

flaccid condition of the pulmonary parenchyma and serous inflammation of the lungs. It procures a more profuse and easier expectoration by increasing the exhalation of the pulmonary mucous membranes in cases where it is deficient, and extinguishes it by its tonic action whenever the expectoration is too profuse. The drug was first made known at Paris, about 1684. Helvetius, the grandfather of him whose widow Ben Franklin admired (the widow of the author of the book *De l'Esprit*), then the pupil of Afforts, experimented with the root, making some notable cures of dysentery. The Dauphin of France, the King's brother, being sick with this disease, the King sent his own physician, d'Aquin, to arrange with Helvetius for the disclosure of a knowledge of his nostrum. For the secret he received a thousand pounds and advancement to important medical appointments. The poet Akenside first recommended the drug for spasmodic asthma, an imputed virtue still believed in. A practitioner of fifty years' experience remarked to us, that with ipecacuanha and opium he could almost dispense with the rest of the materia medica. Trousseau and Pidoux seem to think quite as well of ipecacuanha. They say, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I., p. 607, "Experience shows that almost all the dangerous symptoms which occur during confinement yield to ipecac. We mention this, not on the authority of books, but of what we have seen and done. For five years past we have annually attended sixty women in labor at the Hotel Dieu; we have never failed to give every woman who had been recently confined a dose of ipecac., no matter with what derangement she may have been affected, and we can affirm that we have never seen the least trouble arise from the practice; on the contrary, in most cases, we have either effected a cure or perceptible improvement."

Attleboro', March 2d, 1861.

ON SOME OF THE CAUSES OF DISEASES.

BY JOSEPH COMSTOCK, M.D.

[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

THE causes of many cases of disease are certainly very obscure. We once looked towards chemistry as a source from which much was to be expected; but how vain and fruitless the result, when we find that no ultimate distinction betwixt the poison of the viper and gum Arabic has hitherto been detected! Of our very changeable climate, it has been said that we lie down in July and rise in December. Consumption is the greatest outlet of human life; it is hereditarily endemic to the British Nation, and also to their descendants in all parts of the world—witness the United States, Canada, Malta, the East and West Indies, Bermuda and Gibraltar, indicating that variety of climate has little to do with its prevention, and that it is a permanent disease, unlike the plague and

sweating sickness of London, which are now matters of history only; but it is a curious fact respecting the latter malady, that Englishmen abroad in foreign countries were affected with it, while the people they were among were entirely exempt; another instance, this, of that nation's proneness or tendency to retain an hereditary predisposition to certain diseases.

The blood, secretions, and even breath of one being or animal, seem to be congenial and adapted to that same being alone; to its constitution, idiosyncrasy, health, and even life.

The transfusion of one human being's blood into the bloodvessels of another, has usually been deleterious, if not fatal; even so, and surprisingly so, has been the transfusing of the blood of a sheep into the veins of a dog.

Crowded apartments in which men or beasts were congregated, have proved the hot-beds of disease; but not in such apartments alone are disease and death generated. From the remotest antiquity armies in the open air have been marked in their marches with pestilences; witness those of Moses, David, Pericles, and our own in 1812, and during the war with Mexico. Ship fever seems to be generated on board ships while they are at sea, and to become contagious after their arrival in port.

Cities in which maladies so much prevail, and country places in which health so much abounds, are phenomena illustrative of the pernicious effects of the amalgamation of a variety of breaths and effluvia. Voltaire, long ago, remarked how little physicians have to do in the country, and how much they have to do in cities.

We are told that the glanders in horses arises mostly in large stables, and the dog distemper in large kennels; also, that the British, in attempting to send sheep in numbers across the Atlantic, during their war with us, lost them all, when crowded in a ship, by what one of their medical writers calls a *febrile disease*. To the same effect, Sir Gilbert Blane informs us of the death and destruction of horses on board of horse transports, in the expedition to Quiberon in 1795.

Influenza has repeatedly affected persons without any other assignable cause than that of being present in crowded assemblies; afterwards the disorder might extensively spread by contagion.

Of infection from diseased breath, Dr. Paris notices an instance under *aërial* poisons; it is the case of a gentleman in perfect health, who became salivated in consequence of sitting only a single hour by the side of a person who was in a state of mercurial ptyalism, in order to receive lessons in botany.

The mysterious and long-contested origin of syphilis, which Ferdinand Columbus, son of the discoverer of the New World, as well as Astruc, Gietanner and Van Swieten, imputed to importation from the American aborigines, we must impute to have arisen and been generated by the breath, intercourse and effluvia of the nations of the Old and New Worlds commingled together; for it

seems to be well established by reliable authorities that syphilis was utterly unknown among the Indians, and also if not utterly unknown in Europe, which is contended by some, at least never known to prevail so extensively, and with such malignant symptoms, as after the return of the Spaniards from their great and grand discovery, accompanied with some of the natives.

This was in 1493, and soon syphilis, accompanied with more pestiferous symptoms than are ever now known to attend it, became an epidemic in Europe; indeed, so malignant were its phenomena and pestilential its appearances, that it obtained the title of *pestis inguinaria*, and it appears that the opinion prevailed that it might be communicated by the breath, without any sexual intercourse whatever, and even from one male to another by whispering in his ear, of which we shall presently adduce a notable instance.

The inhabitants of the 15th and 16th centuries are thought to have been peculiarly corrupt, debauched and given to unrestrained sexual intercourse; and hence the vast spread of the disease in question, which obtained the name of *grandgore*. What a picture of depravity does the following historic extracts present to view!

"Then lustful passions, ready compliances, with vicious and dissolute manners, were considered as accomplishments by the high and ordinary ranks of society in Church and State. Extant medical and historical works of that time unblushingly place among the victims of the *grandgore* the names of popes, kings, cardinals, bishops, &c." Further, that "one of the great charges brought by the House of Lords against Cardinal Wolsey, Prime Minister of Henry VIII., was that that he whispered in the Monarch's ear when knowing himself to be infected with that disease."

Aura syphilitica is a term we find in use in those days; and from the enormous depravity of those times we have a clue to the institution of monasteries and nunneries, whose inmates took upon themselves the vows of chastity.

Good and evil, it has been said, are ever in some degree commensurate; and with the discovery of America, the greatest of all human events, we must identify the introduction of a malady which was, and still continues to be, a scourge and sore affliction to the human race.

Whether a recent writer, William D. Purple, M.D., is not too sweeping in his conclusions when he refers all the diseases and disorders of the genital organs to the abuse, misuse, improper or excessive indulgence of those organs—such as disease of the prostate gland, displacement of the uterus, hydrocele, dropsy and enlargement of the ovaria, change of structure of the testicles, as well as functional action of the vasa deferentia, vesiculæ seminales and the urethra; and by sympathy the bladder, ureters and kidneys—may be doubted. Still, we agree with him that there is no organ of the human body that is not liable, by perverted action,

to work its own destruction; that the seeds of disease and death are lurking in every healthy organ, and only require a certain amount of excitement or excitability to arm them with suicidal power; these, and some other opinions of Dr. P., we may endorse and in course refer to. Mania from masturbation, as well as Mesmerism, Millerism, spiritual rapping, table-turning and table-lifting, will here occur to mind, as they all have afforded inmates to our insane retreats.

The writer seems to be peculiar in his ideas, that gleet following gonorrhœa, in some constitutions and under certain circumstances, by transfer or metastasis, may produce coma and death. Also that the abuse of the sexual organs in early youth will produce every variety of neuralgic symptoms, including epilepsy, coma, and perhaps end fatally at last.

But in this connection Dr. — comes in as a corroborator to Dr. Purple: *localities* and *coincidences* are very curious and very unaccountable. The birth and location of Hippocrates were not in the renowned city of Athens, nor in the religious city of Jerusalem, nor in the commercial city of Smyrna, but in the isolated little island of Cos. Dr. Denman, speaking of the Cæsarean operation, says, the oldest physician or surgeon of London could not recollect a case of this operation, nor had heard it spoken of by their predecessors; yet two cases, in the same street, occurred to the same gentleman, Mr. Thompson, one of the surgeons of the London Hospital, within a very short space of time.

Equally curious is it that thirty cases of a kind scarcely mentioned by our most comprehensive systematic writers, should have fallen under the care of one country practitioner in the circuit of his own practice of about thirty miles. Those cases were of *female* masturbation, or self-pollution, and the tact and talent of the gentleman were evinced in the result, for, after some stout denials, each one of the thirty was finally brought to confess the fact, and prove their physician's suspicions correct.

Most of these, by their own statements, commenced the practice at an early age; all but one, we are told, at or before twelve years old, and most of them at six or seven!

That the practice is not *always* solitary he tells us—"In twenty-four of the above cases, the practice was common to associate together for vicious indulgence."

The diseases induced by this enervating vice, we are told, were, leucorrhœa, pain across the pubis and back, retention of urine, weakness of the limbs, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, sometimes loss of the use of the limbs, painful menstruation, cough, difficult respiration; in one case, strangury. One patient, aged 30, contracted the habit at the age of ten years. "On being told of its effects and urged to abandon it, she replied, she would *if she could*."

Another, aged 37, unmarried, had been confined to her bed for

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six years, and acknowledged that she had contracted the habit at an early age, "and had, in all probability, continued it to the present time," says the doctor.

Three of his patients had chronic ophthalmia, which he imputed to the same vicious indulgence, and thinks "that it is the most fruitful source of ill health among females." Hysteria was present in one or more of his cases, as well as chlorosis and mental imbecility in others.

Puerperal mania and child-bed convulsions have fallen under suspicion of the same kind of self-mismanagement in some instances—not in all.

The foregoing enumeration of sexual abuses brought to mind what Josephus, the Jewish historian, says of that most moral, excellent and religious sect of the Jews, far surpassing the Scribes and Pharisees, called *Essenes*, who were celebrated for their temperance in all things, and entire abstinence from all sexual intercourse, except for the sole purpose of the continuation of the human species:—noble exemplars for Christendom.

Man is the only animal that drinks while eating. Dyspepsia has been called a *national* disease with us; pyrosis may be classed in the same category; he that would steer clear of both, must avoid drinking while eating, according to Dr. Dickson, of South Carolina.

Cold is the most prolific of all the causes of disease—of internal inflammation, catarrhs, coughs, consumption, amenorrhœa, spotted fever, rheumatism, and infantile deaths. It was considered by Dr. Gregory as much of an evacuant as bleeding, or purging, as it robbed the body of heat. It affects persons of all ages, climates, temperaments and conditions.

Consumption, as before mentioned, is a disease hereditary to the British nation, and their descendants, wherever they have emigrated or placed themselves. And this hereditary predisposition to this inexorable outlet to human life, is called into action by not sufficiently protecting the body from cold; the disease being scarcely known in Russia, says Sir George Lefevre,* notwithstanding the cold, and, as he says, very changeable climate, from their shutting out the cold air by their warm fur-skin dresses and *Russian stove* heated houses. Our fashions point to the grave by their insufficient protection of the neck, throat, and upper part of the thorax from winter chills and piercing cold; for here the most vital of all the vital parts are situated.

Dr. Trevison, of Italy, MM. Villerme and Milne Edwards in France, have ascertained that 66 infants out of every 100 die by being exposed to cold for the first few days after their birth. Reflect, mothers and nurses, that the little stranger is ushered into this cold world from a region of 98 degrees of heat; then aim, as

* Physician to the British Embassy to St. Petersburg.

far as possible, to maintain it in a climate like that in temperature from which it came.

Animal putrefaction, strange to say, as a cause of disease, is a contested point. In 1832, a prize essay fell under my notice, to which the prize was awarded, but which utterly denied its injurious effects. The award was made by the New York State Medical Society. The present writer published strictures upon this production, which contained other most monstrous medical heresies, in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* of July 11, 1832, page 348, to which the reader is referred. But I must say that a gentleman, standing at the very acme of his profession both as a physician and surgeon, entertained the same opinion as the prize-writer, with regard to the innocuous nature of animal putrefaction; and as that gentleman never formed an opinion without plausible premises, I must here beg leave for a short episode.

It would appear that that gentleman's opinion was based upon the fact that no sickness followed the removal, entirely, of a vast cemetery in Paris, containing an innumerable multitude of dead bodies in all stages of decay.

Now I have to assume from this, and a vast number of similar events upon a smaller scale, that burying dead bodies in the earth lessens or entirely deprives them of the power to produce malignant, epidemic or contagious diseases, upon their being disinterred. I know that bodies dead of smallpox are buried away from public burying grounds, from the fear that in digging a new grave such bodies may be disturbed, and thus communicate contagion to the living; still, I have never known, heard or read, so far as I can now recollect, of a single incident of the kind. Yet it seems that such may have occurred, else the custom would probably not have been established; but it is still possible that it may have arisen from fear and not from fact; and there is another possible contingency, that some one else may have seen what I have not, and be able to correct me on this point.

But to resume, and to put a disputed point beyond controversy, I shall introduce a scrap of history, proving that animal matter above ground, in a state of putrefaction, has destroyed the human race by hundreds of thousands! as well as sheep, cattle, and even birds and wild beasts. It is taken from the Rev. Mr. Abbott's *Scriptural Natural History*. The author, after quoting the Bible as to the direful destruction occasioned by locusts, says:—

“A similar calamity happened to the Africans in the time of the Romans, and about 123 years before Christ. An immense number of locusts covered the whole country, consumed every plant and blade of grass in the fields, without sparing the roots and leaves of the trees, with the tendrils upon which they grew. These being exhausted they penetrated the bark, however bitter.

“After they had accomplished this terrible destruction, a sudden blast of wind dispersed them into different portions, and after

tossing them awhile in the air, plunged their innumerable hosts into the sea.

"But the deadly scourge was not then at an end; the raging billows threw up enormous heaps of their dead and corrupted bodies upon the long-extended coast, which produced a most insupportable poisonous stench. This brought on soon a pestilence, which affected every species of animals; so that birds, and sheep, and cattle, and even wild beasts, perished in great numbers, and their carcasses, being soon rendered putrid by the foulness of the air, added greatly to the general corruption and mortality.

"The destruction of the human species was horrible; in Numidia, 80,000 persons died; and on that part of the seacoast which bordered upon the region of Carthage and Utica, 200,000 are said to have been carried off by the pestilence."

Possibly, after such overwhelming testimony, medical men may be constrained to agree upon one point, to wit, that animal putrefaction above ground is pernicious to health, and destructive to life; and thus take away the imputation that courts and counselors bring against our profession, when they allege that no two of us agree upon any point, and that we are the very worst of witnesses.

Lebanon, Ct., Jan. 2d, 1861.

GLAUCOMA—HANCOCK'S OPERATION FOR THE DIVISION OF THE CILIARY MUSCLE—RESULT SUCCESSFUL.

[THE following cases are of special interest, as the operation of iridectomy is practised somewhat extensively at the present time with doubtful success. They are from the *American Medical Times* of April 6th, and are reported by F. J. BUMSTEAD, M.D., of New York.—Eds.]

Mrs. M., a widow, aged forty-three, who supports herself with her needle, applied at the Infirmary, November 16, 1860, for an attack of acute glaucoma in the left eye, supervening upon chronic choroiditis of several years' standing, and sympathetic disease of the opposite eye.

Her present attack commenced without apparent cause other than excessive use of the eyes six weeks ago; since which time she has suffered excruciating pain in the globe and temple, and has been reduced to an exceedingly debilitated condition by loss of sleep, and the low diet, depletion and seclusion injudiciously directed by her attending physician.

Upon examination, the left eye is found to be abnormally hard to the touch; its vessels much congested; the cornea cloudy; and the pupil somewhat dilated and immovable. The sight of this eye was lost several years ago from the chronic inflammation above mentioned. An attempt to ascertain the condition of the choroid and optic-nerve entrance proves unsuccessful, owing to the haziness of the cornea and lens, which obscures the deeper structures.

The opposite eye is intolerant of light, and watery, and its vision