

death was expected every minute, so great was the collapse, yet by the constant use of the most powerful stimuli the action of the heart was still kept up, and the patient kept alive. With this condition of the nervous system the sight was completely lost, the eyes were completely insensible to the impression of light. These symptoms, with but little change, continued during a space of five weeks, when, for the first time, some slight symptoms of reaction occurred, within the short space of half an hour, bringing hopes of recovery from a condition differing little from death—the heart continued to act of its own accord, without stimuli, for half an hour; and from that time she slowly, but eventually, recovered. On the induction of complete reaction, the true, but previously unintelligible, cause of all this alarming depression succeeded—the rash of scarlatina developed itself, and soon the disease was fully marked. She passed safely through the exanthematous fever, and eventually regained perfect health.*

Remarks.—Such cases as these are, I have no doubt, known to many; and I may remark, that the progress influences the result—the sinking, if slow and gradual, not giving rise to blindness; whereas amaurosis may occur, if the vital powers be rapidly depressed, from any cause. The second case illustrates the influence of a powerful impression on an individual, where the powers of the general nervous system were feeble, and is in accordance with a general law in the system—namely, that if any depressing influence be exerted on a part or on the system generally, if the general tone allow, not only is it repelled, but increased action results; if, on the contrary, the local or the general tone be deficient, the vital depression is proportionate to the condition and the intensity of the cause, immediate death being the ultimatum, then death at a more remote period; and as we gradually ascend the scale, a more and more speedy reaction, until the reaction almost immediately follows the depression: the force of the reaction being generally proportionate to the previous depression experienced.

EMPLOYMENT OF THE TINCTURE OF ACONITE IN CASES OF NEURALGIA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Having been recommended by Dr. Pereira to use the tincture of aconite as an external application in cases of neuralgia

* From the author's manuscript notes of Dr. Latham's lectures. Vide, also, Essay on Influence of Constitution, &c., p. 38.

and rheumatism, I send the following notes of cases illustrative of its effects for insertion in your valuable Periodical.

The cases to which this remedy is particularly applicable, appear to be *chronic* rheumatism and neuralgia, in which the usual symptoms of inflammation, fever, and other constitutional disorders are absent; in short, those cases in which there is no symptom of disease, except violent pain. I have, however, seen it occasionally useful in cases accompanied by febrile symptoms; but perhaps the fever might not have been a necessary accompaniment of the complaint, but brought on by continued suffering. As aconite applied *externally* never, as far as my experience goes, does any harm, there can be no objection to trying it in any case of severe pain.

The manner in which I use the remedy is to rub it on the part affected with a small piece of sponge, tied on the end of a stick, for if it wet the fingers it produces an unpleasant, numb sensation. The rubbing must be continued till the requisite quantity of the tincture is used.

During the application of this remedy, the first sensation the patient experiences is that of cold, from the evaporation of the spirit with which the tincture is made; this is succeeded by redness and swelling of skin, a glow, and sometimes a tingling, said, occasionally, to be as bad as that produced by stinging-nettles. This is in many cases followed by numbness. These symptoms pass off in a few hours, and frequently leave no remnant of the pain, which may have previously been exceedingly severe.

Dr. Pereira recommends the internal use of the tincture of aconite in doses of five minims. I have used it in much smaller doses, but not successfully. I gave three minims to one patient, in whom it produced the most violent symptoms of intoxication, vertigo, delirium, &c.

CASE 1. *Painful affection of the nerves about the hip.*—Margaret May, ætat. 35, Jan. 16, 1840, about six weeks after parturition, was attacked with severe intermittent pains about the gluteal muscles and loins, and shooting round into the groin, and sometimes half way down the thigh. She is unable to sit up or move in bed; she has headach, but no other constitutional affection.

Leeches, aperient medicine, &c., were used, from which she experienced slight relief, but the pain soon returned.

18. The pain has been very severe to-day, but at present is easier, unless she move, which brings on a return; bowels confined; head much worse.

Take two aperient pills, and rub in one drachm of the tincture of aconite.

19. Has passed a good night, and had no pain since the tincture was applied; had

cramp in the calf of the leg for a short time ; has headach at present.

She had no return of the pain about the hip after this ; the headach was relieved by ordinary means.

CASE 2.—January 20, 1840, —, a glazier, complained of rheumatism in the elbow-joint, of three days' standing ; the part was slightly swollen, and tender ; he experienced great pain upon extending or flexing the joint ; no constitutional symptoms.

Rub in one drachm of tincture of aconite. The pain was much relieved at the time ; could extend the arm, but not flex it, probably from the skin being swelled. He did not attend again.

CASE 3.—Jan. 23, 1840. Miss P., ætat. about 35, is subject to rheumatism of the scalp, particularly in cold or windy weather ; has had severe pains to-day, the weather being very windy ; has no constitutional symptoms.

Rub in two drachms of tincture of aconite. 24. Has no pain since the application.

I saw this lady occasionally for some weeks afterwards, during which she had no return of the pain. Although living near me, she has not since applied to me ; therefore I consider the cure perfect.

CASE 4.—Jan. 25, 1840, Mr. Y., ætat. about 70, has severe pain along the lower jaw, on the right side, and shooting up to the forehead, in the course of the fifth pair of nerves ; likewise over the posterior part of the right parietal bone.

Apply two drachms of the tincture.

Felt the usual sensations of cold, heat, and numbness during the application ; and lost the pain in about a quarter of an hour. I saw him about six weeks afterwards, when he had had no return of the pain.

This gentleman was very much out of health at the time, his digestive organs being disordered, accompanied by fever, &c., which symptoms remained after the pain in the face was removed.

CASE 5.—Mary Keith, ætat. about 40, has been long subject to rheumatism, by which the use of her hands is impaired. At present complains of severe pain across the forehead, on the left side, in the situation of the course of the supra-orbital nerve. The pain comes on several times daily, and is much increased by going near a fire. During the accession of pain she loses the sight in the left eye. Has had pain under the right lower jaw, which is better ; otherwise she is in tolerable health.

Apply one drachm of the tincture.

The application produced the usual symptoms, and with them the loss of sight in the left eye. After the numbness left her the sight of the eye returned, but she felt no more of the pain.

This is a remarkable case, showing that there is some very important connection be-

tween the supra-orbital nerve and the organ of vision. I remain, Sir, your most obedient servant,

JOSEPH CURTIS.

Camden Town, May 24, 1841.

OBSERVATIONS ON EMPIRICISM.

By WILLIAM FREDERICK BARLOW, Esq.,
Surgeon, Tonbridge Wells.

"Miracles appear to be so according to our ignorance of nature, and not according to the essence of nature."—MONTAIGNE.

(Concluded from p. 398.)

It is difficult to discuss gravely the follies of empiricism ; they are so truly ludicrous—"Spectatum admissi risum teneatis amici ?" The same remedy is advertised for apoplexy and a disordered stomach, for the sobbings of hysteria, and the convulsion from teething. Nothing can exhibit quackery in a more laughable point of view than a comparison with the science of medicine. Contrast affords us the best means of perceiving alike defects and excellencies. Would any one discover the blemishes of an ill-executed bust, he should place beside it the production of a Chantrey or a Behnes.

Some confound together empiricism and science, as if they were united by the closest of alliances, as if, like the sisters in the "Midsummer-Night's Dream," they were "both warbling of onesong, both in one key." They speak of nought but remedies, putting entirely out of question the intent and manner of their use ; forsooth, they have been cured by the *physic* ; but the time of its administration, the symptoms which indicated it, and the discretion which selected it from among countless other remedies, form no part of their profound reflections.

Medicine is no enchanter, it possesses not the word of the magician, it has no pretensions to the miraculous whatever, but it solves the problems of diseases, by those reasoning powers which the conduct of empirics prove them to imagine altogether superfluous in the practice of *physic*. That it may strike whatever it shall aim at, unlike the charlatan, it shoots not in the dark, but takes advantage of the best position it can occupy, and the clearest light it can procure. Moreover, like a prudent general, it watches every movement of the enemy ; it wastes not its ammunition on a deserted fortress, and justly measures the force of the attack, by the greater or less obstinacy of the defence. Cautiously distinguishing between the influence of a medicine and the effects of a disease, it does not, as was the custom of the renowned Sangrado, destroy with a remedy, and then lament that it was used so moderately. There is as much analogy between