

feebly, and she spoke. In a few moments restlessness and incoherent muttering commenced, when death closed the scene, in forty-five minutes from the attack.

I was afterwards informed that in her first confinement, twenty months previous, she narrowly escaped with her life from flowing. Her mother, also, I was informed, suffered excessive flooding in seven successive labors, and was barely saved in one of them by the administration of some of the uterine flow, which I hear is a potent remedy in this locality for every kind of hæmorrhage.

Yours respectfully, HORACE THURSTON, M.D.

Long Island, N. Y., Dec. 18th, 1856.

### OBSERVATIONS ON CONVULSIONS OF CHILDREN.

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PROBABLY every physician knows, particularly if he *thinks*, that convulsions among children, as a general thing, arise from one of the three following causes: 1st, from teething; 2d, from worms in the alimentary canal; or, 3d, from indigestible substances in the stomach or bowels—in other words, from gastric or intestinal irritation.

Of course, we have no reference to convulsions which may and do occur in the course of many continued diseases, as dysentery, pertussis, pulmonic affections, &c., but only to those which occur suddenly—as a primary affection, so to speak—and in children in comparative health till near the moment of seizure. In such cases, the indications are plain, and must not be overlooked, viz., to examine the gums, and lance or scarify them, if need be; to expel any parasites, supposed to be present, and in the absence of other causes, by calomel and spigelia, or other vermifuges; and to unload the stomach by a simple emetic, and the intestinal tube by a mild evacuant, in cases where chestnuts, green apples, pickles, cheese, and other indigestible articles have been eaten. And by way of parenthesis, let me caution the young physician not to rely too much upon the answers of the *tender-hearted* mother, in reference both to the state of the gums (for some mothers, either through fear of the doctor hurting their little dears, or from a prejudice at having a protruding tooth lanced, will not admit that the gums are swelled “any to hurt”), and to the edibles of which the child has partaken. For, with a lengthened experience in this matter, I seldom find a mother willing to admit that her child has eaten anything “bad or wrong,” or injurious. Hence I have long since relied on emetics to tell the tale (in the absence of swollen gums); and, lo! “truth, like murder, will out,” in the shape of half-masticated chestnuts, green apples, currants, plums, &c. &c. But, after all or each one of these indications have been fulfilled, in individual cases, we occasionally are mortified to find that the convulsions

persist—our treatment, predicated upon our diagnosis, being of no avail. What then is to be done? To what remedial measures should we resort? Sometimes we can relieve the spasms and the spasmodic tendency by infusion of lobelia *per anum*; sometimes we can arrest the convulsions, especially if kept up by an irritability of system, established from previous causes, though now removed, by allaying the irritable state by the judicious use of anodynes, or even of the milk of assafoetida; and sometimes by powerfully impressing the nervous (cerebro-spinal) system, by the administration of quinia, valerianate of zinc, sulphate of copper, nitrate of silver, solution of strychnia, or combinations of these, together with applications of stimulating liniments, or irritating unguents, along the spinal column. But all these means occasionally fail; the indication is no longer manifest—the cause being entirely obscure, and the treatment, if pursued farther, would be wholly in the dark or empirical.

Now, to introduce a new remedy, or rather an “old woman’s remedy,” as Prof. Mütter would call it, in such cases as these, is the main object of this communication. It is one—other means failing—that I have been compelled to resort to, though reluctantly, from the fact that I knew not its properties, to what class of medicinal agents it belongs, and consequently was ignorant of its *modus operandi*.

I have reference to the showy and beautiful garden plant, called by the people in this part of the country the peony; botanic name, *Pæonia officinalis*. The mode of administration is this: take of the dried root, grated, half a teaspoonful, scald it and sweeten, and give the whole at once to a child 3 or 5 years old, *ter die*. To an infant, the same amount may be given in divided doses, during the day or 24 hours.

This plant has been much used by the old matrons in this county, and with uniform success. A case not long since happened, that apparently proved its antispasmodic power. A child of 9 years had labored under convulsions daily, for several weeks. All the resources of the skill of three physicians had successively been exhausted without benefit, when “Aunt Polly” happened to call in with dried “*pinney*” root in her pocket—one dose of which she administered, as above, and, strange to say, that, *vel post hoc, vel propter hoc*, the convulsions ceased *instantanter*. Were this an isolated case, my credulity would cause me to say that it was a *post hoc* result—a happy coincidence; but such results are too thickly scattered over this community to allow me to doubt of its remedial power. It certainly possesses peculiar anodyne, or strong nervine, powers; from the fact, further, that it will allay the nervous twitches, the subsultus, or the peculiar *startings* of infants during repose. In conclusion, I hope that the profession will throw aside prejudice in obstinate cases, and give this article a trial.