

## OBSERVATIONS

## ON THE VAPOUR BATH.

By Dr. J. HANCOCK.

AQUEOUS vapour, as a remedial agent, is preferable to the direct application of warm water on the surface of the body, as being more powerfully sudorific and resolvent, whilst it relaxes the habit less. A much *greater degree of heat*, moreover, can be borne by the patient, and with less fatigue and oppression. It excites the skin with more intensity,\* dilating the extreme vessels, and driving the blood from the overcharged viscera into the general system, and its wonted channels; with the use of friction, it becomes one of the most potent and effective means of revulsion, and a balancer of the circulation.

Few people, unfortunately, either in London or elsewhere, have any idea of the ease with which they may obtain, at any time, a vapour-bath, an article, perhaps, little inferior in importance and real utility to all the drugs of the apothecaries' shops taken collectively. Nothing more is, in this case, required, but for the patient to sit upon some sticks or laths over a small washing-tub,† about half full of water near the boiling heat, with a blanket or two thrown over his head and shoulders, and extending to the floor all around the tub. This will retain the steam about the patient's body, and soon produce a universal sweat.

This simple method, available even to the poorest families, is, in every respect, equal to the most complex and costly apparatus for obtaining a vapour-bath.

From ignorance of this, and the exorbitant price demanded for baths of this kind, the poorer class in London are totally debarred the enjoyment of this species of luxury. They are made to believe, by the

\* The water of the Thames, and the wells about London, is peculiarly *hard*, from impregnation of selenite—sulphate and carbonate of lime, &c.; owing to this, the water is but ill adapted for cleansing the skin; and, even with common soap, it forms on the surface an adhesive insoluble magma, which requires to be rubbed off mechanically by hard friction; hence steam or vapour is a vastly better detergent, serving at once to detach the dirt, and open the pores of the skin; hence, also, the application of steam in washing clothes, is found to render the process extremely easy.

† This answers very well, but the common oval bathing-tub would be still better, as admitting the feet over the water, having a frame of lath-work for the patient to sit on, to be taken off, or used when required.

interested individuals who keep these machines for hire, that nothing less than six or eight shillings can afford them a single bathing, or as many pounds, for the purchase of a machine. On passing down Museum Street in June, 1823, I heard a poor woman relating to another, that her husband was confined to his bed, and quite crippled with rheumatism, and that they were not able to afford him the trial of a vapour-bath. I took the liberty of informing her how she could prepare it herself, and repeat it as often as required without expense. On passing that way, and meeting her again about a fortnight afterwards, she informed me, with expressions of gratitude, that by following my directions, together with the use of some herb-tea, her husband was quite recovered, and some days previously had gone to his work.

The power of the vapour-bath appears to be increased by the addition of aromatic substances to the water, as by throwing in the leaves of the lime-tree, guava, wild sage, or other aromatic herbs, as mint, rue, rosemary, &c.

The patient may remain for a quarter of an hour, more or less, according to circumstances, such as the extent of perspiration, or a feeling of faintness, and should then be rubbed over with a coarse towel, lie on bed, and be covered with a blanket or two, to keep up the perspiration for some time. The bath may be repeated once or twice a day if required, or according to the urgency of the case.

For my own part, I think there is no method better adapted for the successful treatment of fevers in general, than that which is followed by certain tribes of Guiana, which consists of very little besides the use of aromatic vapour-baths and frictions; they take for this purpose the leaves of the guava, lime-tree, &c., or any aromatic herbs at hand, bruise and throw them into the bath. A similar practice is pursued by the Creoles of Martinique in yellow fever, and with a success much greater than that attending the European practice.

The simple method here detailed is not only adapted to the application of watery vapour or steam, but answers, equally with any other, for fumigation with the gases, as of sulphur, chlorine, mercury, &c.; and for these purposes, it is only necessary that a heated stone, or iron, be laid at the bottom of the tub on a cold brick (to prevent its burning), and the sulphur, &c. be sprinkled upon it, when the gas will be evolved, and surround the patient's body.

These fumigations are amongst the most powerful auxiliaries in the cure of chronic rheumatism, and in glandular obstructions, liver complaints, and enlargement of the spleen; and they have extraordinary eff

cacy, along with proper internal remedies, in the removal of leprous, scorbutic, and various cutaneous disorders.

Catarrhs and coughs are relieved by aqueous vapours received with the breath; expectoration is thus assisted in humoral asthmas, and the same is conducive to the healing of ulcers of various kinds. Moreover, in fevers, and inflammatory states of the liver, spleen, and bowels, in dysentery and dry bellyach, the advantages derivable from the vapour-bath are incalculable.

The uses of the vapour-bath are almost too numerous to be detailed here, being constantly requisite in every family; it is, indeed, amongst the most effectual sources of health and cleanliness, removing the scordes of filth from the skin, so as to open the pores, and give freedom to the transpiration; at the same time it is not to be recommended as a general prophylactic, but rather as a powerful remedy in actual disease or predisposition; whilst, as a tonic and bracer of the habit, a moderate use of the cold-bath, or sponging, should not be disregarded. We may, therefore, consider it of much importance to procure a remedy of this kind (the vapour-bath) for domestic use, which may be done at a small expense, and with the greatest facility.

Pimlico, May, 1830.

## THE ROYAL WESTERN HOSPITAL.

The adjourned meeting, relative to the affairs of the Western Hospital, was held at the Yorkshire Stingo, on Wednesday week, A. Dawson, Esq., M.P., in the chair. There were about 250 persons present.

MR. SLEIGH, with great vehemence, entered upon a long series of accusations against Dr. Ayre, Mr. Truman, and others, whom he charged with having attempted, by the most foul means, to deprive him of the situation of surgeon. Mr. Sleigh concluded by moving a resolution, expressive of the benefits which had resulted from the Institution in question, and the necessity for its continuance, at the same time nominating a Committee to inquire into the state of affairs, and for rendering further support.

MR. GALE, a governor of the Western Hospital, in seconding the resolution, warmly supported Mr. Sleigh. He imputed to Dr. Ayre the charge of having taken money from the collector, and of appropriating the money thus taken to his own use. He likewise accused the *Honorary* Secretary, Mr. Beechey, with having kept the sum of thirty guineas, as a set-off to an account which he (Mr. B.) had against the Hospital as a solicitor. Mr. Gale went on to remark, that

whilst to Mr. Sleigh the whole merit of having founded the Institution was due, cabals had been raised against him, and every means resorted to, to prejudice the minds of the governors and of the public against him; and to such an extent was this bitter animosity to Mr. Sleigh carried, that an attempt had lately been made to *set fire to the Hospital, and to burn it with all the patients therein!* It happened, fortunately, that Mr. Sleigh discovered a large quantity of combustible materiel, turpentine, tow, &c. placed under the floor; the intention being to ignite these, and thus to burn down the Hospital. Anonymous letters, at the same time, had been sent to the Westminster Insurance Office, cautioning them against Mr. Sleigh, because it was thought that the insurance which had been made there for 6000*l.* still remained. The fact, however, was, that owing to the premium not having been regularly paid up, a lapse of the insurance had taken place. The whole affair had been investigated before a police magistrate, but the delinquent had not yet been discovered; inquiry was still going on.

DR. AYRE next addressed the meeting, amidst great interruption. He said that soon after he became attached to the Western Hospital, he discovered that its affairs were in a most embarrassed condition, and he also discovered that Mr. Sleigh's character was so bad, it was impossible the Institution could go on with him. Mr. Sleigh had disgraced himself in the eyes of the medical profession by his conduct at St. George's Hospital. He had deluded various young men out of large sums of money for a pretended demonstratorship, and a connexion with the Hospital, when, in point of fact, both were valueless. One of these dupes had given him bills to the amount of 1500*l.*, but, fortunately, being a minor when the bills were drawn, they were not paid. Mr. Sleigh, also, had deceived many of the pupils, by representing that the certificates of attendance on the "Hospital" would be recognised by the College. Dr. Ayre further charged Mr. Sleigh with having purloined a dead body from the "Hospital," which he sold to the pupils in the Borough, and pocketed the money. An inquiry before a magistrate took place, and the body was returned, but not so the money to the pupils. At the commencement of the Institution, Mr. Sleigh had "received" an anonymous letter, inclosing 200*l.* for the Western Hospital. Now he (Dr. Ayre), on the authority of Mr. Gale, would state, that the letter was written by Mr. Sleigh himself, and was a trick to entice others to subscribe. (Mr. Sleigh here referred to the subscription list, to prove that the money had actually been put to the account of the Hospital.) With a knowledge of all these, and