

Cautions to habitual travellers.

It has been shown that the injurious effects which habitual railway travelling produces on some who escape such influences when only taking occasional journeys are very marked. In such persons, heedless continuance comes to be a cause of disease. In some, there have been no previous symptoms that they could recognise, or such as would have deterred them from undertaking the daily journey; and thus the season ticket is taken, and has soon to be disused. In all cases the evidence points to the conclusion that the injurious influence slowly and gradually increases whilst the cause remains—that tolerance is not established by persistence.

It is too much the custom, when adopting a country residence on a railway line, to make no arrangements of business according to the diminished time for work which the daily interval between the morning and evening trains allows. Hence that hurry, anxiety, and working of the brain at high pressure, which, of all things, tends to develop in susceptible persons such injurious effects on health as habitual railway travellers often experience. The remedy for this is obvious: "Cut your coat according to your cloth"—"Mene tenus propriâ vive"—"Selon le pain il faut le couteau," are saws proved to be wise. But we believe that no person is justified in undertaking a series of continuous journeys by rail under the conditions alluded to (if under any circumstances), without previously consulting his medical attendant as to their probable effect on his health, the precautions he should adopt, and the warning symptoms which he may not safely disregard. In aid of such decisions, we trust that these reports, now brought to a conclusion, may prove helpful.

## Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

### DIGITALIS IN DELIRIUM TREMENS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The reaction setting in against the German school of expectancy has led of late to the introduction of many new remedies. Unfortunately, however, the revival of faith has not given birth to a genuine system of experimental medicine, based on the rational principles of the physiological action of drugs, but has manifested itself by an impotent empiricism, supported in some cases by a certain kind of statistical evidence. Many of the remedies recently recommended, nevertheless, enjoy the advantage of being at least innocuous—a merit which cannot be claimed for the large doses of the tincture of digitalis lately exhibited in the treatment of delirium tremens; and when a drug—which in small doses has always been considered as powerful—comes to be recommended in quantities hitherto regarded as poisonous, publicity should at least be given to those cases where the effects have been obviously unfavourable, more especially as reports have recently appeared in the journals where the remedy has been used with apparent benefit.

Three cases of delirium tremens have come under my own notice in which digitalis was given in doses recommended by Dr. Jones, of Jersey. In two of these, death occurred; and in the other, the digitalis had to be abandoned, and recourse had to stimulants and opium, under which the patient recovered. One of these patients, W. P—, aged twenty-eight, a potman, and an habitual dram-drinker, was admitted into the London Hospital, under the care of Dr. Fraser, at seven o'clock in the evening of the 6th of July, 1861. Though he was fearful and highly tremulous, his case did not appear unusually severe. On auscultation, there were no signs of cardiac disease, and half an ounce of the tincture of digitalis was accordingly prescribed. A nutritious diet was ordered; but no stimulants were allowed. An hour later the pulse, which was previously at 84, was reduced to 60; it was full and regular. At ten o'clock the dose was repeated, and the patient passed a quiet, though sleepless, night. In the morning, another half ounce was given; and, in the afternoon, the dose was again repeated. On both occasions, about half an hour after taking the medi-

cine, vomiting supervened. There was no increase in the renal secretion. The patient did not appear much distressed by the sickness; and in the afternoon he had a steady pulse of 65. During the day he became very restless, and, instead of being timid and subdued, was now fierce and fearless, requiring powerful restraint. In the evening, he was still more violent; and, at nine o'clock, the digitalis was again repeated; but this time only two grains were given. Between ten and eleven, being now even more excited, it was determined to discontinue the digitalis and try opium; but before the latter drug could be administered, after a short but violent struggle with his attendants, which at first appeared voluntary, but afterwards convulsive, the patient suddenly expired.

The following extract from the account of the post-mortem examination shows the condition of the heart after death, and perhaps some relation between the therapeutics and the pathology:—"Little fluid in the pericardium, in which the heart lay like a flaccid empty bag. To the touch, before removal, the cavities of the heart and large vessels seemed almost empty. On cutting across the great vessels, only a small quantity of dark fluid blood escaped; the whole heart felt flaccid, and its cavities did not contain half an ounce of blood." I may mention that there was no appearance of disease in the brain or membranes, except that the dura mater was slightly adherent to the skull in the parietal and occipital regions. There were a few drachms of serous fluid in the lateral ventricles.

In the case of the next patient, who died after the administration of half an ounce of the tincture of digitalis (which was given to him by a practitioner shortly before he was brought to the hospital), the man was admitted in a semi-comatose condition, from which he never roused, and unfortunately his friends objected to an autopsy.

The third case was that of H. N—, aged forty-five, a butcher, admitted under the care of Dr. Fraser, on the 14th October, 1861, with the usual symptoms of delirium tremens; "the hands and tongue were tremulous, and, though slightly excited, he was quite sensible." The opiate treatment was adopted, but, no improvement taking place, it was determined to try digitalis. Within eleven hours the patient took an ounce and a half of the tincture of digitalis, in three half-ounce doses. Though the frequency of the pulse was diminished, the nervous symptoms were aggravated; and, from the report of Mr. Fred. Carter, it appears that "an hour after taking the draught (the third dose) the patient became very troublesome and violent—so much so that he was removed to the attic and placed in a strait-jacket." Opium in large doses was now prescribed, and the patient was put under chloroform, in order that the system might be more readily affected by the narcotic. On the 29th October, after taking five drachms of the tincture of digitalis in nineteen hours, he slept for some hours, and awoke quite collected. The effects of the digitalis were very similar to those produced in the potman who died, for in both the timidity of delirium tremens gave way to the fury of acute mania.

With regard to the cases recently reported in the medical journals, it appears from Dr. Harrison's letter in THE LANCET of Feb. 15, that before any digitalis was administered the patient was "quieter," an admission which somewhat detracts from the supposed curative effects of the digitalis; and in the case reported by Dr. Duchesne, it is stated that "it was a primary attack occurring in a young man of tolerably regular habits"—circumstances so favourable in themselves, that almost any remedy might be expected to prove especially useful. It is to be observed, too, that in both the cases recently placed before the profession large doses of opium had been previously administered; and it is not difficult to suppose that an abnormal condition of the nervous system should have delayed the absorption of the narcotic, which, afterwards taking effect, produced the curative results ascribed to the digitalis.

In conclusion, I may remark that "the usual hospital treatment energetically pursued," consisting of stimulants, nourishing food, and opiates, rarely fails; and that it is seldom that a patient dies in this hospital from delirium tremens, unless his case is complicated with serious traumatic injury.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

February, 1862. MORELL MACKENZIE, M.B. Lond.,  
Registrar to the London Hosp. &c.

### CAYENNE PEPPER IN DELIRIUM TREMENS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I desire to draw the attention of the profession, through the medium of your valuable publication, to the highly successful results of the treatment adopted in the Melville Hospital,