

31. *Abuse of Sedatives in Insanity.*—Dr. MAUDSLEY seriously doubts if it were always a wise thing to stifle excitement, and whether a chemical restraint put upon the brain-cells was not often as injurious to the patient as a mechanical restraint imposed upon his limbs. He thought that sedatives were given far too recklessly; that, although they might relieve symptoms, they often only served to push the patient further down the hill, and as often as not, retarded recovery. He thought that the whole range of sedatives, including bromide of potassium and the hydrate of chloral, were all equally capable of being abused; that by giving them we often materially damaged the patient's general health, and, instead of curing, we often merely "made a solitude, and called it peace."—*The Lancet*, August 12, 1871.

32. *Ergot of Rye in the Treatment of Mental Diseases.*—Dr. J. CRICHTON BROWNE, Medical Director West Riding Asylum, states (*The Practitioner*, June, 1871) that during the last six years he has made an extensive series of experiments with ergot of rye in the treatment of the various forms of insanity, and has arrived at results which he believes to be of considerable practical importance.

"A remark of Brown-Séquard's, imputing to this drug the power of producing contraction in the vessels of the spinal cord, suggested to me, at the time which I have stated, the possibility that it might possess a similar control over the vessels of the brain, and might thus be made to modify the functional activity of that organ. This supposition derived probability from a perusal of many scattered observations in medical literature, as to the phenomena of ergotism, and was converted into a certainty in my own mind before I had pursued my investigations very far. As these proceeded it became, indeed, a matter of surprise that a medical substance, long known and prominently displaying in its toxic effects a potent influence over the nervous centres, should not have been resorted to at a much earlier period, as a therapeutic agent in some of the disorders by which these centres are affected. The remarkable uterine relations of ergot, however, seemed to have absorbed nearly all the attention bestowed on it. With the exception of Lallemand and Petrequin, who employed it with benefit in paraplegia, no one has thought it worthy of trial in cerebro-spinal lesions or derangement. No one certainly has tested its efficacy in those classes of cases which I am here to describe as peculiarly amenable to its benignant action. What these classes of cases are it may be as well at once to define, more especially as they do not include all those which the preliminary statement as to its physiological actions might appear to imply. My experience of ergot does not enable me to attribute to it, as yet, any advantageous action in many of those acute forms of mental disorder in which, from its alleged control over the dimensions of the intracranial vessels, it might have been presumed to be most useful. It only justifies me in asserting that it is eminently useful in certain varieties of (1st) recurrent mania, (2d) chronic mania with lucid intervals, and (3d) epileptic mania. In these forms of cerebral derangement I have found it almost uniformly efficacious in reducing excitement, in shortening attacks, in widening the intervals between them, occasionally in altogether preventing their recurrence, and in averting that perilous exhaustion by which excitement is so often succeeded. It can be scarcely requisite to point out that these actions which I have ascribed to ergot constitute it an invaluable instrument in asylum practice, as those conditions over which it is most influential are amongst those which have been hitherto regarded as highly intractable, and which, from the dangerous symptoms by which they are accompanied, have been unfailing sources of anxiety and harassment. Anything which will abridge the duration or favourably modify the course of intermittent chronic or epileptic mania, must prove an inestimable boon, not only to the sufferers from these maladies, but to those who have to associate with them and wait upon them."

The action of ergot in the conditions above enumerated, Dr. B. believes, is due to the controlling power which it possesses over the dimensions of the bloodvessels, and he adduces various reasons which appear to him to justify this opinion.