THE BOSTON MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

VOL. LIX.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 1858.

No. 9.

ANALYSIS OF THIRTY-SEVEN CASES OF UTERINE DISEASE, BEARING UPON THE QUESTION OF THE USE OF POTASSA CUM CALCE AS AN APPLICATION TO THE UTERUS; WITH REMARKS.

[Read before the Boston Society for Medical Observation, September 20th, 1858, and communicated for the Boston Med. and Surg. Journal.]

BY LUTHER PARKS, JR., M.D.

Introductory Remarks.—On the presentation, at a former meeting of this Society, of certain cases of uterine disease, in which potassa cum calce was employed, as an application to the womb, the propriety of using (or frequently using) this remedy was called in question. I have, therefore, thought it proper, from considerations of respect toward those who have differed from me, and of justice to myself, to prepare the table given below, of the cases in which I have used the caustic above-mentioned.

Explanation of the Table.—In the *first* column of the table are the numbers by which the cases are designated. The cases are placed, and numbered, according to the order in which they follow each other in my records. The *second* column gives the lesion of the uterus, as revealed by the touch, and by the speculum, and sometimes by the sound. The *third* column presents the number of applications, to the *exterior* of the cervix uteri, of potash with lime, and of potash without lime;—under the letters “P. C. C.” being recorded the number of applications of potassa cum calce; under the letters “P. F.,” the number of applications of potassa fusa. In the *fourth* column is noted the number of *insertions* within the cervical canal of the uterus, of the potassa cum calce; a space being left, under the same heading, for potassa fusa, also, which space is everywhere blank.* The *fifth* column contains the results of the cases, so far as reached. The *sixth* column is for the record of any *injuries* which may have occurred, beyond the making of an issue, with a temporary increase of the ordinary uterine symptoms. The *seventh* and last column is for explanatory remarks.

* The potash, whether with or without lime, I have applied in the form of cylinders. The potassa cum calce I now use to the exclusion, I may say, of the potassa fusa, and, for the most part, in the small hard cylinders made by Squier of London, under the direction of Dr. Bennet.

TABLE

CASE	LESION OF UTERUS.	Number of ap- plications to exte- rior of cervix uteri.		Number of inser- tions within cer- vix uteri.	
		P. C. C.	P. F.	P. C. C.	P. F.
1	Hypertrophy, with congestion	1		2	
2	" "	1		1	
3	" "		1		
4	" "	3	1	2	
5	Engorgement, with abrasion	2		2	
6	Hypertrophy	1	1	1	
7	Engorgement	3	1	3	
8	Engorgement, with elongation of cervix, &c.	2	1	1	
9	Engorgement, &c.		1	2	
10	"	1	1	1	
11	Hypertrophy, with congestion	1	1	1	
12	Engorgement	2			
13	Congestion	4			
14	Abrasion	1		1	
14½	Engorgement, with abrasion	1			
15	" " "	3		1	
16	Hypertrophy, with congestion	3			
17	Engorgement	3			
18	Hypertrophy, with retroversion	4			
19	" " congestion	13			
20	" " "	2			
21	Hypertrophy, with abrasion	12		2	
22	" " "	3			
23	Hypertrophy	4			
24	Probable uterine catarrh, &c.	3			
25	Hypertrophy, with abrasion	4			
26	" " "	6		1	
27	Engorgement?	1			
28	Hypertrophy, with congestion	5			
29	Hypertrophy	2			
30	Engorgement	2			
31	Hypertrophy, with congestion	4			
32	" with abrasion	9			
33	Engorgement with "	2			
34	Hypertrophy, with "	4			
35		1			
36	Hypertrophy, with congestion, &c.	3			
37	" " "	3			
Total,		119	8	21	0

OF CASES.

RESULT OF CASE.	Injury from application of potas.c. calce.	REMARKS.
Favorable	0	
"	0	
"	0	
"	0	
"	0	
"	0	Incipient adhesion of lips of cervix—attributable, perhaps, to <i>insertion</i> of potassa cum calce—perhaps to subsequent application of potassa fusa to anterior lip, whence it may have run down upon posterior lip. This adhesion was removed by passage of sound, and by incisions.
"	0	After one insertion within cervix, and one application to outside of it, of the potassa cum calce, application of the intra-uterine stem-pessary, and exposure to cold; from one or more of these causes, inflammatory symptoms, with subsequent discharge of pus <i>per rectum</i> . Recovery.
Improvement	?	
"	0	
"	0	Left town before completion of treatment.
"	0	" " " "
"	0	Lost sight of patient.
Favorable	0	
Local lesion removed— symptoms not	0	This case occurred, in 1855, to the same patient whose case is recorded next (144).
Local lesions removed	0	1857.—The lesions this time were chronic, following an acute attack of hysteritis. Patient restored to usual state, which is one of feeble health.
Favorable	0	
"	0	
"	0	
Improvement	0	Great hypertrophy—symptoms severe, and of long standing.
Favorable	0	Patient removed before conclusion of treatment.
Improvement	0	
Favorable	0	Case severe, and of long standing.
"	0	
"	0	
Improvement	0	Case still under treatment.
Favorable	0	
"	0	
Not known	0	[case. Patient left town before conclusion of
Favorable	0	
"	0	
Not known	0	Lost sight of patient.
Favorable	0	
Improvement	0	Case still under treatment.
Favorable	0	
"	0	
Not known	0	Lost sight of patient.
Improvement	0	Case still under treatment.
"	0	" " "

Comments upon the Table.—Cases which have been treated with nitrate of silver, tincture of iodine, or otherwise, without the use of potash, are not included in the table. Also, cases in which potassa cum calce has been inserted within the canal of the cervix (I have never used the potassa fusa in this way), without the application of potash to the outside of the organ, are omitted. Further, the collateral treatment, in the cases cited, is not described, except where there have been unfavorable symptoms. This course has been adopted, because my present object is not to prove the curative efficacy of applications of potassa cum calce to the exterior of the cervix uteri, but to show that such applications, if made with circumspection, *need not do injury*.

The average number, to a case, of applications to, and insertions within, cervix uteri, of caustic potash, with or without lime, was 4; the average number, to a case, of applications to exterior of cervix uteri of potassa cum calce, was $3\frac{3}{4}$. Counting Cases 14 and 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ as two separate ones, the total is 38.

In two of the cases the potassa cum calce was not applied to the exterior of the cervix. In one of these—No. 9—that agent was inserted within the cervix, potassa fusa also being applied to the exterior of the organ. In the other—No. 3—potassa fusa alone was applied externally. With reference to the propriety of admitting these two cases, I argued, that if no harm was done in them by the use of the potassa fusa, externally, and the potassa cum calce, internally, *a fortiori*, none would have accrued from the application of the potassa cum calce to the exterior of the cervix.

In one case—No. 35—the lesion was not satisfactorily made out. There was one case of abrasion alone; one of simple congestion; and one of probable uterine catarrh. In all the rest—thirty-four in number, out of a total of thirty-eight—there was more or less of hypertrophy or engorgement; in the removal of which lesions, it seems to me, the potash is most often useful.

In eleven of the cases in the above table the treatment was not completed. But inspection will show that in nearly all the cases—complete and incomplete—more or less benefit is reported to have been obtained. And there is no proof, that I can discover, that that benefit was in any way retarded, at least, by the external cauterization with potash.

To this statement, it may be said, perhaps, there is an exception in one case—No. 8. But that, to say the worst of it, is an equivocal one, the occurrence in it, of suppuration, being, at least, as referable to other causes, as to the external application of the potassa cum calce. Beyond this, no serious injury (indeed nothing unfavorable) occurred in any of the remaining thirty-seven cases, and one hundred and eighteen external applications of the potassa cum calce attributable to those applications, further than the increase, for a few days, of the ordinary uterine symptoms—chiefly the backache and vaginal discharges.

On the basis, then, of the facts presented in the above table, I shall, perhaps, be justified in declining to discard the use of potassa cum calce, as an external application to the cervix uteri, until more light is afforded me upon the subject. That carelessly employed—*abused*—it may produce injury, I make no doubt. But, that it is *necessarily* dangerous, I am not ready to admit. If, by the application of the agent in question, is meant the destruction of the cervix, by covering it with the caustic, I am with those who oppose such application. The treatment which I am endeavoring to sustain, is the making of one or more issues on the neck of the womb, the aggregate area of which issues is never to exceed the space which can be covered by a three-cent piece; bearing in mind, that the diameter of the issue is usually about twice that of the cylinder of caustic.—I will add, here, that I usually continue the contact of the caustic with the living tissue from half a minute to a minute; and, also (what it may seem superfluous to state), that I always neutralize the potash, before withdrawing the speculum, by pouring in half an ounce or more of vinegar. I sometimes, too, place a piece of cotton in such a way as to prevent contact between the issue and the vagina.

Potassa cum Calce within the Cervical Canal.—Let it be remembered, that we have all along been treating of the potassa cum calce as an application to the exterior of the cervix uteri. We have, in a former paper read at this Society, spoken of the danger attendant upon its insertion within the os tincæ. This danger consists, firstly, in the risk, which is not slight, of partial or complete closure of the cervical canal.* Secondly, there is, perhaps, some liability of the inflammation set up by the caustic extending to the body of the uterus. The cauterization by potash of the canal of the cervix uteri should, probably, be reserved mostly for cases of small polypi, situated between the os externum and os internum uteri; and for the rare instances of obstinate inflammation in the above-mentioned region, which refuse to yield to milder agents. When resorted to, care should be taken, I submit, to keep the canal open by the passage of the uterine sound, at intervals of two or three days; and also, perhaps, by the introduction of the nitrate of silver, as a dressing. These proceedings should be continued till all tendency to adhesion has passed by.

Potassa cum Calce versus Nitrate of Silver.—In conclusion, I would express my belief that in chronic hypertrophy, and chronic engorgement of the uterus, the potash treatment is more effectual and rapid than the milder caustics, in bringing about resolution. If this be so, it becomes sometimes a duty to use the former, as diminishing the number of vaginal examinations and operations. The milder caustics, however, I do not neglect, as also depletion by leeches and by scarification, by way of adjuvants, and by themselves.

* See Case VI.