

## SELECTIONS.

*Case of Cholera, extracted from a Letter from JOHN WHITING, M.D.*

**H**AVING been called, during the very hot weather of last harvest, to visit a man in the middle age of life, about eight o'clock in the morning, I found him in a most deplorable situation. On first sight he appeared to me to be labouring under tetanus in its most severe form and advanced stage; for his whole body was in a spasmodic state, and the energy of the system was quite exhausted. He complained, in a feeble tone of voice, that his head seemed to be girt round with a tight cord. His eyes were generally fixed and staring, the arms frequently stretched out, and the fingers, every now and then, had the appearance which I have more than once observed in children labouring under hydrocephalus, bent forward at an obtuse angle at the upper joint, but slightly curved backward from that point to their extremities. The cramp in his thighs and legs exceedingly tormented him. The diaphragm and muscles of respiration were so much affected that his breathing was rendered very laborious, and every now and then, as in tetanus, it was entirely arrested, violent pain being felt striking through the chest to the back at the same moment; and the patient's whole body was brought into the state of opisthotonos. The pulse, beating at the rate of about 100 in a minute, was extremely feeble, irregular, and intermitting every five or six strokes. All the secretions seemed stopped, the eye dull and dry, the tongue, although clean, yet free from a particle of saliva; the skin cold; his extremities felt as if they were those of a corpse. In short, such was his state, that when I first saw him I considered him a dying man, and thought that he could not live more than half an hour. Of course, I lost no time in learning the history of this poor man's disease, expecting fully to have my first view of the case corroborated by the relation of its cause and progress; but instead of this, was agreeably surprised at finding that all these tetanic symptoms were only an aggravated form of those spasms which generally more or less accompany cholera morbus; for I learnt that the man, after returning from the harvest field the previous night, had eaten a hearty supper, went to bed well, and almost immediately fell into a sound sleep, from which he did not awake until about 4 o'clock in the morning, when he was seized with a violent pain in his bowels; the abdomen was much swollen, and he felt an urgent desire of going to stool. He discharged a large quantity of liquid feces;—soon afterwards he became sick. The purging and vomiting had re-

curred every ten minutes or quarter of an hour, till the time I saw him ; and he had gradually sunk into the miserable state which I have described. This history at once suggested to me the methodus medendi, one which has never failed me in the treatment of this formidable disease. My aim is, to render the bile in the stomach and bowels less offensive, by diluting it largely by some watery fluid, as thin gruel, barley water, or simply warm water. As some gruel was at hand, I made him drink about a pint of it ; and with a view of lessening the formidable exhaustion of spasm, I added about half a wine glass of gin, and 30 drops of laudanum. After a few minutes he felt a little better ; still, however, the sickness and spasms continued. I therefore, in about eight or ten minutes gave him another pint of gruel, and 30 more drops of laudanum. In a little time the spasms began to give way, his countenance improved, and his pulse rose and became regular, and he said he thought he should fall asleep had he not still cramp in his thighs. I waited about half an hour, hoping he would sleep ; but finding him still restless, I gave him half a pint more of gruel. Soon after this he was so much better that I left the house, having directed his wife to give him half a pint of gruel every quarter of an hour. I had gone but a few steps when I was called back ; and on going into the room I found that he had vomited nearly a wash-hand bason full of an olive green fluid. From that moment every symptom of the disease gave way. His countenance became natural, his skin warm, his pulse steady and full, and he said that a delightful glow pervaded his whole body, particularly his legs and thighs. After this he fell into a sound sleep ; the vomiting never returned, the bowels became regular, the stools being rather more bilious than common ; and in three or four days the man returned to his employment in the harvest field.

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On the 17th of January a paper of Dr. Fergusson's was read before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, on the nature and properties of the marsh poison, as known under the titles of Marsh Miasmata and Malaria, wherein the author endeavoured to prove, from reference to the medical topography of different places in the south of Europe and the West Indies, that the universally received theories of aqueous and vegetable putrefaction, singly or combined, being the sources of this poison, was unfounded ; that putrefaction under any shape had no effect in producing it ; that it never emanated from water in bulk, however putrid ; but is the product of a highly advanced stage of the drying process in absorbent soils that had previously and recently been saturated

with water. The illustrations were principally taken from the countries where the author had served during the last twenty-five years, and exhibited a great variety of facts and observations in support of the opinions advanced. Other properties of the marsh poison, such as its adherence to, and attraction for, lofty umbrageous trees and rising grounds in the neighbourhood of swamps; its concentration in ravines and hollows; its absorption by passing over water; its rarefaction or dissolution by the sun's heat, and by regular currents of wind, were also pointed out and illustrated. In the course of his paper, the author, while treating of the effects of the marsh poison, was led to consider the yellow fever of the tropics, which he views as the extreme and most baleful product of the marsh poison; and he brought many facts and arguments, which he conceived incontestably established the non-contagious nature of that dreadful malady. He concluded with some remarks on the mode of reception of the marsh poison into the human constitution, whether by the stomach, lungs, or skin; which last he seemed to regard as the most probable channel; an opinion which he supported by some curious illustrations taken from the History of the Plague of the Levant, and from a consideration of the peculiar dermoid idiosyncrasies of the African or Creole negro.

We wish much to see a full developement of the views contained in this paper, many of which are both novel and important. When we recollect that it proceeded from the same pen as the essay on the Syphilis of Portugal, which first tended to direct the attention of professional men to an inquiry from which the most important results may be looked for, we confidently hope that the same spirit of investigation may be awakened to the no less interesting subject of marsh effluvia. *Ibid.*

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## INTELLIGENCE.

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### MEDICAL LECTURES.

The Lectures of the Medical Institution of Harvard University, will begin at the Medical College in Boston, on the third Wednesday of November, and continue daily for three months.

Anatomy and Surgery, by Dr. WARREN.

Chemistry, by Dr. GORHAM.

Midwifery and Medical Jurisprudence, by Dr. CHANNING.

Materia Medica, by Dr. BIGELOW.

Theory and Practice of Medicine, by Dr. JACKSON.

Dr. BIGELOW, Dean of the Faculty.