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CASE OF POISONING BY VERATRUM VIRIDE.

[Read before the Middlesex East District Medical Society, and communicated, by the Secretary, for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

By J. C. HARRIS, M.D., OF WEST CAMBRIDGE.

J. C., aged 1 year and 6 months, was attacked with pneumonia, from which he made a good recovery, the chief remedy in the active stage being *veratrum viride*—the dose being four drops of the tincture, repeated every four hours. When the child ceased taking the *veratrum*, there remained forty or fifty drops mixed with water, in the proportion of four drops to a teaspoonful, which the mother saved for future use, keeping it in a cup four or five days, then pouring it into a bottle. About six weeks after this, the child caught cold, was feverish, and had some difficulty in breathing. The mother commenced giving the *veratrum* every half hour, in teaspoonful doses of the mixture she had saved, until four or five doses had been given; a tablespoonful was given for one dose by mistake. The whole quantity taken was probably not less than thirty-five drops, for the four or five days' evaporation must have increased the proportionate strength of a dose at least one drop.

There was an effort to vomit after the second dose, but without ejecting anything from the stomach. Efforts to vomit were made every few minutes, but without success, except once, when a small quantity passed from the mouth. I was called to the child about seven hours after taking the first dose. I found him apparently unconscious, very pale, breathing heavy—almost stertorous; pulse 40, extremities cold, and a profuse cold perspiration over the whole body. These symptoms I supposed were the result of the large doses of the *veratrum*. I made no attempt to remove the contents of the stomach, but ordered mustard paste to be applied to the chest, abdomen and extremities, and carbonate of ammonia and camphor—three grains of the former to one of the latter—every hour, and a drachm of brandy intermediately. This treatment was

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kept up until the child died, about thirteen hours after taking the first dose of the veratrum.

REMARKS.—This child had always been feeble, and his mother was in the habit of frequently dosing him for real or imaginary sickness. It is possible, if not probable, that the result would have been different had there been free emesis within an hour or two after taking the medicine. I did not attempt to remove the contents of the stomach, for the case seemed almost hopeless when I first saw it.

This is the first case of death from an overdose of veratrum viride I have seen or heard of, and therefore it is possible I did not pursue the best course of treatment.

NOTE BY THE SECRETARY.—This case is very interesting, from the fact that it is the first well-authenticated case of poisoning from the use of the veratrum viride. It did not result from its legitimate employment under the direction of a physician.

Another point of interest is the fact that the alkaloids suspended in water should keep their strength for six weeks. Those who are familiar with the action of the tinctura veratri viridis with water know that on keeping a few days, a dirty, unpleasant-looking sediment is deposited in the bottom of the vessel, which has usually led to its rejection as worthless.

Still another point is the absence of free vomiting. Perhaps the nature of the drug might have been so changed as to have impaired the emetic without destroying the sedative properties.

The relation of this case should not hinder any from administering the veratrum when it is indicated. It must have been given tens of thousands of times, but this is the first well-authenticated case of death that has come to the knowledge of the Veratrum Viride Committee of this Society. The veratrum viride is used at present by the members of this Society, and the confidence in it has grown with its use as the most reliable arterial sedative known to us.

Woburn, March 24th, 1865.

MEDICAL TESTIMONY.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

MESSRS. EDITORS.—Truth is the great end of all investigation. The cause of truth requires the most critical examination and careful discrimination. Errors and mistakes in the observation of facts, and in opinions based upon them, may have been unavoidable for want of attention or haste, but they are unjustifiable in all matters of medical jurisprudence, especially when committed by that class of witnesses called experts—a class who are, at least by the laws of Maine, favored by unlimited reward; and who are expected to possess talents and attainments far beyond those of ordinary skill and knowledge.