINE AS AN EXPECTORANT

THIS substance, when applied to the tongue, causes a peculiar heat and pricking sensation, which extends down the throat and bronchial tubes, and exciting a spasm of the latter, ends in inducing a cough of a kind very efficacious in clearing the air-cells and canals of accumulations of mucus. It is, therefore, a remedy highly suitable in the asthmatic coughs of old people, and others who, from debility, are unable to expel the matters which clog the pulmonary membrane. M. Dupasquier, of Lyons, prescribes it in the form of a syrup and an electuary. The former is composed of fifteen grains of naphthaline, suspended by a small quantity of boiling alcohol in about four ounces of syrup, of which the dose is a teaspoonful every quarter of an hour until expectoration. The other form consists of naphthaline well mixed with any simple electuary, in the proportion of eight grains of the former to half a drachm of the latter; dose, a tablespoonful every quarter of an hour, as before.—*Gazette des Hôpitaux.*