ON THE CURABILITY OF CANCER.

By James Arnott, M.D.

That a "vis medicatrix nature" operates in all diseases to which the body is subject, and that this may be generally sufficient to remove them, are, I believe, universally admitted propositions. There is a great difference, however, between diseases in respect of the certainty or facility with which nature alone accomplishes a cure. A catarrh, or boil, may, if not very severe, be confided to her powers exclusively; but very rarely will these be found adequate in consumption or cancer.

The question which we have to consider is, has any means been discovered of supplanting, or aiding, the efforts of nature in the cure of cancer; or is it likely that any such means will be discovered? I shall speak first of internal remedies, or such as may be supposed capable of influencing the constitution of the patient.

Hemlock, arsenic, iodine, mercury, and other potenti medicaments, have at various times, and have always, been extensively employed as cancer remedies. The first may be found, reported by Mr. Simon, in one of the early volumes of the "Transactions of the Pathological Society;" but as the disease recurred after a year, in a more advanced form, the advice of the medical men was rejected. The second expedient: we can prevent the pain from caustic by obviating inflammation, or by reducing it to a torpid or apparently lifeless condition, like a bullet in the flesh; and, while this is being accomplished, it relieves the dreadful pain which so often accompanies the disease. It is much to be regretted that an agent possessing these properties should have been too often employed. In cases of open or ulcerated cancer, when the sore cannot be healed, and where it might otherwise torture the patient, and rapidly bring his life to a close.

Remedies applied locally in cancer are generally supposed to be only palliative. The knife and caustic remove cancerous disease only for a time. The principal objection to the knife is the danger of the operation itself proving fatal, for Mr. Paget and other writers have shown that ten per cent. of those operated upon die from it; and the principal objection to caustic is the dreadful and prostrating suffering caused by it. There is no mode as yet known of removing the first of these objections: we have no preventive of pysemia, of erysipelas, or of sudden death from chloroform. But it is not so as regards the second expedient: we can prevent the pain from caustic by internal means or by removing the local effects, if these can be prevented by a safe and harmless mode of removal, what must be done to approximate to cure will be accomplished. But this is not the only use of intense cold in cancer. Whether it operates by destroying the vitality of the cancer-cell, by obviating inflammation, or by other means, it will, in many cases, either cause the disappearance of the tumour, or reduce it to a torpid or apparently lifeless condition, like a bullet in the flesh; and, while this is being accomplished, it relieves the dreadful pain which so often accompanies the disease. It is much to be regretted that an agent possessing these properties should have been so often employed. In cases of open or ulcerated cancer, when the sore cannot be healed, and where it might otherwise torture the patient, and rapidly bring his life to a close.

Instances of an imperfect mode of using cold in cancer, I will (paradoxical as it may appear) adduce two published reports of cures said to be effected by it. In these two cases, it might, indeed, have proved effectual; but it certainly would not have been attempted but for the presence of other, and differing so much from that which I have recommended. The first may be found, reported by Mr. Simon, in one of the early volumes of the "Transactions of the Pathological Society;" but as the disease recurred after a year, in another part of the body, (a circumstance, however, proving that it was really cancerous,) the case is not very satisfactory. The second was published in the Bulletin de Thérapeutique of Paris for the 10th of April last. A large tumour, pronounced to be cancerous by Velpeau, Manec, and other surgeons, was completely removed by about twenty applications of a frigorigen mixture applied in such a manner as rarely to produce conglutination. If it was the cold that operated beneficially on these occasions, a different explanation of its modus operandi must be given from that suggested in the above observations.

Extrusion of the Bladder.—The surgical efforts to remedy this repulsive and distressing deformity have hitherto met with the most disastrous failure. Mr. Ayres, of New York, has, however, managed to successfully treat such a case by the agency of a female bladder, and accompanied by prolapsus uteri. To cover the bladder, Mr. Ayres took a flap from the upper part of the skin of the abdomen, the base of the flap being immediately above the bladder; this he turned down, and then obtained a hypogastric flap, with its base below. He adopted remarkable precautions to prevent gangrene, and his success was perfect. A photograph accompanying his brochure gives an excellent view of the deformity.