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ON THE EFFECTS OF MALE FERN BUDS, IN CASES OF WORMS.

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THE more certain remedies generally used for worms are so disgusting, that many adults and children cannot get over the loathing of them. They dislike the tin, because it produces a belching of gas, like sulphuretted hydrogen; the cowhage, because it "sticks in their throats, and all the way down;" and the turpentine, because its flavor is "quite hateful," and its effect not an exhilarating, but a crying drunkenness.

These objections prompted me to look about for a more agreeable remedy than either of them, and of equal efficacy. Dr. Peschier, of Geneva, asserts that he has cured 150 cases of lumbrici, tricocephales, and teniæ, in nine months, with the ETHEREAL TINCTURE OF MALE FERN BUDS (*polypodium filix mas*), in doses varying from viij. to xxx. gtt., in as many pills as there are drops. His brother, an apothecary at Geneva, and the discoverer of this "tincture" or "oil," gives it in thirty to thirty-six drop doses, in syrup or castor oil, or in pills, one half at night, and the other on the following morning; and, two hours after the morning dose, 3ij. Ol. Ricini. This quantity is usually sufficient to expel the worms. I have given it on a lump of sugar, and no child has hitherto revolted against it. It has had three results; either it has killed or burst the worms, or it has urged them from the bowels alive, or it has had no effect at all. My worm cases as yet have been too few to develop its powers, and the preparation used was made of dried stalks and buds obtained from Covent-garden market, and not worth relying on. An herb-gatherer from the Forest of Dean brought me about a peck last month, the tops or buds of which have been snipped off, and, after drying by insolation, put into a quart of ether. This person, an intelligent sort of woman, informs me that her grandmother, Sarah Boughton, in my father's parish of Ruardean, who died, aged seventy-five years, about twelve years ago, and was what the country venerate under the name of a "yarb woman," was wont to gather the male fern buds, and let them wither, and then dry them in an oven and reduce them to powder, which she gave to children for worms. Her grand-daughter also bruises the stems (the redder the better), boils them to a thread in fresh liquor, and so makes an ointment, with which, she says, she scatters gathering breasts with great success. In this part of the country, fern is boiled and given as food to pigs.

Madame Noyau, or Noyer, raked up the powder of the root from the tombs of the ancients, and procured a reward for it from the French government as *her* specific, forsooth! This woman, like a great many

other people who pretend to have discovered what was very well known before, had the fame of having brought it into notice—I apprehend, from the good luck of being about great people and the court.

Nicholas Culpeper, who lived long before her (from 1616 to 1653), but was not quite so conspicuously situated, anticipated her in all she knew of it in cases of teniæ, for he distinctly says, “It kills both *flat* and *round* worms.” William Salmon (1684) says, “It kills *long flat* worms, drunk in mead with gr. x. of scammony, and so it expels the dead child, and helps obstruction of the spleen.” *New London Dispensatory*, 1676, pp. 56–7). In his splendid folio Herbal (1710) he directs 3j. of the powder of the male fern to be given with gr. xv. of scammony in black hellebore. Whether old Gerard, who wrote in Elizabeth’s reign, and whose placid discourse savors of “the sweet and pleasant flowers” which he describes, anticipates these qualities of the fern, I am not aware.

The female fern has the same properties as the male, but is weaker. I have not entered all my worm-cases in the case-book; some, however, are preserved.

On March 29, 1834, the four children of Thomas Preece, of Brampton Abbots, were ordered to take eight pills twice a day, each pill consisting of a bitter extract, and containing gr. j. of the ethereal tincture of male fern buds. The worms came away dead and “bursted” from all of the children, who then took a purge of salts and senna, and, on April 5th, another round of the fern-drop pills. On May 7th the mother told me they were free from all symptoms and appearances of worms, and they were directed to take a teaspoonful of common salt in water once a week to remove the disposition to them.

On the 24th March, 1835, Mary Nelms brought her two children to me for worms. I ordered them to take gr. x. of the ethereal tincture of fern buds three times a day on a lump of sugar, and a x. gr. purge of scammony, gamboge, jalap, and calomel, every third morning. One of the children after taking the drops voided six worms, one after another, alive; the other a still greater number.

On the 9th of March preceding, Joseph (æt. 2) and Mary Jackson (æt. 5), George Meredith (æt. 9), and Elizabeth (æt. 2½), took the same remedies, and passed quantities of thread-worms (*cucurbitina*), after taking the powders, alive. I then ordered them to take muriatic acid.

Ann Mansell came to me on the 14th of April last, with three children,—Marianne (æt. 5), Esther (æt. 2½), Joseph (æt. six months): she had “seen worms full of young ones” come from the first two. I ordered them the preceding remedies, but they passed nothing except slimy mucus, which frequently exists without worms, and is attended with the same symptoms.

On the 7th of May, Charlotte Meredith brought her two children again; a boy æt. 4, and a sucking infant. The last had passed worms *while at the breast*. The fern-bud tincture was given till the 4th of June without effect, and I then ordered calomel to be taken at night, and scammony and jalap in the morning, which removed them. She thought she had given the tincture in a wrong manner, as it had fully succeeded

with Jackson's children under the same roof. Both these families lived in a situation where they were constantly subject to worms.

It is not known, I believe, that iodine will kill worms. Thomas Greenaway, æt. 23, affected with phthisis and pyrosis, of which he ultimately died, inhaled Sir C. Scudamore's combination of iodine (a remedy from which no consumptive patient under my care has received the slightest benefit, but, if anything, rather harm), upon which he passed white worms an inch long, with flat heads (*cucurbitina*?). I gave him—R. Sp. Tereb. Rect. ʒj. ; Ol. Ricini ʒss. ; Liq. Opii Sed. gtt. vj. M., ft. haustus. It brought away upwards and downwards the *debris* of at least fifty dead worms of three sorts, all of which appeared to have been killed from the time he inhaled the iodine. He lost a dreadful gnawing of the stomach, which had been ascribed to gastrodynia, and upon which the old writers laid so much stress as a characteristic symptom of worms in occult cases attended with convulsions.

The gipsies put a branch of French holly (variegated garden holly), with the leaves and thorn at the end, into an oven and dry the leaves, and then reduce them to powder, of which they give as much as will lie on a sixpence five or six times, and report it to be a sure vermifuge.

The foresters of Dean give the bear's foot (*helleborus fatidus*) in a sufficient dose of the dried leaves to cover a sixpence. It was recommended by Schroder and other old writers, and is mentioned by some moderns as "possessing extraordinary anthelmintic powers," but it is violent and dangerous, according to the former, to "gross bodies," and to all except "strong bodies." Gunpowder in gin (ʒj. to ʒj.), is considered a popular and effective anthelmintic, in some counties, particularly, I believe, in Cornwall.

The extract of esula or sponge was the general worm-remedy of the old physicians, who ascribe great cures to it. The drastic purgatives are commonly used in the country by medical men, but are very uncertain ; they serve to remove the mucus in which the worms exist, and expose them to the action of more direct anthelmintics.

What are the causes of invermation ?

Herefordshire is quite a worm country, among the laboring classes, on the hilly parts in this neighborhood, though they have places of their own, tenements and gardens, and some orcharding or arable, taken out of the waste, and are nothing like so ill fed, clothed, and employed, as their own order in many other counties ; they are rather, generally, a relic of the almost extinct race of English peasantry. But there are very few of their children that are not possessed of worms, putting one in mind of Swift's lines :—

"Whatever we do, whatever we see,
All mankind are worms."

The worms come alive at the same time, in many cases, from the mouths and ani of grown persons and children, which happens, according to Dr. Robert Dyer, among the blacks in the Mauritius. Professors and authors ascribe them to bad air, bad food, want of sun, vegetables covered with larvæ, and bad water containing the small germs of them (*Professor Elliotson*), and invisible ovula floating in the atmosphere, obtaining admission into the alimentary tubes of persons, chiefly children

and sickly adults, whose animal fluids are in such a state as to form a proper medium for their growth and increase. (*Anon.*) Many persons, on going to particular parts, have suddenly been subject to worms, just like other people in that particular neighborhood. Persons who have drunk bad water, have frequently from that time most decidedly had worms. In a particular family the whole, as well as the servants who came, had ascarides. They were discovered in a well, from which the people drew their water, and went away on the people ceasing to drink the water. (*Dublin Transactions*, Vol. II.) Drs. Thompson and Ricketts gave the case of a young woman in Ireland, "who drank water from the graves of pious clergymen!" This idiot, by way of a blessing upon holy-water drinking, threw up 700 larvæ of the common beetle and of dipterous insects, and, in the course of a year and a half, 1300 more! The larvæ of cheese and game, called hoppers, and of the pantry fly and beetle, may be introduced and flourish in debilitated stomachs and bowels. (*Good.*) Preece's wife, whose children's cases I have mentioned, told me, that for want of any other water they were obliged to drink brook water, which, after a time, was covered with floating appearances, to which she attributed the generation of worms in her children. But if they were taken in with the water, how did it come to pass that she had a child *at the breast* so full of worms that they crawled alive out of the mouth and anus, as if the child were eaten up by them? The irritation and convulsions which ensued were fatal. How could this child, nourished with breast milk, or with pap made with boiled water, so derive them; or how does it happen, if water be the chief cause, that worms are quite as common where the water certainly is not blame-worthy? If children at the breast have worms, the saying of John Wesley, who collected into his "Primitive Physic" all the old women's sayings and "*desper't* good receipts" in the country, that "worms are never found in children that live wholly on milk," is not true. Bad diet, the eating of trashy fruit and vegetables, the lying about of filth and decayed animal and vegetable matter covered with larvæ, faulty nutrition, vitiated secretions of the mucous membrane of the stomach and intestines, and peculiar states of health, in which, nevertheless, ruddy cheeks and animal vigor may not be wanting, certainly predispose to worms; but still the question, "Whence come they, and how do they get there?" is not solved.—*Lancet*.

ON THE CAUSES OF SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION.

FROM AN ESSAY BY JAMES OVERTON, M.D. OF NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

[Concluded from page 154.]

By what means, then, it may be here repeated, are we enabled to account for the extreme combustibility of the living body, which is present in cases when it is the subject of spontaneous combustion? This state is said, in general terms, to be the effect of an asthenic state of the organism; which condition may be the product of very numerous and different causes, as old age, protracted disease, sedentary and other debilitating habits, and any excesses in modes of living calculated to enervate and