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PART I.

ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS.

ART. VII.—*On the Treatment of Pretubercular and of Advanced Phthisis Pulmonalis by the Mullein Plant.*^a By F. J. B. QUINLAN, M.D., Univ. Dubl.; Fellow of the King and Queen's College of Physicians of Ireland; and Member of the Royal Irish Academy.

IN the collection of ancient Irish manuscripts contained in the library of the Royal Irish Academy are several medical treatises in which the mullein plant is strongly recommended in pulmonary disease. In fact, the first word of its Celtic name^b [*Cumeal Mhuirpe*] means “good for pulmonary complaints.” From time immemorial the Irish peasantry have regarded this plant as an unfailing cure for consumption; and thus it is that an herb, which in England, France, and Germany is a mere wild weed, is in Ireland carefully cultivated on a very large scale. It is in constant demand, it is advertised in all the journals, and, in fact, forms an article of ordinary commerce. There are five mulleins, all belonging to the natural order of *scrofularaceæ*; but the one in question is the *Verbascum Thapsus*, or great mullein, which is known in France^c as the *molène bouillon blanc*, and in Germany^d as the *kleinblumiges Wollkraut*. It is a hardy biennial plant, with a strong stalk from half a metre to two metres high, with thick woolly and mucilaginous leaves, and a long flower spike with numerous yellow flowers, the smell of which is not

^a Read before the International Medical Congress, Copenhagen, on Tuesday, August 12, 1884.

^b Sowerby's *British Botany*. Volume VI. P. 111.

^c *Ibid.*

^d *Ibid.*

disagreeable. The best results are obtained with the green leaves, which can be procured during seven or eight months of the year; but excellent effects are produced by the dried leaves also. By cultivation under glass the mullein can be had fresh during the winter; and this is important, as will presently be seen.

The method employed by the Irish peasantry is to take one hundred grammes of the fresh green leaves (or about thirty of the dried) and place them in rather more than one litre of fresh cow-milk. This is brought to a boil, and allowed to stand for ten minutes. The hot fluid is then filtered, is slightly sweetened, and is drunk while warm. This whole quantity is taken twice or, in some cases, three times a day. It has a soothing pectoral effect, and, after a little time, is much liked by the patient.

Although in such popular repute, and in such extensive use, the mullein is not in the *Pharmacopœia*, nor was it regularly recognised by the medical profession. It appeared to me that it would be well that the matter should be properly investigated, and accordingly, during the last two years, I have treated a series of cases of pulmonary consumption in all its stages—127 in number—with the mullein leaf solely, with one trifling exception, which I shall presently notice. This procedure gave the most unbounded satisfaction to the patients, who implicitly believed in the remedy, and co-operated zealously with me in its use. Previous to commencing treatment each patient was carefully weighed, and this weighing was repeated every week, with great attention to uniformity of conditions as to time, clothing, meals, &c. The symptoms and physical signs of each patient were accurately noted, and the results tabulated. The conclusions to which I have arrived are as follows:—

1. In the early and pretubercular stage of pulmonary consumption mullein has a weight-increasing and curative power greater than that of cod-liver oil, and nearly equal to that of Russian koumiss. It has been experimentally proved that this is due to the mullein, inasmuch as the milk alone fails to accomplish the same results.

2. In cases in which tubercles are well established, or cavities exist, the mullein has a great power in relieving cough. In fact, such a patient taking it requires no cough mixture at all, and every practical physician will recognise the great boon which this power confers on the phthisical sufferers, whose stomachs are often hardly able to receive sufficient alimentary sustenance. Indeed, the mullein

milk is looked on by them more as a food than as a medicine. In persons of very feeble digestion heaviness is often experienced after so much milk. This, however, can be completely relieved by allowing the boiled mullein milk to cool down to 50° C., and adding a teaspoonful of Benger's pancreatic fluid. It should then be left under cover for ten minutes.

3. Phthisical diarrhœa is completely obviated by the mullein. This is, no doubt, aided by the milk, but also occurs when the mullein is prepared with water.

4. All the symptoms of pulmonary consumption can be combated by the mullein, except colliquative perspirations—over them mullein has no influence; and in my cases I principally employed the hypodermic injection of the atropia sulphate. This is the exception to the sole mullein treatment to which I have already alluded.

5. Mullein smoke applied directly to the respiratory passages has a great effect in relieving irritation, and spasmodic coughs, and coughs in general. The dried leaves of the mullein are broken up fine, and are smoked in an ordinary pipe, either pure or mixed with a little tobacco to flavour them. Wheeler and Whitaker, of High-street, Belfast (Ireland), prepare very elegant cigarettes for this purpose. These are of two kinds—(1) mullein, flavoured with a little Turkish tobacco; (2)—for those to whom tobacco is disagreeable—mullein, flavoured with a little oil of cascarilla.

I now exhibit both varieties of these cigarettes, as well as specimens of the mullein plant.

Koumiss can be had only where the mare is a regular milch animal; because, for chemical reasons, the milk of the cow does not make proper koumiss. Cod-liver oil is very disagreeable to take, and the quantity which is taken in all civilised countries, notwithstanding the wry faces generally made while taking it, by patients of all nationalities, is the surest testimony of its merit. It is, in my opinion, inferior to the mullein milk as a weight-increaser. It does not arrest cough, and it often does the contrary of arresting phthisical diarrhœa. Lastly, it disgusts the feeble stomach very much—to such an extent that many patients are entirely unable to take it. In the whole course of my experiments I met no patient who could not take the mullein, and scarcely any who disliked it.

I will conclude this paper with two typical cases of the cure of two patients who were suffering from early but undoubted pulmonary consumption. Both these patients are now alive, and in robust health, and I visited both just before leaving Dublin.

CASE I.—Helen S., aged twenty, single, a governess, residing in Dorset-street, Dublin, suffered 18 months previous to her admission into St. Vincent's Hospital from inflammation of the left lung. Her health fell away, she coughed, became emaciated, and the catamenia ceased. She had slight dulness over the apex of the left lung, and auscultatory phthisical signs. She weighed 110 English pounds. In five weeks she increased to 119 English pounds, all symptoms disappeared, and the catamenia returned during the treatment.

CASE II.—Elizabeth B., aged eighteen, single, a dressmaker, residing in Gloucester-street, Dublin, had been ailing for four months. She coughed, and once had slight hæmoptysis. She lost flesh, and the catamenia ceased. On admission into St. Vincent's Hospital I detected slight dulness over the right clavicle, and stethoscopic evidences of early consumption. She weighed 90·25 English pounds. Soon after beginning the mullein treatment the catamenia returned, and after six weeks of it she had increased to 102·75 English pounds, with evident recovery. She was now sent to our convalescent department in the country, when I directed her to get cod-liver oil, and to discontinue the mullein. For thirty-three days she took a tablespoonful of cod-liver oil twice and sometimes thrice daily, and increased 7·50 English pounds only. This was the more remarkable as, while taking the cod-liver oil, she had the aid of fresh air, sufficient exercise, and an abundant diet, of which she took ample advantage.

The above two cases are typical of about fifty instances of early consumption in which complete cures were effected. It is worthy of remark that very young mullein leaves have a dangerous resemblance to young foxglove—so much so that I have known an experienced gardener to put a young plant of the latter into a mullein bed. Of course, as soon as the poisonous intruder grew a little he was detected and expelled. Full or even half grown mullein and digitalis are not the least like each other. Dr. Ernest Knowling, of Tenby, South Wales, England, reported to me a case where belladonna leaves got accidentally mixed with mullein, and produced serious but happily not fatal results. I saw myself the leaves and flowers of the belladonna which had been picked out of that parcel, and they were further identified by Mr. Holmes, Botanist to the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. We investigated this case, and found that the mistake arose from the highly reprehensive practice which prevails, even in some most respectable drug stores, of allowing dried poisonous leaves to be lying about in the same loft with non-poisonous ones. No person, however inexperienced, could

mistake fresh belladonna for fresh mullein; but when leaves are dried and curled up it requires an expert to distinguish many which, when green, are quite unlike. The above are the only troubles which have come to my knowledge connected with the use of a valuable remedy of which I solicit the consideration of this Congress. I feel that I lay myself open to much criticism in coming forward here to announce a specific even for early and pretubercular phthisis; for I am aware that many think but little either of cod-liver oil or koumiss.

The power of the mullein in soothing the downward path of the advanced sufferer is of lesser consequence; for, did it not exist, there are many other ways of accomplishing the same object. My only apology for the position I take is this—a high standard of ancient native culture perished in Ireland amid a sea of national woe; and, from my boyhood, I have seen the humbler classes of a whole nation cultivating, believing in, using, and paying for a remedy which elsewhere was, in modern times, regarded as a mere weed. It appeared to me that a whole nation using a remedy for centuries, and, no doubt, judging it by results, could not be wholly wrong. I approached the subject without any preconceived opinion, and had the result of my research been unfavourable, and the opposite of what it was, I had determined to announce it as such. All that I ask for this remedy from my esteemed colleagues here is to try it in a similar spirit, and I have no expectation of their taking any other course.

ART. VIII.—*Stone in the Female Bladder.*^a By GEORGE H. KIDD, M.D. Edinb.; M.A.O., Honoris Causâ, Dubl.; Fellow and ex-President Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland; Honorary Fellow, London and Edinburgh Obstetrical Societies; Corresponding Member of the Gynæcological Societies of Berlin and Boston; Consultant and ex-Master of the Coombe Lying-in Hospital; Consulting Obstetric Surgeon to the Hospitals of the House of Industry; President of the Obstetric Section of the Academy of Medicine in Ireland.

STONE in the bladder of women, though of rather infrequent occurrence, is met with sufficiently often to make it incumbent on the surgeon to sound the bladder in all cases where there may be

^a Read in the Obstetrical Section of the Academy of Medicine in Ireland, February 22, 1884.