REMARKS ON SOME CONDITIONS OF THE BRAIN AND NERVOUS SYSTEM, WITH CASES.

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THE late researches of Marshall Hall and other eminent pathologists,* have demonstrated the fact that similar symptoms are manifested by directly opposite states of the nervous and vascular systems ; and that the various forms of apoplexy, paralysis, convulsions, coma, &c. frequently depend on an exhausted, atonic state of the system, as well as on an en-tonic or plethoric condition. That too little attention has been paid to this subject, by many practitioners, admits not of doubt from any one extensively acquainted with medical men and their practice. It is the object of this communication, therefore, to call the attention of the faculty to the great importance of diagnosis in general, but more particularly in this interesting class of diseases. Many cases of protracted, exhausting diarrhœa, in children, and in delicate, aged and feeble persons, terminate in some of the above affections, and are treated, too often, by depletion, instead of the opposite course of stimulants, tonics and nourishing diet. Hippocrates remarks that convulsions supervening to hypercatharsis, are fatal, and daily experience shows that the above affections, particularly convulsions, are prone to follow uterine hemorrhage, from which the patient may recover, but frequently death is the result. I saw a woman a few days ago, who had gone through the process of a natural labor, attended by an ignorant midwife, who ordered the woman to get up out of bed, on her feet, soon after the birth of the child, and in attempting to extract the placenta, brought on a profuse uterine hemorrhage, with syncope, followed by convulsions, which terminated her existence in a short time. It must be admitted, however, that the extreme state of exhaustion, inducing the symptoms above referred to, in many cases, is a state from which no human skill can rescue the sinking patient, or even arrest for a moment the resistless hand of death. This is no argument against a just diagnosis and a rational treatment, which, in apparently desperate cases, have often restored health to the astonishment even of the physician himself. I once had a protracted case of fever, attended in the third or fourth week by profound coma, from which it was difficult to rouse the patient ; being satisfied, however, that it was the result of exhaustion, I administered stimulants and tonics, perseveringly, and had the satisfaction, after remaining at the bedside of my patient for twenty-four hours, to see a gradual disappearance of the desperate aspect of his case, which finally terminated in perfect recovery. In connection with these remarks, I subjoin the two following fatal cases, with the treatment, which rested principally on the responsibility of others ; and though in my opinion some other course of medication would have been preferable, yet I think it extremely doubtful whether anything could have been of any permanent service. It is too common for the interests of our science, to detail successful cases only, and to pass in silentio the fatal ones.

* Gooch, Abercrombie, Travers, Copland, &c.

This is calculated to mislead the young and inexperienced. It is of much more service to the young mariner to describe and point out to him the rocks and shoals on which he may founder, than to dilate on the beauty and safety of the whole open sea besides. With a detail of the facts in each case, and a reference to the authors before mentioned, I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

CASE I.—February 27th, 1832. I was called in great haste to a gentleman aged about 60—habitually intemperate, tall, lean and spare—accustomed to much exercise—his general health good until about 1st of Feb., when he was attacked by the then prevailing influenza, which confined him to the house, and for which he used the common remedies with relief. This was followed by a pleuritic affection, for which he was bled, blistered, &c. and put on the antiphlogistic regimen with relief again. He had also labored in the meantime under a profuse diarrhœa, with thirst, &c. He did not confine himself to bed whenever he could possibly sit up. On my arrival I found him speechless, in a deep stupor, the pupils very much contracted, with stertorous breathing, insensibility, &c. The account given by the family was that he was taken with a trembling agitation of the limbs, which was followed by convulsive movements and loss of sense and motion. He had discontinued his usual spirituous potations some weeks previously from a fear of aggravating his complaints, and had complained of difficult deglutition and articulation for several days previously to the attack. The pulse was rapid, with some fulness and a convulsive throb, both of which continued to within a short time of his death, notwithstanding the depletory treatment. The blood when drawn was of a thin, pale and florid appearance. He was treated by bloodletting from the arm and jugular vein, cupping on the temples, purgatives, enemæ, &c. with no relief, and died in about twenty hours from the attack.

CASE II.—March 23rd. I was called to a married lady aged about 50. Found her laboring under complete hemiplegia—the mouth distorted to one side, one eyelid paralyzed, countenance blanched, with a peculiar sharpness and parched appearance of the features. The temporal artery and the other vessels of the head and face appeared to be nearly empty. The pulse was 120, quick and jerking, with some fulness. The pulse and blood exhibited the same character as in the preceding case.* There was a constant disposition to stupor, from which she could be roused with some difficulty. She was treated by bloodletting, purging, cupping on the temples, blisters to the nape, &c. No relief was afforded by these means, and on the sixth day she died completely exhausted.

The previous history is as follows. She had been in delicate health for many years preceding her death—lived remarkably low, never using any animal food or spirituous or fermented liquors. She had labored for many months under chronic diarrhœa, and had by the advice of a friend commenced using a drastic *nostrum* called hygeian pills, the active constituents of which appear to be gamboge and aloes. They were recommended to her as “*a sovereign cure for all diseases!*” They operated with

* I have seen some cases of fever with supposed cerebral affection, in which, in the latter stages, the pulse and blood exhibited similar characters.

great violence. She had been following this course for several days, when she fell down from the sudden supervention of hemiplegia. The paralyzed side was acutely sensible, while there was little sensibility of the opposite side.*

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MEDICAL REFLECTIONS.—NO. I.

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PATENT MEDICINES, NOSTRUMS, ETC.

THAT any of the members of the medical profession should countenance and encourage the use of articles which *interested* individuals offer to the public as sovereign and infallible cures for all diseases, is highly disreputable to science and to the true dignity of their own calling. Yet that this is the case, to some considerable extent, no one will pretend to deny. The friends of medical improvement are well aware of the injurious tendency of such a course of conduct, and have to lament that many of their brethren, instead of being zealous collaborators with them in bringing our science nearer and nearer to perfection, and thus forwarding the dearest interests of humanity, are almost daily aiding and abetting presumptuous ignorance and vile empiricism. Some, too, even of the very *magnetes* of the profession, have gone so far as not only to make trial of *secret preparations*, but even to give certificates in their favor. It is needless to state what an astonishing effect this has on some of the more credulous, both in and out of the profession. The authority of a single great name has often more influence with them than all the reason and philosophy which can be made to bear upon the subject. It is almost natural to a great majority of the human race (whether through ignorance or a distrust of their own capacities I shall not attempt to decide), to receive upon trust, and to adopt as the *ultima ratio philosophiæ*, whatever has the sanction of a great name and the recommendation of high authority. Thus they have opinions and dogmæ ready to their hands, which they apply, often blindly and heedlessly, without being able to give a why or a wherefore for the application. This is applicable to nearly all the concerns of life which require reflection and study, but in a preëminent degree to the science of medicine. The least degree of reflection will convince any educated professional man, that it is the height of absurdity to lose sight of all principles in medicine, and to use or recommend any secret preparation, for no other reason than its supposed beneficial effects in some particular case. He cannot say whether the result is the effect of the means used, or whether it is the *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, the work of nature. Admitting, however, that the remedy unquestionably has had a good effect in a particular case, whilst the exhibitor is profoundly ignorant of the composition of substances which constitute it, he cannot thence form any just conclu-

* I once treated an intemperate man of full habit by bloodletting and active purging, for complete loss of sensibility only, of one side. He was completely relieved. He never had any other paralytic affection, but once labored under mental derangement, which is hereditary in his family.