

(Tuesday, March 10th) she states that she feels herself as well as after any of her previous confinements.

I have omitted as yet to state, that on my arrival at the house of Mrs. K., her attendants informed me that she had had considerable hemorrhage, a fact which of course will account for the state of exhaustion in which I found her. The transfusion syringe used was that of Read and Son of College Green, Dublin.

M. HEALY, M.D.,  
and Surgeon.

Clare Dispensary, near Ennis,  
March 10, 1835.

---

ON THE VARIATIONS IN STRENGTH, AND  
THE PREPARATION OF  
MEDICINAL PRUSSIC ACID.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The *London and Edinburgh Philosophical Magazine* for the last month contains a paper by Mr. Everitt on the preparation of prussic acid for medical purposes; on some particulars in which I beg to be permitted in your journal to comment.

No one is more ready than myself to admit the truth and importance of the following remarks by that gentleman, as they reiterate the sentiments I have been continually publishing for the two past years: and my greatest surprise is that the medical profession should so long have tolerated the very serious evil which they deprecate. "I stated," says Mr. Everitt (at the *Medico-Botanical Society*, to which he is the professor of chemistry), "that I had examined samples of the (medical hydrocyanic) acid procured from various shops in town, and that the frightful difference of strength had induced me to make the results known, with a view of calling the attention of the medical profession to the evil. Thus samples from Allen, Hanbury, and Co. yielded 5.8 per cent.; from Apothecaries' Hall, at different times, from 2.1 to 2.6 per cent.; and from several sources I found acid containing only 1.4 per cent. These samples I procured from the several shops personally, and asked for 'Scheele's strength.'"

I heartily thank Mr. Everitt for his co-operation with me in this cause, although he has not acknowledged a published paper of mine, leading the way, in which I have represented the strength of what is called 'Scheele's acid' as varying from 2.5 to more than 5.0 real acid per cent. "Now," he continues, "it is true we have no fixed standard, and therefore it is impossible to say whether Allen and Co.'s is

too strong, or the other too weak: but thus much is certain, that if a medical man were pushing the exhibition of hydrocyanic acid gradually to a maximum dose, the prescriptions being carried to a shop where the acid had only 1.4 per cent., and then, by some accident or other cause, taken to where Allen's acid was used, a sudden, and I fear, a fatal increase would be the result, for more than a triple (quadruple) quantity would be taken. For the possibility of a fatal accident I need only refer to the case of seven individuals near Paris being killed by a slightly-increased dose, recorded in all the medical periodicals a few years since." Since which time Mr. Everitt is, perhaps, not aware that the case has been reported in *The Times* of a gentleman who was killed by taking his ordinary dose of this acid. Such cases as these may probably recur, before the profession, who buy an imaginary strength under the name of "Scheele's," will be brought fully to act upon the assertion, either of Mr. Everitt or of myself, namely, that "no process for procuring a dilute solution of hydrocyanic acid in which distillation or filtration is had recourse to, will yield an acid of uniform strength, however carefully the process may be conducted."

But my communication has more immediate reference to a plan which that chemist proposes to supersede,—an extemporaneous formula of my own. I decompose pure cyanuret of potassium by a solution of tartaric acid in a common phial, and the result is a medicinal prussic acid of extreme purity, necessarily uniform in strength; and, after much investigation, the only preparation of prussic acid that I know of which will retain its strength unimpaired for any length of time. The method was suggested by Dr. Clarke in the year 1831, although for want of the cyanuret of potassium it could not then be adopted; but, as Mr. Everitt, remarks, "it can now be employed by any one, since Mr. Laming has brought into the market a very pure salt;" and which, it may be added, is already in extensive use by medical men, and receiving the commendation of our chief pharmacologists.

Mr. Everitt's objections to this plan are thus announced: "From very numerous trials I find that the procuring of this salt, the cyanide of potassium, perfectly pure, must be expensive; \* \* \* \* \* and many chemists I find object to it from its being so excessively deliquescent." I am glad the professor quotes only the objections of others to it on account of this latter quality; and he probably has satisfied himself that pure cyanuret of potassium although a deliquescent salt, is very

far from being "excessively deliquescent"—not so much so in fact as in any manner to interfere with the facility of its employment or the extent of its usefulness. I send it out only in *corked* phials, and to my knowledge it may be so preserved from deliquescence during two years; and how much longer I have not had time to make experiment. With regard to the expense of procuring the salt, or its quality when obtained by other chemists, I have nothing to do; it satisfies me that I am able to supply it both pure and cheaply; so much so that the practitioner can with it make in five minutes the purest and best prussic acid at less than half the cost of that which Mr. Everitt now wishes to substitute for it.

The proposed plan is, first, to dilute hydrochloric acid exactly to the sp. grav. 1.129; and then by its means to decompose cyanuret of silver. The cost of the medical hydrocyanic acid so made would be, according to the estimate of its projector, one shilling per ounce, whereas, made according to my formula, with pure cyanuret of potassium and tartaric acid, its cost would be under sixpence per ounce.

I presume that this new plan has been proposed on account of the impossibility, which Mr. Everitt acknowledges, of obtaining prussic acid of uniform strength by any of the processes requiring either distillation or filtration. If so, what reason has that chemist to suppose that "the decomposition of ferrocyanuret of potassium by means of sulphuric acid, is likely to become the only method by which hydrocyanic acid will be prepared for chemical and medical purposes?" It is only "on account of the cheap rate at which this salt is now to be had." The profession will do well to remember this. But Mr. Everitt strongly urges the "*absolute necessity* of assaying in all such processes the ultimate product;" and this he does with great reason; but if he believes that medical men will trouble themselves to do this, he certainly seems to forget that by commending the addition of hydrochloric acid to the hydrocyanic, as he tells us is already practised by Mr. Barry, he is encouraging what in the greater number of instances must prove an insurmountable barrier to the application of the recommended test; for few medical practitioners either would or could distinguish in the assay the effect of the hydrochloric acid from that of the hydrocyanic. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

RICHARD LAMING, M.R.C.S.

36, Great St. Helens,  
March 11, 1835.

HISTORY, PATHOLOGY, AND TREATMENT,  
OF  
RING-WORM AND SCALD-HEAD.

By SAMUEL PLUMBE, *Surgeon, London.*

(Continued from page 858.]

IN the earlier periods of the lives of children there is no disease, no species of deviation from sound health, if we except scrofula, which operates so perniciously on the future prospects of the individual, as ring-worm, if of long continuance. The moment an unfortunate child is found by the schoolmaster or the schoolmistress with a spot on the head, the latter, very properly (not merely for interest's sake, but as a duty to the parents of all the other children), sends the child home, and refuses to readmit it until thoroughly cured. The consequence of this is, to the unfortunate child, a loss of time at that period of life when it can be least afforded, the period of early education. Dr. Willan many years since declared, that he had seen, in a few years, children affected with this disease from two hundred seminaries in the neighbourhood of London! Formerly it was frequently found not only most injurious to the education of the child, but destructive of the interests of the best instructors of children, for the conductors of establishments of previously high character and reputation, found their pupils drop off in large numbers, and many good schools have been utterly ruined by it. The poison of the upas tree within the circle of its influence is scarcely more powerful than that of contagious ring-worm, as regards the fortunes of the private schoolmaster who happens to have it break out among his pupils to any extent. Children during their pupilage obtain, properly, when they have a mother, the mother's own peculiar care, and it is she who most feels the annoyance of this disease at home. Her offspring may play around her, regardless and utterly unconscious of their ailing, but her nearest neighbour, and most intimate friend, if she have children who are free from the disease, refuses association between the families; the mother suffers, on the one hand, the rejection of her children from school, and the arrest of their education (to be supplied otherwise only at great and inconvenient expense); and, on the other, she finds herself and children shunned at home, from fear of the communication of the disease to healthy families. It is, in truth, a bane of extensive operation to the interests and