

some hundreds of squinting eyes straight (a few being put out and destroyed in the attempt), we have now operators who straighten the crooked back, by cutting out a portion of its motor muscles, who remove the false ankylosis of the knee by dividing the hamstring tendons, and who set a crooked head straight on the shoulders, by cutting across the tendon of sterno-cleido-mastoidens: nay, one surgeon is reported to have divided the *scalenus anticus*, but that I suppose was done on the dead body.

The last grand series of these bold and violent operations will serve as the very climax thereto. Dieffenbach, Amussat, and others, have brought forward operations for curing stammering, as if the nervous impediment of speech depended on a mechanical obstruction. Amussat's operation, consisting simply of the division of the genio-hyo-glossus muscle, is only dangerous in the hands of a man unacquainted with anatomy, as he might wound the ranine artery, an accident which really has occurred. Dieffenbach's is one of the most horrible that can be imagined, and I must say I think there are few in this country would submit to it. The frightful attendant hæmorrhage, and the great risk of losing the tongue, or the life, would serve to deter every body; nor can I believe any English surgeon could care so little for his patient's life and his own reputation, as to recommend it. The remaining operation, removal of the tonsils and uvula, is said to have been successful in many cases; but an instance thereof in the "*Literary Gazette*" of last week tells wonderfully against it, while, at the same time, it strongly corroborates the remark I made in the commencement of this paper, that such is the eagerness for operating, that proper cases are not selected, and many are made to undergo the discipline of the knife, who might be cured without. The patient alluded to, after losing the tonsils and uvula, by the operation for the cure of stammering, was found to stutter worse than before the bistoury was used, and yet when placed under the hands of a master of elocution, spoke *plainly in ten minutes*, to the astonishment of all who heard him. The removal of diseased tonsils is an every-day operation; I have practised it myself, but its applicability to the relief of stammering, is with me a matter of great doubt.

While the rest of the human body thus formed the subject for various experiments, it was not likely that the important organ of hearing should escape. Accordingly, we find an operation called catheterism of the Eustachian tubes much advocated at present in this country, although it is already failing in popularity abroad; it was first performed, as I believe, by Guyot, a postmaster at Versailles (as I mentioned in my treatise on the ear upwards of twenty years since), who invented a syringe with which he injected

his own Eustachian tube through the mouth. Cleland afterwards passed a flexible catheter into the tube through the nose; and he was followed by Wathen, whose cases have been republished in my "*Essay on the Deaf and Dumb*." It was afterwards revived by Itard, who made many important modifications in it. Saissy, Deleau, and Kramer, also wrote upon the subject. Deleau, whom I have seen operate, seldom used the large air-pump, but preferred a small pair of ivory bellows, which were inserted into the catheter, and worked with one hand.

The use of the catheter, for the purpose of removing obstruction of the Eustachian tube, has lately obtained an unenviable notoriety, from the fatal effects which followed its use in more than in one instance. I have myself seldom resorted to it, having long been persuaded that it is neither simple nor harmless; and that even in the most experienced hands, it is quite as likely to prove injurious as beneficial. It has often been said, that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," and, assuredly, nothing is a greater mark of ignorance than presumption. Bold operations are often undertaken by men, least qualified to conduct them with success, by way of speculation, as it were, hoping that, if, in spite of their incapacity, the matter should terminate well, they will gain credit, practice, and wealth, by means of their good fortune. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN HARRISON CURTIS.

2, Soho-square, April 2, 1841.

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ON THE  
ECTROTIC METHOD  
OF  
TREATMENT OF SMALL-POX.

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*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—IN THE LANCET for February 2, I saw an extract from a paper read before the Parisian Medical Society, by Dr. Olliffe, President of the Council, on the Treatment of Variola, by the "Ectrotic Method." That mercury exerts a specific influence on variola, I have long known, as long ago as the year 1796. During my apprenticeship in this town, in that year, my master and I inoculated between three and four hundred persons in one day. The preparation consisted, in time, of three weeks; in diet, of abstinence from animal food; and in medicine, of nine doses of calomel, varying, according to age, from one to five grains. The issue was, that all those who strictly complied had a very mild distinct sort, ranging from about fifty to one only, and that the part punctured, and the eruptive fever, were not more than that from vaccination of the

ninth day. The extract from Dr. Mason Good's valuable work almost fully corroborates and establishes it, bearing in mind Sir George Baker's remark, respecting the hospital physicians' observations.

That it does so, then, will, I trust, be considered as an axiom; but what is its *modus operandi*, that is the question. Von Wenzel's experiment, with calomel, surely cannot explain it; that it renders it inert and useless I doubt not, from its caustic quality; but surely this cannot be the case in the system. As every other means, M. Serres' *Méthod Ectrotique*; M. Velpeau's removal of the apex of the pustule with the point of a lancet, and introducing into its cavity the sharpened end of a piece of nitrate of silver; M. Eichhorn's vaccination after the eruption; the ancient Arabian method of puncturing each pustule, and expressing the matter; Dr. Picton's plan of total darkness; M. Legrand's plan of gold leaf; the application of the oil of almonds, *cum multis aliis*, have failed, it is clear this is the only rational and effective plan.

The external or topical use of mercury, commencing, like most other grand discoveries, by chance, occurred to Malouin, related in his *Chimie Médicinale*, and was pursued by several others; partially, but efficaciously, by Dr. Podaliri; till M. Serres commenced his researches, which have been continued by many, and which have lately, in the hands of M. Briquet, been followed by the most decisive and valuable results. From all which it appears, that if the external use of mercury be commenced immediately on, or within a day or two after, the appearance of the eruption, it never proceeds to suppuration. This effect takes place by a process totally different from that which is produced in varioloid affections. In the latter, it is to be attributed to the prompt desiccation of the vesicle, whilst in variola the pimple does not open at all; no pus appears; no scales are formed; resorption is effected; and, consequently, no scars can possibly occur.

M. Serres asserts, that resorption takes place when suppuration has taken place: but M. Briquet's researches prove that the appearance of the pustules, in a suppurating state, renders the effect of the mercury altogether void. He, in thirty cases, applied the Vigo plaster *cum mercurio*, to some of the most grievous kind, with unparalleled success. Friction with the mercurial ointment produces the same effects as the Vigo plaster.

Near the conclusion of your extract the doctor says, "I think it will now be admitted by all, that mercury acts specifically; that it exerts a special action on the virus, whilst the latter yet exists in the papular state; but that it is often powerless when the pustules are developed." And further on, "Let us now conclude that the topical

mercurial treatment commenced by M. Serres, and improved by M. Briquet, is the most salutary, and affords the fairest chances of success; that it is applicable to variola in all the diversified forms assumed by the disease; that it never gives rise to dangerous accidents; that if timely and properly applied, it changes the nature of the eruption; and, finally, that it is all-powerful as a preventive of cicatrices. For my own part, I look on it as almost infallible. I adopt it as my polar star in the treatment of those cases of variola which cross my professional path."

Now, in the hope of stimulating others to the laudable task of explaining the *modus operandi* of the specific, I venture my little bark in the ocean of medical opinion.

The variolous contagion, whether received into the system of a person who has not previously been subject thereto, or who is susceptible thereof, either by aura or inoculation, produces, after a certain time, if we may be allowed the expression, a fermentation in the blood, which in due time throws to the skin a crop of pimples, which gradually inflame and enlarge till they suppurate, and are followed by scabs; and the danger to the constitution is proportionate to the quantity thereof, *cæteris paribus*. From the foregoing experiments it appears that mercury, whether internally taken or externally applied, before, or at the commencement of the attack, not only mitigates, but actually arrests the course of the disorder, and that if applied some time before, prevents the eruption; and immediately after, it confines it to the state of papulæ, with impunity to the constitution.

We observe in those who live freely, or whose blood is most impure, the most violent fermentation, and a confluent crop of pustules, and consequently the greatest danger. Now, what is it which renders the blood impure? My answer is, a vitiated secretion of bile; remove this, and establish a healthy secretion, which I look upon as the grand *vis medicatrix artis*, allowing the benignant *vis medicatrix naturæ* to exert her salutary influence; and this gracious task she is ever ready to perform oftentimes to the wonder of the physician, when the impediment is removed. If the biliary secretion be bland and healthy, Hygeia will be present; the blood pure; the constitution will bid defiance to variola, and most other enemies; and the blood may be so pure, as to deny even the introduction of the variolous or vaccine virus.

To the operation, then, of this mineral on the important gland, the liver, may not these merciful effects be attributed! And may we not also attribute to its external use the non-maturation of the pimples, and their suspension and death, to its well-known power of stimulating the absorbents, and emulging, by their channels, and inducing a

healthy action of that important viscus? Following this train of thought, it would be arrogance in me to presume further; it is enough that I have called the attention of the medical world to the momentous subject. I would briefly hint, that we be cautious in its internal and external use, for we know that excessive salivation is highly dangerous; and we also know, that some are very easily excited thereto, by even a few grains; whilst others require prodigious quantities: between these two extremes there is every gradation, so that we should adapt the means to the end, and no more.

How the transit of the variolous poison through the cow should rob it of its power to ferment the blood, occasioning it to throw its extraneous particles to the skin, is a mystery alone known to the great First Cause. That it does so is clear, to the extent of preventing the general eruption, and yet giving to the constitution full prophylactic power, of which the following is one, among tens of thousands of proofs:—About twenty-five years ago I was sent for to a woman in labour; her husband, who came for me, informed me that in the same room with his wife were his two children, ill of small-pox; having some recent vaccine lymph by me, I determined, if the parents were willing, to introduce a charged point into each arm of the infant, at the moment of birth; I did so, and the result was most gratifying, the vesicles presented their usual appearance, and the infant, now a healthy man, resisted every trial to variolate him at that time, and repeatedly to the present time.

I will now conclude by adverting to the fact, that after the eruption has continued nearly to maturation, no good is produced by the use of mercury; no: is it not because it has not time to effect an emulging of the liver, if congested, and a healthy secretion of bile? Fearing I have already trespassed too far, I am, Sir, your obliged humble servant,

THOMAS POPE.

Clebury Mortimer, Salop,  
April 5, 1841.

\* \* We have omitted the preface to our correspondent's letter, as containing no facts bearing upon the subject discussed.

## COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION OF HYOSCYAMUS.

*To the Editor of THE LANCET.*

SIR:—As the season for gathering medicinal herbs is approaching, I beg to offer a few observations on collecting and preserving hyoscyamus, which I hope will be acceptable to those practitioners who wish to give this important article of the materia

medica a fair trial. I know from personal observation that sufficient attention has not been paid to the subject; from which circumstance practitioners have been led to form a wrong opinion respecting the medicinal powers of the plant.

Writers of high character are not agreed respecting its duration; some state that it is an annual, others that it is a biennial; whilst the Apothecaries' Company, in their "Catalogus Rationalis Plantarum Medicinalium," leave it in doubt, and say, "biennis sive annua."

I have known this plant of doubtful duration forty years, and have seen it growing in various parts of this country in its wild state. I cultivated it for several years in my garden, and from what I have seen I am quite satisfied that it is a biennial; and such is the opinion of the herb-gatherers with whom I have conversed on the subject. If there is, as some assert, an annual variety, it is rare as an indigenous plant. I wish those who call it an annual would give its habitat as such; I only know it as a biennial, which bears fine petiolated leaves in the latter summer months of the first year of its duration; the plants at this period are called by the gatherers seedlings; their leaves are very specious, and meet with a ready sale in the market: if carefully examined, they will be found to possess but little of the clamminess and foetid odour that belong to the true medicinal leaves: their footstalk is the positive characteristic of the first year's leaves, which are not fit for medicinal purposes. I have asked the gatherer why he carried about the seedling leaves; his answer has been, "A cos they like 'em better than t'others, cos there a'nt no stalk." These leaves die down to the root in the autumn, at which time the root has attained its mature state, and is in full possession of its poisonous properties. In the following spring the root sends up a curious tuft of small light green woolly leaves: a stem soon rises, plentifully furnished with leaves which have no footstalk, but closely embrace the stem; they feel clammy, and send forth a strong and unpleasant odour, very similar to that of the leaves of the black currant. These are the true medicinal leaves, and are in perfection when the plant comes into flower. I prefer them as soon as the first flowers open; the plant flowers in June; the period varying with the temperature of the season. Now to guard the practitioner in large towns, where he must depend upon the herb-collectors for his supply, I would advise him to have the leaves brought to him on the flowery stem. On receiving the herb, if it should not be convenient to strip off the leaves at that time, the flowering heads should be cut off immediately, and the plants strewed separately, in a dry but not a dark place. These cautions are important, and are proved to be so