purely spasmodic dysphagia, did not assume any periodicity in its attacks; it generally, however, came on during dinner, either at the commencement or towards the termination. This did not appear to be owing to the substantial diet then taken, as he was accustomed to eat animal food twice or thrice a day, and, further, a draught of cold water was occasionally sufficient to induce it. The attack generally lasted a few seconds, at the close of which he was able to resume his meal free from pain and uneasiness.

Mr. M. had all the appearance of robust health. Pulse 60; skin cool; tongue clean and moist; appetite good; bowels perfectly regular; excretions healthy; no cough; respiration easy and natural; evidently no pectoral disease.

Draught of hydrocyanic acid.

21. Slightly relieved by the draught.

May 19. The hydrocyanic acid in gradually increased doses not entirely allaying the spasms, antispasmodics were tried, and afterwards the carbonate of iron, without any alleviation.

June 3. A consultation was now proposed, when it was advised that leeches be applied to the lower lip, a blister to the stomach, and blue pill with ipecacuan in small doses, to be taken night and morning. Camphor mixture during the day.

17. The remedies last proposed having now had a sufficient trial without any satisfactory result, I resolved on trying colchicum, and ordered the following:—

Wine of colchicum, 2½ drachms;

Tincture of hyoscyamus, ½ drachm;

Calcined magnesia, 1 drachm;

Peppermint water, 2 drachms;

Water, 4 ounces. One ounce three times a-day.

21. Much relieved by the colchicum. Repeat mixture.

28. Has been entirely free from spasm during the last ten days.

From this period until the latter part of October my patient kept the colchicum mixture in the house, and when threatened, as he was at intervals, with spasms, a few doses invariably dispelled them.

November 2. Complaints of huskiness, with slight loss of voice; some cough; no expectoration; thinks he has caught cold, having taken carriage exercise daily. The attacks of spasm more violent, though not so frequent; strength failing.

To take *Dover's powder* and *calomel* thrice a-day.

A variety of sedatives were now tried without any beneficial effect.

27. Much worse; huskiness increased; voice nearly gone; slight cough, accompanied with mucous expectoration; difficulty of swallowing almost permanent, and increased to such an extent that liquids alone are taken. A second consultation held.

Ordered—Venesection to eight ounces; four leeches to the affected part.

Camphor, 12 grains;

Sugar, 2 drachms;

Nitrate of potash, 1 drachm;

Wine of ipecac., 1 drachm;

Water, 6 ounces. One ounce twice a-day.

December 1. Evidently worse; voice completely gone; cough troublesome, with purulent expectoration.

4. The opinion of Dr. Alderson, of Hull, was now taken. To have hydrocyanic acid in decoction of sarsaparilla three times a-day, and an anodyne draught at bedtime.

5. Purulent expectoration profuse; cannot speak even in a whisper; gradually sinking.

6. Passed a quiet night; respiration gradually failing, and died without a struggle, or any apparent suffering, about 11, A.M.

Sectio cadaveris 48 hours after death, in the presence of Dr. Alderson.

General appearance of the body.—Much adipose or fatty matter in the parietes of the abdomen; much fat in the omentum; intestines healthy; liver soft, but not changed in structure by deposition of foreign matter; spleen healthy; stomach healthy.

Chest.—Lungs healthy; heart soft and flabby, but not otherwise diseased; valves healthy; aorta natural.

On tracing upwards from the cardiac orifice of the stomach to the oesophagus, a large ulcer with ragged edges was found surrounding the oesophagus internally, extending laterally and upwards and downwards three inches, precisely situated at the bifurcation of the trachea; there existed a collection of gangrenous matter (solid and liquid) as if it had been contained in cells, which extended more to the right side and backwards than forwards; the trachea was changed in colour to a deep gangrenous greenish-purple, and in many places cracked, the cracks extending into the gangrenous mass.

SARSAPARILLA.

THE SARSA OF THE RIO NEGRO, AND THE VARIOUS PREPARATIONS OF SARSAPARILLA.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—The very favourable results which followed your insertion of my paper in 1829, on the celebrated sarsa of Rio Negro (*Smilax seplulitica*), and its preparation, the xarave del rey of the Spanish Americans, encourages me to hope that the following brief notice will be found serviceable in awakening the attention of the faculty to the merits of this valuable remedy, and to the defective modes adopted in the several preparations

of sarsaparilla. I have the honour to be,
Sir, your very obedient servant,

JOHN HANCOCK, M.D.

Welbeck-street, London,

August 18, 1838.

The *xarave del rey*, or Rio Negro compound, has, since the publication alluded to, become known and highly appreciated by many eminent physicians in North America, as an efficacious remedy in chronic disorders. It is this species which, as Humboldt justly remarks, is the most active of all that are known, and much preferred to the *zarza* of the province of Caraccas or of the mountains of Merida. That it has not come into more general use in this country may be accounted for from the difficulty there exists in procuring the necessary ingredients which enter its composition, and which are indigenous and peculiar to the American Continent.

In the "United States Dispensatory," of 1836, edited by Drs. Hood and Bache, this subject has been treated at some length, and those gentlemen unite with me in opinion, that the present manipulations of sarsa are extremely imperfect, and calculated to spoil a most useful and important remedy; repeated experiments having proved, that the long boiling dissipates the volatile principles, and destroys other properties, and that water alone is a very imperfect menstruum for holding its alkaloid in solution.

According to experiments made by several eminent continental chemists, three or four alkaloids have been named as being the active principles of sarsaparilla; but more recently M. Paggiare reduces these principles to one only, stating that they are decomposed by heat, and that the pith as well as the bark contains salsaparine. The active principle, he says, is very imperfectly taken up by water; but is readily soluble in alcohol, acids, and ether, forming a solution which is very nauseous and bitter. These differences of opinion may reasonably be accounted for, when we consider the variety of roots there are passing under the common denomination of sarsaparilla.

As to the depreciation of the virtues of sarsa from excess of boiling, this important fact is known and acknowledged by continental chemists; and practical experience in the Oronoko has proved, that preparations made with vinous or spirituous menstrua prove far more efficacious than those with water; unless, indeed, fermentation be employed, which, by the spirit and acid formed, evolves the active elements of the root. It is evident that, whether the principle be understood or not among the Spaniards, those people have a much better method of preparing it than is known and followed in this country.

There are numerous species of this plant, and divers other roots similar in appearance,

that pass in the market as genuine sarsaparilla; although, in fact, many of them have none of the properties peculiar to the genuine plant. Amongst the roots sold for sarsaparilla, may be mentioned one of the class pentandria, a species of *periploca*, and which, although extensively used, claims no affinity to the genus *smilax*. This plant is brought from the East Indies; it contains but little farinaceous matter, and therefore affords a very clear decoction or infusion. On this account it appears to be favourably received; its poverty being thus its chief recommendation. Even in some of the true species of *smilax* the active powers are so exceedingly slight as to be scarcely deserving of notice. Thus, even the Jamaica sarsa, which in this country commonly passes for the best, is held in slight estimation by the Americans, practical experience having convinced them that its powers are very limited.

Dr. Duncan, in his "Edinburgh Dispensatory," observes, "the roots have a bitterish, not ungrateful, taste, and no smell; it is, however, a very inert mucilaginous substance;" and Mr. Brande, in his "Manual of Pharmacy," has repeated nearly the same observation. This proves most clearly, with due deference be it spoken, that neither of these gentlemen ever possessed the slightest knowledge of the genuine sarsa, and, also, that they were not aware of any means of distinguishing the good from the bad; in fact, they judged only from appearances, and not from the sensible qualities, which afford the only correct criterion. It is to be regretted, as highly detrimental to the advance of knowledge, that authors should thus proceed copying each other, adopting every opinion and every dogma, true or false, and giving the sanction of their names to numberless errors without reflection and without investigation. The gentlemen above named are enrolled among the *high authorities*, and, as a matter of course, their opinions regulate the inferior writers; it was, therefore, a duty incumbent upon them to consider well, and duly investigate, such matters, ere they gave their opinions to the world.

Before my paper on this subject appeared on record no one seemed to be aware that the genuine sarsaparilla, when chewed, impressed a nauseous acrimony on the mouth, and especially on the throat and fauces.

My remarks upon this subject, addressed to the Medico-Botanical Society, have been reprinted entire in the "Journal of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy," vol. 1, and translated into the Italian, French, German, and most other European languages; and my deductions as to the proper solvents of the active principles of sarsaparilla have been confirmed by some of the ablest experimental chemists of France and Ger-

many.* From the notice taken of the subject (in France and North America particularly) we find it has obtained a much higher consideration abroad than in this country; this I think is to be attributed to its unbounded extent of commercial speculation, and the consequent substitution of other plants which are brought to this market from every quarter of the globe,† as likewise to the defective methods of distinguishing the comparatively small quantity of the genuine from the abundance of non-medicinal roots sold under the name of sarsaparilla; to this may be added the insufficiency of the menstruum employed, and the faulty, not to say destructive, method pursued in its preparation, especially from its long boiling, as directed by the colleges; the Rio Negro sarsa is mostly consumed in the Oronoko, Varinas, and other neighbouring parts, being constantly employed by them as a substitute for mercury in syphilitic and all chronic disorders; as an article of commerce it never finds its way into this country, and even should it do so it would be lost among the many roots passing under the common denomination of sarsa. I have often regretted that measures had not been taken by some one well known to the faculty to supply the public with the genuine *xarave del rey*, or compound of Rio Negro sarsaparilla, and this more especially since I find certain spurious preparations assuming that name without the least pretensions to it; in fact, being entirely deficient of its efficacy or healing properties. With some of these preparations my own name has been most unaccountably used, and to such an extent has this been done that having a stock of the genuine material, and the several ingredients which enter this compound, together with facilities for a regular supply of the same, it is my intention on some future day, as a measure of self-defence, and in order to prove its efficacy, to have prepared, under my own immediate direction, the true and genuine compound Rio Negro sarsaparilla.

CASE OF SIMPLE ILEUS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Drs. Whiting and Tweedie, in the article on Colic, in the “*Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine*,” make the following observation:—“It has been asserted by some writers that an inverted action of the

whole or of part of the alimentary canal, may be produced independently of either debility, spasm, or obstruction: they adduce in proof of this opinion the speedy discharge by the mouth of fluids which have been thrown into the bowels by clyster. These last are called cases of simple ileus, and perhaps the evidence adduced to prove the existence of such a state is still open to controversy.”

The last remark induces me to notice the following case:—Mrs. Sarah West, 78 years of age, of a robust habit of body, had throughout life suffered very little from illness. In March last she had a catarrhal affection which yielded to proper treatment. She was troubled occasionally afterwards with constipation, for which she took pills of extract of colocynth, or castor oil, which had the effect of opening her bowels. On the 20th of April it was found necessary, from the same cause, to prescribe an infusion of senna, which operated freely. Her bowels having been again constipated during several days, she began to suffer from nausea and restlessness, but had no pain on pressure over the abdomen; pulse soft, and perfectly regular; tongue clean.

On the morning of the 25th she vomited stercoraceous matter, mixed with a considerable quantity of slimy, frothy fluid. She appeared considerably exhausted from the effects of the vomiting; but after reposing a short time, some light food was given to her at her own request, which was almost immediately vomited; on taking, however, some more shortly after, it remained on her stomach. In this manner she vomited fecal matter, and took food every morning, during six weeks; at the expiration of this period the vomiting took place at intervals of three or four days, or a week, up to the day of her death, the 11th of July.

From the 20th of April, a period of eighty-one days, she had no evacuation whatever per anum, with the exception of a scanty discharge, about half an hour before death. She sank, completely exhausted, without having suffered acute pain at any time during her illness. Once or twice she complained of slight pain, or rather tenderness, on pressure over the cæcum. There was at no time much borborygma, or distension of the abdomen. Whenever the vomiting was suspended for a few days, she complained of a feeling of fullness at the epigastrium, and, to use her own expression, a sensation of “deadness” at the lower part of the abdomen. During several weeks she had daily, sometimes in the morning, and at other times towards night, a slight paroxysm of fever, of about an hour’s duration, with heat of surface and thirst, but without the pulse being much affected.

With regard to the treatment, my friend, Mr. Fieldsend (at Gautby, Lincolnshire), whose patient she was, gave her at first

* In proof of this see “*Journal de Pharmacie*,” vols. 15, 16, and some subsequent numbers.

† Professor Marsius, in his learned and elaborate work, the “*Pharmacognosia*,” has enumerated no less than thirteen different kinds belonging to other genera which are sold as the genuine sarsaparilla, but which in fact have no alliance with it except in the basis of the roots.