

composition and constitution. Its formula is,  $C_6 H_7 O_5 + aq$ . It is found in fatty oils combined with oleic, stearic, and margaric acids; its specific gravity is 1.252. Glycerine is a syrupy liquid, miscible both with alcohol and water, insoluble in ether, slightly inflammable, inodorous, and of a sweet taste.

The most convenient mode of preparing it is by the saponification of olive oil, by means of litharge and a little water. Sulphuric acid will separate the oily matters, leaving an aqueous solution containing the alkaline salt along with the glycerine. The mixture is evaporated to dryness, and treated with alcohol, which again dissolves the glycerine, and leaves the alkaline sulphate undissolved. The glycerine may be purified from oxide of lead, by passing through it a current of sulphuretted hydrogen. —*London Lancet.*

[A number of cases, appended by Mr. Wakley, are omitted for want of room. For Mr. Yearsley's treatment, see Vol. 39, this Journal.]

#### NOVEL EFFECTS OF POTASSIUM—FOREIGN BODIES IN THE URETHRA—CATALEPSY.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

A FEW months ago I was called in great haste to a young gentleman, who was in a most ludicrous yet painful condition. I found, on examination, a bottle, holding about a pint, with a short neck and small mouth, firmly attached to his body by the penis, which was drawn through the neck and projected into the bottle, being swollen and purple. The bottle, which was a white one, with a ground-glass stopper and perfectly transparent, had an opening of three fourths of an inch in diameter only; and the penis being much swollen rendered its extraction utterly impossible. The patient was greatly frightened, and so urgent for its removal that he would give me no account of its getting into its present novel situation, but implored me to liberate it instantly, as the pain was intense and the mental anguish and fright intolerable. Seeing no hopes of getting an explanation in his present predicament, and after endeavoring to pull the penis out with my fingers, without success, I seized a large knife lying on the table, and with the back of it I struck a blow on the neck of the bottle, shivering it to atoms and liberating the penis in an instant, much to the delight of the terrified youth. The glans penis was enormously swollen and black, as was the prepuce; both were vesicated, as though scalding water or fire had been applied to them. He complained of smarting and pain in the penis, after the bottle was removed; and inflammation, swelling and discoloration continued for a number of days, but by scarification and cold applications, subsided; yet not without great apprehensions on the part of the patient, and a good degree of real pain in the penis.

The reader is probably anxious to know, by this time, how a penis, belonging to a live man, found its way into so unusual a place as the mouth of a bottle. I was extremely curious myself; but the fright and perturbation of the patient's mind, and his apprehensions of losing his penis

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entirely, either by the burn, swelling, inflammation, or by my cutting it off to get it out of the bottle, all came upon him at once, and overwhelmed him with fear. Now for the explanation. A bottle in which some potassium had been kept in naphtha, and which had been used up in experiments, was standing in his room; and wishing to urinate without leaving his room, he pulled out the glass stopper and applied his penis to its mouth. The first jet of urine was followed by an explosive sound and flash of fire, and quick as thought the penis was drawn into the bottle with a force and tenacity which held it as firmly as if in a vice. The burning of the potassium created a vacuum instantaneously, and the soft yielding tissue of the penis effectually excluding the air, the bottle acted like a huge cupping glass to this novel portion of the system. The small size of the mouth of the bottle compressed the veins, while the arteries continued to pour their blood into the glans, prepuce, &c. From this cause, and the rarefied air in the bottle, the parts swelled and puffed up to an enormous size.

How much potassium was in the bottle at the time is not known, but it is probable that but a few grains were left, and those broken off from some of the larger globules, and so small as to have escaped the man's observation. I was anxious to test the matter (though not with the same *instruments* which the patient had done), and for that purpose took a few small particles of potassium, mixed with about a tea-spoonful of naphtha, and placed them in a pint bottle. Then I introduced some urine with a dash, while the end of one of my fingers was inserted into the mouth of the bottle, but not so tightly as to completely close it, and the result was a loud explosion like a percussion cap, and the finger was drawn forcibly into the bottle and held there strongly—thus verifying, in some degree, this highly interesting philosophical experiment, which so frightened my friend and patient.

The novelty of this accident is my apology for spending so many words in reporting it, while its ludicrous character will, perhaps, excite a smile; but it was anything but a joke at the time to the poor sufferer, who imagined in his fright that if his penis was not already ruined, breaking the bottle to liberate it would endanger its integrity by the broken spiculæ cutting or lacerating the parts.

Accidents frequently occur to young men, who, to gratify a morbid propensity, introduce substances into the urethra, which sometimes slip beyond their reach, find their way into the bladder, and prove fatal.

The following incident is somewhat interesting, as it illustrates one of these cases. On dissecting a subject a few years ago, in the Indiana Medical College, a calculus was found, one and a fourth inch in length and three fourths of an inch in diameter—rough on its outside, but in shape resembling an egg. No satisfactory history of his case was obtained at the time. In performing the operation of lithotomy before the class, on the dead subject, this calculus was employed. In one instance, on removing it with the forceps, I accidentally crushed it, and found the end of a lead pencil sticking out at one extremity. It was a little over an inch in length, and made of red cedar, which on cutting still exhaled the peculiar odor of that wood. A small lead was in the

centre, and one end of the wood was sharpened, the other cut off square. A few days after this, a young medical student brought me the annexed history. Three years and six months previous to the death of a young man, 20 years of age, he being in company with a lad of his own age in the woods, introduced this pencil point first into the orifice of the urethra, to gratify a morbid appetite, and it slipped away from his fingers beyond his reach. Being much terrified, he kept working at it, but the outward end being squarely cut off, would not come out, but worked backwards into the bladder, when it ceased to trouble him. Twelve months afterwards he began to experience difficulty in urinating; but called on no physician until the lapse of eight months. This physician discovered stone in the bladder, and advised him to have lithotomy performed. But about this time a Uroscopian was consulted, who, after wisely peeping into a vial of his urine, made the discovery of simple liver disease, and under his treatment he died—it being from three to three and a half years from the introduction of the pencil. He never, from first to last, disclosed the accident to his physicians; but the young man who was with him at the time of the occurrence gave the history, as he was a confidant of the patient.

Foreign bodies will sometimes get into the urethra and bladder in a strange and unaccountable manner, especially into the female urethra. A student of medicine, or rather a man who had practised medicine in the West a number of years, brought me a stone the size and shape of a pigeon's egg, which he declared he had extracted from the urethra of a female. It had lodged in the urethra an inch from the external orifice, obstructing the urine and causing great distress. He had not the least doubt of its being a calculus, formed in the bladder originally. As soon as I saw it I was convinced that it was formed in some lime-stone quarry originally, and found its way into the urethra from without—the why and the when best known to the patient. On expressing my opinion to the owner of the pebble, he was disposed to be crabbed, and was for a hot dispute; when, to convince him, I had him view the stone through a microscope, and lo! it was plainly seen to be composed of minute fossil shells—evidence conclusive that it was never formed in the bladder. On a more minute and particular examination, the fact was elicited that the female alluded to was one of those strange, hysterical beings, whose minds are of a perverted cast, and who are always having anomalous and out-of-the-way disorders.

An illustration of the value of the microscope as a diagnostic means, was had in the case of a female who was subject to catalepsy, somnambulism, hysteria, mesmerism, and a long catalogue of strange and anomalous affections. One of the most tangible of her intangible difficulties was the passage of large quantities of gravel, sand and pebbles from the urethra. It was said that *quarts* of these had passed her from time to time; and that no mistake in this matter might arise, the catheter would detect them while in the urethra and bladder. I procured half a gill of these gravel stones, and their physical qualities were precisely like clean water-worn stones, selected from a gravel bank or the brook. Examination of them chemically, showed them to consist of heterogeneous substances

—lime, silicious, and fossiliferous kinds. And the microscope plainly exhibited some of them to contain minute shells and coralline formations. After this, the intelligent reader may guess, at least, *how* the substances got into the bladder. Her physician, who is a gentleman of skill and intelligence, believed them to have been formed in the bladder or kidneys. They were at times detected in her stools; but as she strained much, and sat over a vessel, her attendants were not certain but these came also from the urethra. The history of this female would furnish a tissue of as strange and extraordinary circumstances as that of Jane Rider, Rachel Baker, or any other of the like stamp, which are on record; and as I have copious notes, I may some day furnish them entire for publication. These cases are better understood at this day than formerly; yet there are instances where these persons not only deceive others but themselves likewise—a species of moral insanity, which prompts them to do things totally inconsistent with reason and their own principles. If this female introduces these foreign bodies into her urethra, and at times swallows some of them, it is done in a paroxysm of intellectual or moral perversion, unknown to her in her more lucid intervals.

A few years ago it was my fortune, or rather misfortune, to have under my care a female patient who labored under this perversion of mind, and she had the most strange and contradictory kind of diseases, mostly affecting the genito-urinary organs. One day it would be an inability of retaining her urine; the next, perhaps, retention, requiring the catheter. One month, menorrhagia; the next, passing over the time, or scanty in quantity. There would be weeks that nothing would pass the bowels, the most drastic purgatives proving harmless, and apparently digesting like the blandest aliment, when a dose of opium would act promptly as a purgative. Then a diarrhoea for days together, that opium and its preparations would increase, but a dose of castor oil would put a stop to at once. She would vomit for hours, and the blandest food would be rejected; but perhaps cold raw cabbage and vinegar, or pickled beets, would be retained, and digest most perfectly. But she was always showing me some curious substance which came from the bowels, or bladder, or vagina, and quite a pretty collection of unique curiosities might have been gathered from her, had some one, who had a taste for such matters, taken pains to preserve them. A ball of hair was voided from the bowels; also a substance like amber, some curious seeds which no one could name, pieces of flesh, a tube like the intestine, a liquid possessing the sensible qualities of urine, milk, blood, inky liquids, globules of quicksilver, sand, pieces of brick, &c. All these substances were at some period of her case voided per anum. A catalogue not less numerous or dissimilar came from the bladder. From the skin there came shining scales, which looked to me like bits of mica, and which she saved and exhibited as some unknown metal that she professed to believe had been given her years ago. I had never seen a case like this before—and as she was a very pious, exemplary girl, I took it for granted that she told me the truth.

Along with the other marvels of her case, black urine was often shown me, and she would go more than a week at a time without once

voiding a drop, or there being any secreted. This staggered my belief, I must confess, a good deal; but as I knew of no motive for deceiving me, I reluctantly believed it. The skin would exhibit curiously-colored spots occasionally, sometimes colored off very fancifully. Then a blister, as if a hot substance had been applied, or a strong corrosive material. At length the climax of the case arrived. I was called in great haste to see her, and found the urethra obstructed with a hard substance, which sounded, when the catheter was applied to it, like a calculus. She stated that it had been in the bladder a long time, she was confident. But as it happened, I had been obliged to use the catheter, from time to time, previously, and had even used a male silver instrument for the purpose of exploring the bladder but a short time before, and no stone could be detected. Besides this, the stone was a large rough one, and appeared as if it had entered the urethra from its *external* orifice, instead of from the bladder. As it was only about three fourths of an inch from the meatus, it was readily extracted with a pair of common forceps, when its true nature was perfectly apparent. It was a piece of common slate stone, and its kindred fellow was the hearth stone of her own room! Light broke on me at once. I taxed her with imposing upon me, and her only reply was a violent fit of hysteric grief and anger. It is unnecessary, I presume, to inform the reader that most of her strange and unaccountable symptoms vanished from this time, her health improved, and whatever diseases came upon her after this, were such as could be classified.

I have no doubt that most of the extraordinary phenomena in this case had their solution in some of the ordinary laws of nature. Black urine could easily be shown, as well as bloody. Milk, or ink, or blood, could be mixed with it, and the absence of the urine could be readily feigned. Seeds of plants, also pieces of flesh, gravel, sand and brick-dust, with coal, plaster, &c., could be readily put into the urine and feces. Quicksilver or its amalgams might have composed the scales of mica &c., which were found on the skin; and hot water, hot irons and other burning substances, might have been used in effecting the appearances of the skin. The object of all this deception was probably to excite pity and compassion, or perhaps to become an object of wonder and notoriety. A morbid pruriency may have also entered into some of her calculations, as manipulations about the genito-urinary apparatus seemed to be specially her object.

It is this class of patients that are so susceptible to the influence of animal magnetism. In truth, I believe mesmerism is only one phase of the complaint, and can be artificially induced in these subjects very easily. I presume catalepsy is another form of it, occurring naturally, for I have known a person who was subject to fits of catalepsy, that could only be roused at pleasure by mesmeric passes, and could be also thrown artificially into the cataleptic state, by mesmeric manipulations, precisely like the natural fit of that disease. A case happened a few years ago that was of this character.

A colored girl, about 20 years of age, fell into a cataleptic state, which greatly alarmed the family in which she lived. She appeared

stiff, rigid, and insensible as a piece of statuary. A young gentleman, who was sitting up in the room with her during the night, commenced making frictions on the legs and arms, and while rubbing the arms, from below upwards, he observed that they gradually relaxed, as did the legs also, when she immediately arose, yet with her eyes perfectly closed. In the greatest consternation he left the room, and rushed down stairs, followed by this ebony Venus, who pursued him through doors and passages, with eyes still closed, avoiding all intervening obstacles, as though she saw them perfectly, and it was with the greatest difficulty she could be got back into her room, and not until the young man himself returned, when she followed him readily. She continued to fall into the cataleptic state spontaneously, or by mesmeric passes, and was brought out by reverse passes, until the case began to excite too much notoriety for the comfort and convenience of the family, who had her carried home, and the subsequent history I never knew.

Hysteria, catalepsy, mesmerism, somnambulism, and a number of the hysterical affections, are so nearly allied to each other, that they most probably have something of a kindred origin. The disposition which such persons manifest to deceive themselves and others, is a striking trait in their character. While we should be constantly on our guard against imposition, we should, notwithstanding, treat them kindly, and look on them in the light of diseased beings, physically and morally.

*Syracuse, N. Y., Aug. 1, 1849.*

A. B. SHIPMAN.

#### SKETCHES OF EMINENT LIVING PHYSICIANS.—NO. IX.

J. K. MITCHELL, M.D., PROFESSOR OF THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE IN  
JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE.

"For man loves knowledge, and the beams of truth  
More welcome touch his understanding's eye,  
Than all the blandishments of sound, his ear,  
Than all of taste his tongue."

"So in latest years,  
When time thy head with honors shall have cloth'd,  
Sacred to every virtue, may thy mind,  
Amid the calm review of seasons past,  
Fair offices of friendship, or kind peace,  
Or public zeal, may then thy mind well pleased  
Recall these happy studies of thy prime."—*Akenside.*

**SPRUNG** from an old Scotch family which early emigrated to the "Old Dominion," Dr. Mitchell combines the graces of the Virginia gentleman, with the shrewdness of his *tartan* ancestry; the keen perception of those who are the Yankees of Great Britain, with the polish of the courtiers of the Charles's, whose descendants now constitute the inhabitants of "Old Virginny."

Having, with hundreds of others of his fellow countrymen, visited Philadelphia, to attend her great Medical Schools and learn the art of healing, he, after obtaining his diploma, sailed on a voyage to India—not, however, before he had wooed and won the heart of one of the fairest of

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