

I have thus, my dear Doctor, entered into a minute examination (and as some will, no doubt, consider an unnecessary one) of this strange doctrine, as it appears to be that which is now, and ever has been, advanced by those factions who make the profession of power a pretext for its sempiternal abuse. There is nothing easier than to do nothing; to preach that nothing can be done, is next, perhaps, to the facility of absolute quiescence. The introduction of such a stationary principle into the affairs of life is, however, as impossible as it would be productive of the most injurious consequences. It would at once supersede every improvement, and make every attempt at innovation a crime, in a being who has been endowed with the means, and by a just inference, destined, to better his condition. But this argument goes to paralyse these energies, and tends to assail heaven itself through the necessary imperfections of man. Singular as this doctrine may appear, there is nothing new about it, save the effrontery with which it is put forward as a novelty. It is as old as our knowledge of man. His history, indeed, from the savage to his present comparative state of refinement, is but a narrative of a warfare of opinion on this very point, perpetually carried on between the adherents of existing systems, and the promoters of amelioration. In cookery and ethics, in costumes and constitutions, in science and religion, this constant struggle for the permanence of the present against a prospective order of things, has ever kept the world in a sort of moral insurrection. The first who projected those arts which Kitchener and Brummel have but just completed, were, if we are to credit historians, as strenuously opposed in their daring innovations, by epicures in raw flesh and patriarchal raiment, as the artificers of regular governments and codes of morality were thwarted in their laudable undertaking, by the amateurs of natural society, or lovers of "club-law." Nay, if we do not slight the oracles of holy writ, we are bound to believe that the endeavours of heaven itself to improve the condition of man, met with no better reception from the "Rodericks of the chosen people;" for while the *law* was delivering in thunder and lightning on the mount, the furnace was glowing at its foot, for the formation of false divinities. So is it precisely at the present hour; make a proposition as plain as thunder is audible, or as the lightning is visible, and there will be found men to deny its truth and utility. Touch but a fold of the idol by which they live, or which they have been accustomed to worship, and instantly you are pelted with the peculiar missiles of the sanctuary; approach, in short, but the gates of any one of these pagodas of corporate corruption, and

forthwith you have the "sacred geese of the citadel" in a gabble about your ears, on the inviolability of the edifice.

But to what, after all, has this tenacity of antiquated institutes,—this "morbid sensibility" to the progress of innovation,—this vigilance of the sentinels of corruption, come to in the end? Has it stayed the march of improvement, silenced the voice of reason, or overawed the efforts of man to advance to that point to which he seems intended to arrive? No; revolution after revolution, in all the avocations of man, have followed in slow but certain succession; and though, in some places, he may have retrograded, yet a statistical glance at his present condition must convince the candid spectator, that this gradual pace of improvement places a splendid balance in his favour over any given period of his former history. If we are to judge of the future by the past, the tide which has rolled on through all time with so constant and irresistible a current, is not likely to be impeded by the "Canutes" of our medical corporations, who would cast chains on its course.

ERINENSIS.

Dublin, Sept. 30, 1829.

OBSERVATIONS ON IODINE, ERGOT OF RYE, AND QUININE,

By T. WETHERILL, M.D., *Liverpool*.

CONCERNING iodine, ergot, and quinine, you have already, from time to time, collected in the pages of your interesting work, much useful information; I beg, notwithstanding, to trouble you with this communication, in the hope that some of your readers are prepared to give additional evidence of their merits, through the medium of *THE LANCET*. It is with medicines as it is with other things; the surest way, perhaps the only one, and therefore certainly the best, to arrive at their comparative worth, is that of subjecting them to the discipline of the public pruning knife. The *fox-glove*, for instance, was at one time the constant theme of the most extravagant panegyric; it was said to cure nearly all diseases, until time and sad experience taught mankind differently. Let me not, however, be misunderstood. I have no serious charge to lay against enthusiasm; it has many redeeming qualities about it, and is generally the offspring of genius. When the character of a medicine comes to be overrated, there is little fear of the truth being undiscovered at one time or another; the disclosure, unfortunately, is often attended with one inconvenience; it is apt to bring on too great a reaction, which as often causes it to sink into unmerited disrepute. Ac-

cordingly, we find that many of those plants which were formerly held to be of great medicinal virtue, are now either totally neglected, or expunged from our dispensatories and pharmacopœas. The good have fallen with the bad. All men are not philosophers who are physicians and surgeons. From these premises it is fair to argue, that iodine, ergot of rye, and quinine, notwithstanding their value and present popularity, 'ere long may become neglected and unfashionable—*stat sua cuique dies*, is the language of the poet, and the irresistible law of matter.

IODINE.—Mr. Everett, p. 647, No. 312 of *THE LANCET*, has clearly shown, in the treatment of a case of bronchocele, that iodine can be safely given internally to a much greater extent than has been commonly thought or practised. My own experience has long convinced me, that this medicine, given two or three times a day, in doses of from fifteen to twenty drops of the tincture (prepared from ten grains of the iodine to one ounce of spirit) may be gradually increased to one drachm, without any fear of injuring the constitution; but if given too largely at first, or if too abruptly increased from a smaller dose, it causes nausea, burning, or other disagreeable sensations of the stomach, vertigo, head-ach, &c.; in one case it produced pyrosis.

In dropsical forms of disease, iodine will be found a most valuable medicine. In several cases of anasarca of the lower extremities, attended with ulcers, phlyctenæ, &c., I freely administered the tincture; it invariably gave relief, and very frequently took away every vestige of the disease. For the ointment, prepared with one drachm of the hydriodate of potash to one ounce of hog's lard, applied assiduously to the part, accompanied by friction, and the internal use of the tincture, in dropsy of the ovaria, indurations and enlargements of the mammary, thyroid, and other glands, I know of no medicine of equal efficacy. I have treated asthma by large doses of the tincture with the best results. At present I am using it conjointly with an ointment made of the sulphate of zinc three ounces, hydriodate of potash one drachm, and spermaceti one ounce, spread on lint and applied to the ulcers, for one of the worst and most interesting cases of ulcerated legs I ever witnessed. The result of this case, of which I have taken a drawing, shall, in due time, be communicated to the public.

ERGOT OF RYE.—"What do we owe to American physicians and surgeons?"—was the taunting and sarcastic language made use of, some time ago, in *The Edinburgh Review*. It is now, however, no longer a matter of inquiry, much less of surprise, to the rest of the world, whether the United States

of America are possessed of physicians and surgeons, whose talents and enterprise justly rank them with those of any country. I dislike to compare the capacities and capabilities of different individuals; it is an invidious task, and seldom, if ever, leads to any thing definite or profitable, or I am sure it would not be difficult to mention the names of several American physicians and surgeons, viewed either as writers on, or as practitioners of, medicine, at present in the full vigour and pursuit of their professional avocations, whose researches and abilities would lose nothing by being compared with those of the most distinguished of the faculty in any part of Europe.

The use of ergot, in hastening the process of labour, was originally made known to the public by a citizen of New York, Dr. Stearus. It was Dr. Hosack, my late preceptor, of the same city, who first suggested its use, and gave the ergot to arrest uterine hæmorrhage. It has been said, that the *candle* was originally lit in Italy, but if so, why was its light kept under a bushel? The value of this medicine is now well known not to be confined to the influence which it is capable of exerting over the parturient uterus. Dr. Hosack anticipated this; the writer has heard him, in his usual eloquent and energetic style, declare to his pupils, that ergot, at no distant period, would be considered a most important article in the *materia medica*. The pages of every medical journal now abound with testimony of the truth of what he then said. In a letter, dated June 2, 1822, which he addressed to Dr. Hamilton, of Edinburgh, he says,—“By its active operation upon the womb, it promises to be very extensively useful in counteracting many morbid conditions to which that viscus is liable, especially those proceeding from an inactivity in the muscular powers of the uterus, or a lax state of the vessels. Under the former head may be noticed the retention of the placenta, and the disease called physometra. Under the latter are, excessive discharges of the lochia, fluor albus, and those uterine hæmorrhages which proceed from, and are continued by, general and local weakness.” Again, in the same communication, he observes,—“Seeing these effects of the ergot in producing uterine contraction, and in checking hæmorrhage, it has occurred to me, that it promises to become a valuable medicine in those cases of uterine hæmorrhage which proceed from an attachment of the placenta to the neck and orifice of the womb.” Dr. H., in his letter, relates a case of uterine hæmorrhage. The patient was a lady about fifty years of age; he gave her the ergot, in substance of ten-grain doses, with the most decided benefit, when other means had been tried in vain.

Having thus been early impressed with the value of this medicine, I did not hesitate to test its efficacy at the first opportunity. I have given it in numerous instances during the last five years, not only with the view of assisting the process of labour, but also to arrest uterine hæmorrhage, and have, almost uniformly, received from it the most encouraging results. In two very recent cases of flooding, the consequence of a miscarriage of about two months, it proved to be of signal service. The patients, when I was first called to them, were both in extreme danger; I therefore instantly decided upon giving the ergot, being persuaded (*transfusion* apart) no other means would save them from sinking. It staunched the hæmorrhage, in both instances, almost immediately. One of the patients exclaimed, when she was able to speak audibly, "Those powders have saved my life."

I have usually given the ergot in substance, in doses of from ten to twenty grains, repeated every half hour, or oftener, as the case might require, blended with treacle, or with some common housewife preserve. I have not repeated this medicine more than three times, with two exceptions, in any one instance without effect; and in no instance have I perceived any bad consequences with which it could be charged. In two cases where it was given to hasten the completion of labour, it certainly failed. This proves little or nothing; the medicine might not have been genuine; or, which is as likely, these were examples of those anomalies occasionally met with in the practice of medical men, which refuse submission to any known rule of treatment.

SULPHATE OF QUININE.—I have treated two well-marked cases of *tic douloureux* by quinine, in doses of from five to ten grains, taken two and three times daily. The paroxysms of the disease, in one of the patients, (a delicate and well-informed female,) appeared every day at one P.M., and lasted with great severity until four in the afternoon. On the third day after taking the medicine, the complaint of this patient had totally disappeared. In the other, the cure was not quite so complete. I have also given the quinine for headache, the "*periodical*" of authors, and, in some very distressing attacks of toothach, with much advantage.

Liverpool, Sept. 25, 1829.

P.S. I have just received news of the death of the woman on whom I operated in May, 1828, for scirrhus uteri; a report of her case you inserted in the 257th No. of *THE LANCET*. She sailed for Boston (America) in July of the same year, and reached that place without experiencing any thing particular during the passage; but soon after she had arrived there, she was

attacked, as I had anticipated, with symptoms of phthisis pulmonalis. Her husband, on whose word little is to be depended, states, that she felt, for some time before her death, much pain in the region of the womb, and apparently, for it is difficult to understand the meaning of his letter, he is inclined to think her life was shortened by a fresh attack of her old complaint. I should be very glad to have an account of the *post-mortem* examination; and as *THE LANCET* is extensively circulated in *America*, perhaps the medical gentleman who had the management of her case there, should he see this, will have the goodness to communicate it to you, or to me, through your publication?

SULPHATE OF QUININE IN INTERMITTENTS.

By WILLIAM THOMAS, Esq., M.R.C.S.

THE following brief but well-marked cases, showing the efficacy of the sulphate of quinine in intermittent diseases, deserve to be recorded:—

Mr. J. H., aged 50, applied to me in January last, for the cure of a quartan ague, which had continued from the preceding autumn. He had tried all the remedies in general use, without benefit, before I saw him; I therefore commenced at once with the sulph. quinine, giving a grain every three hours between the paroxysms. The first mixture checked the disease, and he had no fit after the second bottle. To ensure success, I continued the remedy at more remote periods for ten days longer, by which the disease was entirely eradicated.

J. R., a labouring man of good general health, was attacked last spring with a neuralgic affection of the right side of the face, observing an intermittent type. The paroxysm would commence daily about two o'clock in the afternoon, lasting for four hours, during which, the pain was most excruciating. Fancying the distressing symptoms might have arisen from derangement of the digestive organs, I prescribed aperients, which, with calomel and opium, blisters, and a long list of other remedies, proved totally ineffectual. I then ordered the following:—

Sulph. quinine, six grains;

Water, six ounces;

Sulphuric acid, five drops. Make a mixture.

Of this mixture, two table spoonfuls were taken every four hours during the intermissions, and I had occasion to repeat the quantity only twice, before the man was at his daily employ.

Pembroke Dock, Sept. 26th, 1829.