ON THE USE OF
THE CARBONATE OF IRON IN SOME DISEASES OF
THE UTERUS.

BY WM. GAMAGE, JUN. M. D.

MESSRS. EDITORS,

SINCE you favoured me with the insertion, in your useful Journal, of my communication on the use of the carbonate of iron for the ulcerated uterus, I have had several opportunities of observing the effect of that medicine in other cases of disease of that organ. I send you the most distinctly marked.

Case 1st.

1812, May 5th. Mrs. B. complained to me, that she had had some disease of the uterus ever since the birth of her last child, which was nearly four years old, and that during the last year she had been seriously afflicted, and most of the time unable to do her family work. She had applied for medical assistance to some person in the country, was told she had a cancer, and took many medicines, but with very little and only temporary benefit. She was weak and emaciated. Her most distressing symptoms were frequent head-ache, loss of appetite, great weakness in the small of her back, soreness in the hypogastrium, shooting pains low in the pelvis, and bearing down pains, if she attempted to walk; frequent discharges of blood, and sometimes of dark coloured foetid matter per vaginam. By examination, I ascertained, that the os uteri was hard and uneven, much enlarged and pushed forward. The degree of enlargement of the body I could not determine. The carbonate of iron was prescribed in doses of half a drachm thrice in a day. In eight days she had consumed two ounces, taking a

larger dose, than at first directed; she was essentially better, her pains very much abated, and the discharge of blood per vaginam had nearly ceased. When she had taken four ounces, she could walk without difficulty and was rapidly regaining her strength. She continued the medicine irregularly through the summer, and entirely regained her health.

Case 2d.

1842, May 20th. Mrs. L. the subject of the following case was about forty years old, and the mother of several children, the youngest of which was between four and five years. Her health for many months had been bad, and I had occasionally directed medicine for her on account of head-ache, indigestion, and what she called rheumatic pains. Those symptoms, which would at once have discovered her real complaint, she had studiously concealed, thinking they were only the effects of her particular age, and that they would soon subside. She became at this time seriously ill, and unable to pursue her daily labour. She had head-ache and sickness at the stomach after eating; great weakness in the small of her back, and a constant gnawing pain about the middle of the sacrum; soreness in the lower part of the abdomen, and when she attempted to walk, the most excruciating, *bearing down* pains, and sense of weight. For the year past her catamenia had been very frequent, and accompanied with great pain; she had had a copious and uninterrupted leucorrhœal discharge; her lower extremities were frequently swollen, and the necessity to evacuate water often occurred.

I found the os uteri much thickened, very hard and pushed forward; the body appeared to be very large and to rest on the sacrum; and from the circumstances of the gnawing pain at this place, the pain caused by the evacuations per rectum, and the inability to retain the water for any length of time, I conjectured, that the uterus occupied so large a proportion of the cavity of the pelvis, as to compress the bladder and rectum.

I prescribed the carbonate of iron in this case without the least hope of relieving my patient. She took one drachm and a half a day without inconvenience, and to my surprise in a week her distress was much alleviated. She continued to take the medicine in this way without interruption for six weeks, with evident advantage; but on account of its acting as a cathartic, she was obliged to desist. In the mean time she took the aromatic sulphuric acid and opium; but being convinced, that the carbonate of iron gave most relief, at the end of a week she recommenced taking it. She was, however, often obliged to omit it, as its cathartic effect could not easily be checked, even by opium. In this way it was used with resolution till Sept. 21st, when having become so disgusting, as to cause vomiting, it was laid aside. She had, however, been for some time free from all the distressing symptoms, except the gnawing pain in the back, and the inability to walk.

After resting a few days, she commenced taking the submuriate of mercury, in small doses with cicuta, and continued it, till her mouth was slightly affected, when she took cicuta alone in doses of five grains three times a day. No other advantage appeared to be derived from this plan, than removing the irritability of the stomach and bowels. Her disease, she complained grew worse, and she had a foetid discharge per vaginam. I directed, Oct. 26th, the tincture of the muriate of iron in doses of half a drachm thrice in a day. She gradually increased the dose to a drachm, and took it with little interruption till Jan. 1813. Her situation was flattering, general health improved, menses more regular, accompanied, however, with pain; otherwise she had very little pain, and could walk with tolerable ease. Continued the tincture irregularly, till March, when alarmed at the return of some of the former symptoms, she again resorted to the carbonate; but having consumed one ounce, she could not be prevailed on to continue it; and the tincture of the muriate was reassumed.

May 1st. The medicine has not been taken with much perseverance; but the disease still declines. The bulk of the uterus is evidently very much diminished, as I ascertained by examination, though by no means reduced to its natural size.

Aug. 6th. During the last three months, sometimes the carbonate, and sometimes the tincture of the muriate has had the preference; but a moderate quantity only of either has been taken. The catamenia have returned regularly every fortnight. A leucorrhœal discharge has been present, and the pain at the secrum occasionally, felt with severity. But the effects of the bulk and weight of the uterus have not been experienced in any great degree. She can walk with tolerable ease; and can do laborious work.

Case 3d.

1812, July 4th. Mrs. B. a young woman, had only two children, the youngest of which was two years old; had not been so well since the birth of this child, as before, complained of debility, head-ache, and sinking at the *pit of the stomach*; had great weakness in the small of the back, leucorrhœal discharge, catamenia too frequently, and sometimes bearing down pains.

The os uteri was unnaturally large and hard; the state of the fundus could not be ascertained.

She took the carbonate of iron in the usual way, and her symptoms were soon meliorated; but she became disgusted with this medicine, and I directed the tincture of the muriate of iron. In the autumn, she removed from town, but continued to take the medicine for sometime. I saw her this spring, and she appeared to be entirely freed from her complaint.

Case 4th.

1813, Feb. 18th. A woman of good character applied for advice. She was emaciated, and her countenance sickly; she said she had been a long time an invalid, and was unable to gain a living as usual by her industry. Her most distressing symptoms were an extreme weakness in the back; occasional swell-

ing of the abdomen, and shooting pains low in the pelvis; catamenia irregular, sometimes frequent and in small quantities, at others profuse, and accompanied with much pain; leucorrhœa, with which she had been troubled for some years; during the last, this discharge had been thick and yellow; latterly it had been in the habit of disappearing for a time, and then there seemed to be a tumefaction inside, which caused distress; this would presently burst, and a thick, yellowish and fœtid matter be discharged. After this another collection would commence and the same result follow; and the phenomenon was repeated.

The necessity of an examination was stated, and it was submitted to. The vagina was sound; there was a considerable degree of prolapsus uteri; the os uteri was thickened, very hard and not smooth; the body appeared to be enlarged.

The carbonate of iron was prescribed. She could not take more than a drachm in a day without nausea. When two ounces were consumed, she was decidedly better; and after taking six ounces, the discharge of yellow matter was rarely perceived, and she was so well as to return to her usual employment. She, however, continued to take the medicine and was cured.

Case 5th.

1813, June. Mrs. C. aged about thirty, desired to be relieved of some dyspeptic symptoms, which she named, and an extreme weakness in her back, with which she had a long time suffered. Inquiring particularly I learned, that her catamenia were irregular, returning at least once a fortnight, and if she made much exertion, they appeared in small quantities every two or three days; she had leucorrhœa profusely, sharp pains low in the pelvis, and if she walked or stood long, severe forcing pains. She had been married about nine years, was the mother of one child, who was about eight years old. These symptoms had troubled her since the child was a year old, but her health had not been seriously affected till lately. She had taken many medicines for these complaints, but without any

permanent benefit. I mentioned my suspicions of the character of her disease, and an examination being submitted to, I ascertained, that there was some degree of prolapsus uteri; the os tincæ pressed down upon the vagina, was a little enlarged, very hard and uneven; the hardness extended as high as the finger could reach. There was no evidence that the fundus was enlarged.

The principal medicine directed was the carbonate of iron, which she took in the usual way with much advantage. August 10th, had consumed ten ounces of the carbonate, and thinks herself free from almost all her unfavourable symptoms.

Since my attention has been directed to this disease, I have witnessed many cases of morbid anatomy of the uterus. Besides dropsical ovaria, and other partial affections of this organ, which are not so immediately interesting, I have noticed the following remarkable instances, which appear to resemble some of the cases of the disease under consideration. They are not so valuable, as if accompanied with the history of the symptoms previous to the death of the patient; but they may assist to elucidate in some degree the character of the disease.

The possession of the three first cases was purely accidental, they presented, when not expected.

Case 1st.

The uterus occupied almost the whole cavity of the pelvis, leaving only a little space for the rectum, which was contracted, and pushed quite to the right side. The bladder was contracted to one third its natural size, of a triangular shape, and its coats much thickened. The substance of the uterus was unnaturally hard, of a brownish white colour, and of a uniform consistence through its whole bulk. It was a thickening of its parietes, for its cavity was of its natural size. Some small tubercles protruded from the fundus; and on its posterior face, one, very large pressed upon the sacrum. The substance of these was similar to that of the uterus. No sign of ulceration

in any part. The ovaria were diseased ; the right ovarium was formed into a sack, which contained about two ounces of water ; the left into a larger sack, which was filled with a thick oily substance, and woolly hair, like that on the head of the subject.

Case 2d.

The uterus appeared at first to occupy a large proportion of the cavity of the pelvis ; but this bulk was found to be composed of the uterus not greatly enlarged, and tubercles growing from it, and included in the same peritoneal coat. They were connected with its posterior face, and the one of greatest size was three or four times larger, than the organ itself. They could easily be dissected from the uterus, except at one or two points, and the medium of attachment was a thickened cellular membrane. Their substance was much harder, than that of the uterus, and of the same consistence throughout. Cutting into the cavity of the uterus, a distinct round tumour of the size of the yolk of an egg presented, harder, and whiter, than the substance of the uterus ; easily separated from its parietes, which were thinner than natural, except at the posterior part, opposite to the large tumour, on the outside. The os tincæ was healthy, and there was no ulceration in any part. The ovaria were enlarged and hard, and on the right side a sack was formed, containing a little water.

In a third case, the size of the uterus was greater, and its substance much softer, than in its natural state. The ovaria were greatly enlarged, hard and knobby ; the affection extended to the fundus uteri along the fallopian tubes, and exhibited a hard and uneven mass fixed to it on each side. The cavity was three or four times its natural capacity, and contained a yellowish fluid of the consistence of thick cream, its walls were ragged, and apparently had suffered a loss of substance by ulceration.

Case 4th.

In 1812, a woman, who had an ulcer affecting the uterus, was for a short time under my care. The disease had existed for a long time. She was confined to the bed, weak and emaciated, and her sufferings in the highest degree distressing. Great soreness was felt in the hypogastric region, and almost without interruption the most agonizing pains shooting through the pelvis. The discharge per vaginam was thin, blackish and horribly foetid.

The carbonate of iron was given her, and it seemed to mitigate, in some degree, the severity of her pains, but did no other good. She ceased to be my patient sometime before her death, but I had the opportunity of inspecting the morbid appearances.

The cellular membrane connecting the several organs, and lining the pelvis, had become of a firm texture, compact and thick; and apparently, every lymphatic gland was enlarged, and either hard, or contained that pulpy substance, peculiar to those glands in a diseased state. The fundus uteri was not greatly enlarged, but hard. The ulcer was situated forward, and had destroyed the superior labium of the os tincæ, and a part of the neck of the uterus. The upper half of the vagina was destroyed, and that part of the bladder in its neighbourhood, was perforated with a hole of an inch and a half in diameter. The surfaces of the ulcer were black and its discharge thin and blackish.

Case 5th.

1813, June 27th. Mrs. P. aged forty-seven, came under my care on account of a supposed prolapsus uteri, a complaint, to which for some time past, she had been subject, but till the present instance had found no difficulty in reducing it without assistance. I found a tumour of an uncommon appearance protruding completely without the os externum pudendi. I was at

first impressed, that it was the os tincæ in a diseased state, and greatly enlarged; and this impression was strengthened by the neck of the tumour, felt within the vagina, resembling very exactly the neck of the uterus. The tumour had been down in this situation for a week, and the protruded portion of it was cold and gangrenous; no attempt, therefore, was made to reduce it. A copious discharge of pus came from the vagina, but none of any description from the tumour; its fœtor was extremely offensive.

Bark and wine were prescribed in quantities as great as she could bear, and a yeast poultice applied to the tumour. Some advantage seemed at first to be derived from this treatment; the swelling subsided so much, that the tumour returned into the vagina; but the patient was in a short time exhausted by a diarrhea and vomiting, to which she had been subject, and which came on with much violence.

An examination was made after death. The organs of the abdomen and pelvis, except the uterus, were in a natural state. The uterus was separated from its neighbouring parts in connection with the vagina, this being laid open, a large body of an oval form, and distinct from the uterus, presented. It consisted of a body and neck, and its whole length was eight inches; its circumference, about fourteen inches; its substance was fibrous; firm and compact to the depth of half an inch, but internally loose and spongy.

The substance of the uterus was natural, and its body very little increased in size; but its neck, and the os tincæ were so stretched, as to be very little thicker than the vagina, and to form with it one uniform canal. The vagina was rendered much thicker, than it is wont to be. The ovaria and fallopian tubes were in a sound state; but it is worth relating, that two hydatids, one on each side, of the size of a common bean, were attached to the peritoneum connecting those organs to the fundus.

Mrs. P. was the mother of several children; by her account she had been an invalid for many years. Since the birth of her last child, about thirteen years, she had been afflicted pretty

constantly with leucorrhœa, irregular catamenia, and sometimes menorrhagia; for two or three years past, she had almost daily some show of blood. She had submitted to a variety of medical treatment for her numerous complaints, except her principal disease, the existence of which had not been suspected.

The excrescence, it is probable, had been some time in arriving to its present size; and that its presence was the main cause of all her train of morbid symptoms, is, I think, a fair conclusion. If its existence had been known previous to its union with the vagina, might it not have been removed in the same manner, that polypi have been from the same organ?

In my former communication on this subject, the word, phagedenic was not happily applied. Some of the phenomena might justify its use; but the general expression, "ulcerated uterus," is I think more appropriate to those cases. The uterus, as well as other parts, is undoubtedly subject to ulcers of different characters; but the difference cannot so easily be distinguished during the life of the patient. Dr. Baillie, in his work on morbid anatomy mentions the malignant ulcer, as one variety of disease, which affects this organ. Probably the fourth case of the morbid anatomy, which I have sent you, is an example of this ulcer.

That disease of the uterus, which consists in an unnatural increase in the thickness and hardness of its parietes, ought to be distinguished from its ulcerated state. For though it may sometimes be accompanied with ulceration, and this may in every instance be ultimately its result, it is certain, that the organ may be greatly increased in this way without any such effect. Dr. Baillie says, that he has seen it as large as the gravid uterus at the sixth month. The first of the cases of the morbid anatomy is an example of this affection; and the second of the cases, submitted to medical treatment, appears to me to be of the same description. The first case of the former communication ought probably to be referred to this head.

This disease would not be readily suspected in its first stages, but when it has made considerable progress, it causes great tenderness in the hypogastrium, and if it press on the sacrum, a

distressing pain in that part. The patient feels something weighty, and suffers much in walking. The bulky uterus can easily be felt per vaginam. Sometimes are present the effects of pressure on the bladder and rectum.

When the uterus is beset with large tubercles, much the same effects would probably arise as from its last mentioned affection. These different states could not easily be distinguished during the life of the patient, and it could not be known, whether the tubercular state was more or less subject to remedies.

A disease very distinct from these, affects, and appears to me to be confined to the os uteri. The fourth case in the former paper, and the first, third and fifth presented at this time, are instances of this affection. The symptoms, which particularly mark this, are acute pains low in the pelvis; very frequent discharges of blood in small quantities; the part feels hard, and larger than natural, and sometimes uneven, but without that sense of weight to the finger, which is perceived, when the size of the fundus is much increased; on the contrary, one is impressed with the idea, that the tumour lessens, as the neck is pressed. No opportunity of proving by ocular demonstration, that the disease is confined to the os tincæ, has yet offered. The opinion rests on conclusions drawn from comparing the symptoms of this, with the symptoms of the other affections of this organ.

This disease yields readily to the carbonate of iron.

A diseased state of the uterus seems to be much more common, and a more frequent cause of misery, than is generally suspected. I am convinced, that many females, who are supposed to have dyspeptic and nervous complaints, are really suffering with a disease of this organ. It is undoubtedly often confounded also with leucorrhœa, as a discharge, difficultly distinguished from this, pretty uniformly accompanies these affections of the uterus.

A case of diseased breast, for which the tincture of the muriate of iron was successfully employed as a remedy.

The subject of the following case was a woman of about forty-five. She had in the centre of the right breast an ulcer of about two inches and a half in diameter over the surface, but not very regular; its edges were thick and elevated; its base hard, and extended deep into the substance of the breast; the nipple was destroyed, but the gland was not involved in the disease. The discharge from it was dark coloured, thin and fetid. It was very painful, and would have passed well for a cancer. The axillary glands were enlarged, and two of them quite hard. Many external applications had been made without apparent benefit. Among the rest, the carrot poultice had been used, and as this appeared to be a pleasant application, it was continued.

I directed the tincture of the muriate of iron to be taken three times a day in doses of half a drachm, gradually increasing it to a drachm. The ulcer put on a better appearance, when she had taken this medicine a short time only; and it continued to improve, so that at the end of four months, it was healed; and the induration of the glands of the axilla almost disappeared. It is nearly a year since her cure, and she remains well.