

mend a repetition of the *ink*, as the liniment will effect a cure and not leave a *stain*!

Yours respectfully,

New York, July 13th, 1852.

G. W. WESTBROOK.

DIARRHŒA AT THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA.

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THIS disease was exceedingly common on the Isthmus. Almost every body had at least occasional attacks of it, and some persons suffered severely.

Besides that depending upon intestinal ulceration we noticed *three* distinct forms: first, the *simple*, or *diarrhœa crapulosa* of some nosologists; second, the *bilious*; and third, the *catarrhal*.

The simple form of diarrhœa resulted principally from excesses in eating and drinking. When food was taken in so great a quantity that it could not be properly chymified in the stomach, and absorbed by the lacteals, it ran off by the bowels, occasioning, in this manner, more or less flux. On the days when rations of fresh beef were dealt out to the men, we always expected that the following morning would bring us a large increase in the number of diarrhœa patients, and we were never disappointed. The fault did not lie in the quality of the meat, but in the quantity which the people consumed. Those who partook moderately of it did not suffer at all.

In most cases the only treatment required was the complete removal of the cause. This we generally effected by a dose of castor oil, containing ten or fifteen drops of laudanum. But in some persons the intestinal mucous membrane was strongly predisposed to take on morbid actions, and the diarrhœa, though simple in its origin, was accompanied by prostration of strength, much griping, and tenderness of the belly. To them it was necessary to administer, besides a laxative, mucilage, small doses of opium, sinapisms, or poultices to the abdomen, and a light unirritating diet.

Bilious diarrhœa seemed to be directly occasioned by the excessive quantity and acrid quality of the hepatic secretion, and was one of the most common forms that came under our observation. The flux in these cases was occasioned both by the abnormal amount of bile poured into the alimentary canal, and by the morbid action (irritation), which its abnormal quality produced in the intestinal mucous membrane.

The following plan of treatment was adopted. At the outset a laxative was administered for the purpose of clearing out the bowels. We used castor oil and laudanum, *infusum rhei cum sodâ*, *pulvis rhei et magnesia* and Seidlitz powders; but generally preferred castor oil and laudanum. To neutralize the acidity of the intestinal contents, and to allay intestinal irritation, we gave powders containing two or three grains of bicarbonate of soda, and one quarter or one half grain of opium every four hours, or as often as the bowels moved, commencing as soon as the laxative had operated well. Rest was also conjoined, and a light, bland diet, consisting of arrow-root, farina or oatmeal gruel. The laxative was

repeated every day or every second day if its use was indicated ; but such repetition was seldom necessary. This form of diarrhœa was chiefly remarkable for the immense quantity of bile which patients sometimes discharged during the course of an attack. It will be seen that the object we had in view in treating this disease was not to arrest the hepatic secretion, but to improve the quality of that secretion and to shield the intestinal mucous membrane from injury. The excessive biliary secretion seemed in many cases to be a result of a salutary effort on the part of nature, and therefore not to be interfered with except for good cause. The arrest of the biliary secretion under such circumstances seemed always to threaten the patient with a very unpleasant consequence, viz., an attack of jaundice.

The remaining type of diarrhœa which came under our observation on the Isthmus was the catarrhal. The pathological lesion upon which it depended was catarrhal irritation of portions of the mucous membrane of the intestinal canal, of varying extent, accompanied by abundant secretion of mucus. Sometimes this morbid action was confined to the mucous follicles and their immediate vicinity, while in other cases it was probably spread uniformly over a considerable portion of the intestinal mucous membrane. One of the most common causes of mucous diarrhœa was suppression of the cutaneous exhalation, effected either by exposure to the chilly air of the night, by remaining in wet clothes, especially when fatigued, and by standing or sitting in draughts of air to cool when over-heated. Associated with it we sometimes saw catarrh of the respiratory mucous membrane. The term catarrhal is applied to it, not so much on account of the relation last mentioned, as on account of the pathological lesion which produces it. The higher grades exhibited a strong tendency to run into dysentery. The most note-worthy symptom was the abundant quantity of mucus in the evacuations. It is scarcely necessary to mention that cold was not the only cause of catarrhal diarrhœa. Irritation effected by the acidity of the intestinal contents was also a potent cause.

Treatment.—Warmth to the belly and the internal use of some of the milder antiphlogistics, such as the nitrate of soda, and opium, with a suitable diet, was generally sufficient to effect a speedy cure. A favorite prescription was “nitrate of soda, ʒ ij. ; bicarbonate of soda, ʒ ss. ; tinct. opii, ʒ ij. ; mucilag. gummi acacia., ʒ ij.” Mix. Dose, one teaspoonful every two or four hours. Or again we commenced the treatment with five or ten grains of blue pill, followed in a few hours with a tablespoonful of castor oil. After this had operated, the action of the bowels was controlled by small doses of opium, with or without alkalis. If the bowels were loaded we always administered a laxative. If there was abdominal tenderness and much griping, counter-irritation by sinapisms, or hot poultices were very useful.

It is almost unnecessary to state that we did not always see these three types of diarrhœa separate and distinct from each other, but that in the course of examining patients with a view to determine the precise pathological lesions upon which the diarrhœa depended, and of which it was, strictly speaking, but a symptom, we generally found the bilious

and catarrhal forms commingled, and sometimes all three of them were present.

We saw but a few cases of the chronic forms of diarrhœa resulting from ulceration of the intestinal mucous membrane, on the Isthmus. We observed that people afflicted with pulmonary tuberculosis were very liable to attacks of diarrhœa, seemingly uncontrollable by art, and hence such people were immediately sent out of the country to a healthier climate, on ascertaining their true condition. There seemed to be not only a strong tendency to softening of the tuberculous deposits in the lungs, but also to tuberculous ulcerations of the intestines.—*New York Journal of Medicine and the Collateral Sciences.*

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Empirical Remedies.—Robert Campbell, M.D., of Augusta, Geo., chairman of a committee on this subject, read a report before the Medical Society of the State that reflects much honor on the author. A small, modest pamphlet, containing the whole article, has been published, and for a clear insight into the wiles of quackery, as well as for the exhibition of good common sense and practical wisdom, fully equals, if it does not surpass, all previous efforts in this department of medical literature. He is down upon the clergy with a vengeance, as the main pillars on which empirics generally depend for their success. From their proverbial willingness to certify to what may have been told them by some deluded victim of disease and quackery, coupled with a desire to promote human happiness, they are often duped into aiding and abetting the most unprincipled quacks. Dr. Campbell, however, offers apologies for them, but with a determined spirit tells them of their sins in meddling with that of which they are profoundly ignorant. Our author's plan for eradicating the terrible evil of quackery, is, first, to have an efficient Standing Committee in the Georgia Society, whose duty it shall be to collect and publish all cases of injury from the taking of empirical remedies. Secondly, he would have the facts submitted to the American Med. Association, soliciting of that body the recommendation of a plan for the several State Societies, "for the purpose of accumulating evidence sufficient for the arraignment of this injurious system, as a national grievance." He also would have an abolition of that portion of the patent law that secures the right of mixing and selling secret remedies. This is all very well on paper,—but the idea of extirpating quackery by legal enactments is preposterous. The evil has grown up with our institutions like noxious weeds in a fair garden, and cannot thus be uprooted. Nothing short of correcting the public sentiment by general education, can remedy the great evil under which the whole country is suffering.

Pirrie's Surgery.—Messrs. Blanchard & Lea, true to their character for enterprise, have brought out another excellent book on Surgery, by William Pirrie, Professor of Surgery in the University of Aberdeen, &c., illustrated by three hundred and sixteen wood engravings. The volume