

A treatise on the disease called the milk-sickness, or trembles / by J.J. McIlhenny.

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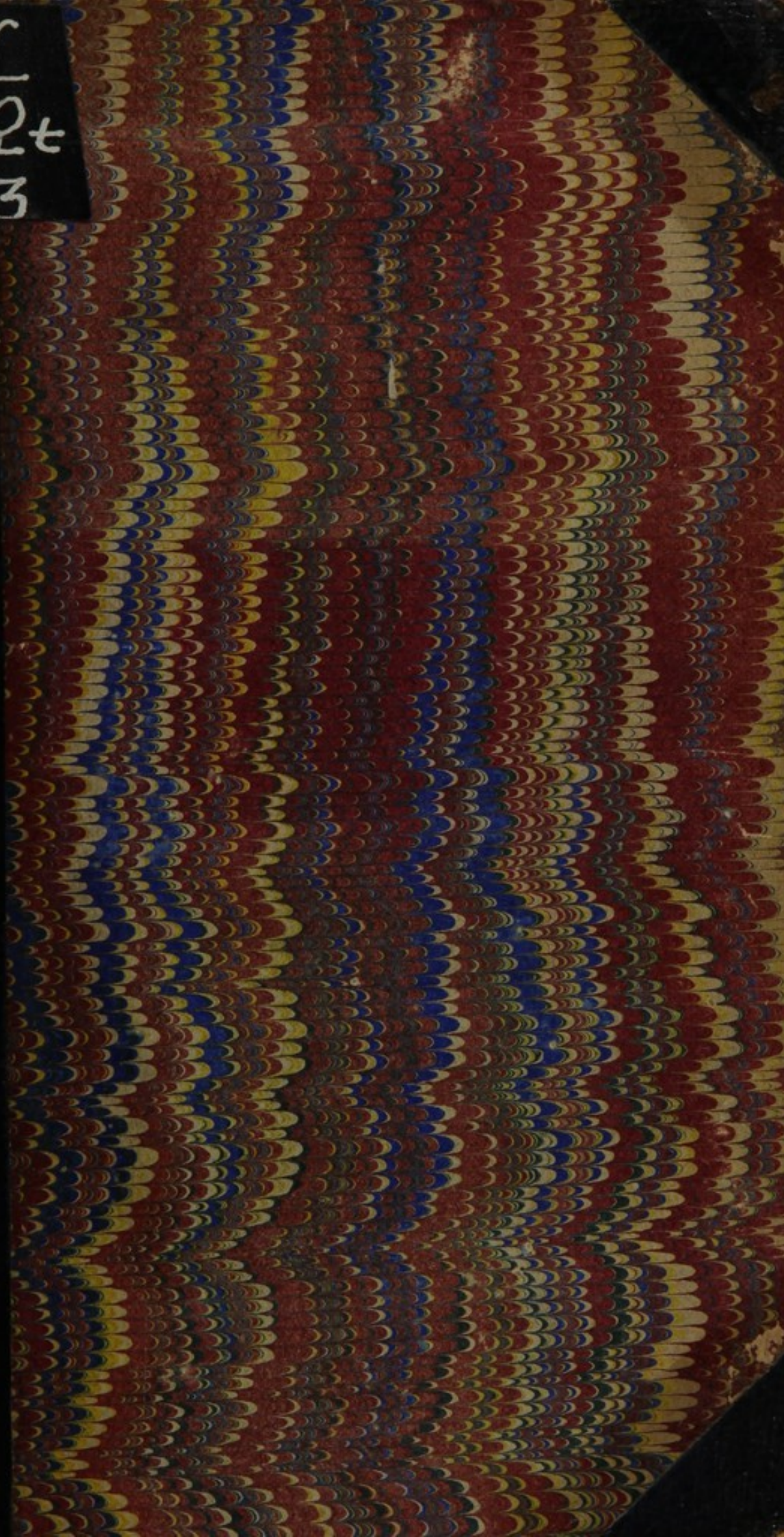
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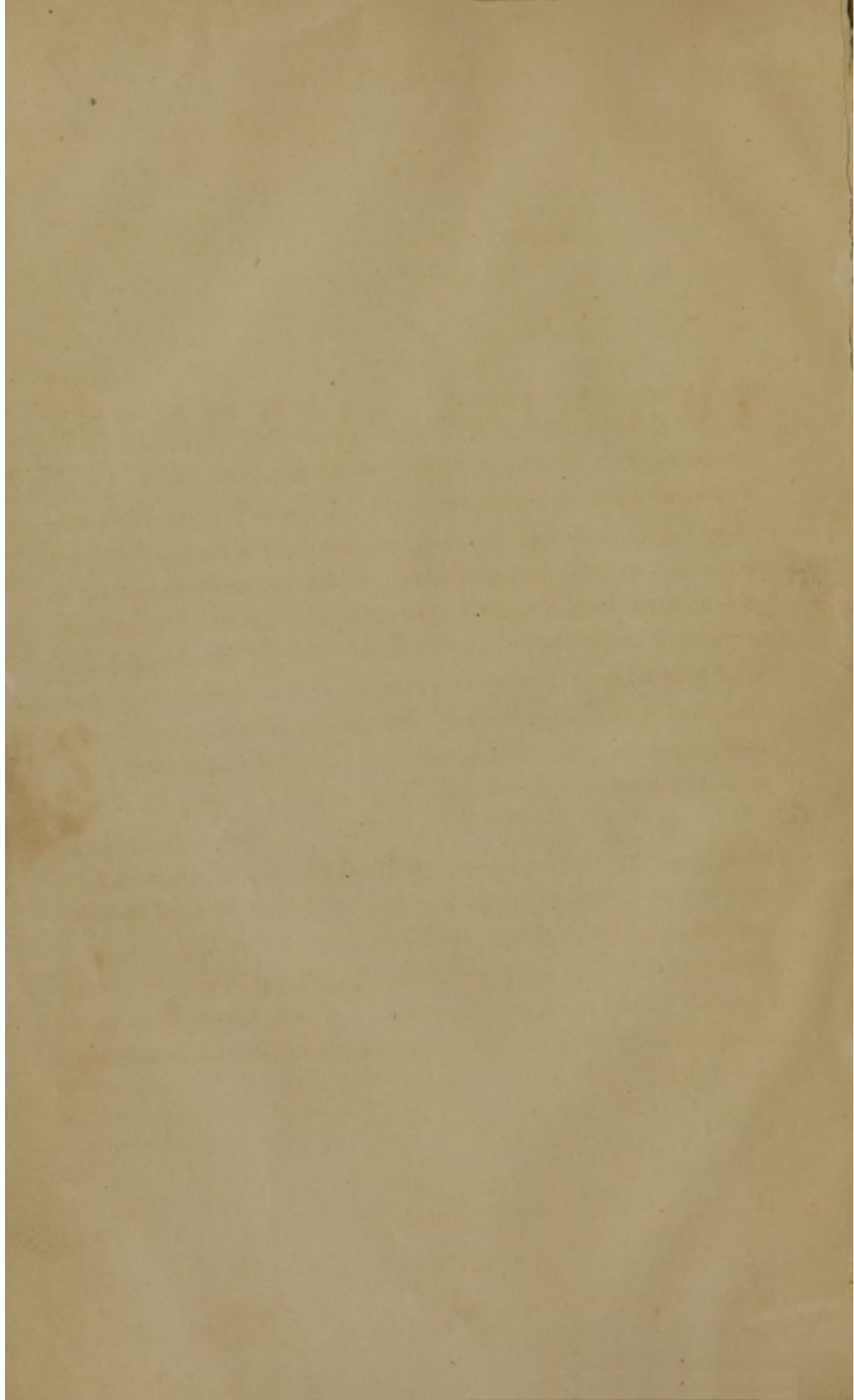
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A TREATISE

ON THE DISEASE CALLED

TO THE PUBLIC

THE MILK-SICKNESS,

OR,

TREMBOLES.

22950

BY DR. J. J. McILHENNY.

SPRINGFIELD:

GALLAGHER AND HALSEY, PRINTERS.

1843.

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TO THE PUBLIC.

NOTHING but a desire to contribute something, be it ever so little, to the advancement of a true knowledge respecting the disease termed TREMBLES, MILK-SICKNESS, or SICK-STOMACH, could induce me to lay before an intelligent and discerning People, a production upon that subject, when so many articles have been written, and so many pamphlets have been published, by men who stand deservedly high in the Profession. But, when I come to look at the result, and contemplate the amount of good they have done—particularly in the *curative means* which they have held out—I am stimulated to an exertion in this cause, in consequence of what I must consider an ill-judged and an injudicious mode of treating the disease.

I have, as I think, set forth my means of treating the disease termed SICK-STOMACH, in a fair and candid manner; and, if they are good, and such as have generally been successful, I know that a liberal-minded community, will reward me, by their approbation—if they are not such as will meet the exigency of the disease, I am also willing that their disapprobation shall rest upon the effort.

J. J. McILHENNY.

MILK-SICKNESS; ALIAS, SICK-STOMACH.

THERE are times, in the course of our professional lives, when it becomes necessary and important, that we should pause and take a view, not only of our conduct as Physicians, but reflect well on the future course of our professional duty, as men who are called upon to treat the infirmities of mankind, and thwart the direful and dreadful effects of human maladies.

Among the vast number of disorders to which the human frame is liable, there is none, perhaps, that holds a more conspicuous name among Medical men—there is none that fills the minds of persons residing within the bounds of infected districts, with more horror, with more dread, with more forebodings of death—than does the disease which heads this article.

If this is a true picture of the disease, is it to be wondered at, that the subject has been so much hackneyed—so much written and spoken about? It is a disease that calls loudly for aid; it is a disease, the very sight of which, demands our best efforts. If there is any philanthropy in the profession—if there are any means by which Physicians can arrive at any more certain curative effect than such as has generally been adopted, they are conjured, not only by the duty they owe their fellow-men, but by the duty they owe their profession, to remove, at least, one more of our maladies, that long since has been truly styled an *Opprobrium Medicorum*.

It is not my present intention to go into a long and elaborate discussion as to what may or may not be the CAUSE OF SICK STOMACH. That is a subject that has too often engaged the attention of our professional brethren, to the neglect of a proper inquiry into the pathological and therapeutical condition of their patients. Searching into the cause of the disease, has engaged the attention, not only of medical men, but intelligent and scientific individuals, for years past, without arriving at any definite or satisfactory conclusion, as to what particular thing may have produced it.

Residing, for many years, within the bounds of a highly infected district of country, and being called upon to treat quite a number of

persons laboring under the disease, I may be allowed, at least, the privilege of suggesting a few facts, which came under my own immediate and personal observation. My present intention is not to lay claim to the discovery of any thing connected with the *cause of Trembles*; it is more particularly directed to the consideration of the **BEST CURATIVE MEANS**. Suffice it to say, that I consider it, without doubt, a disease of vegetable origin: that it is produced by animals eating the vegetable, and, through them, communicated to the person or animal that partakes either of the meat, butter, or milk.

I am fully satisfied of its vegetable origin, from the fact, (of which all our farmers are fully apprised,) that until vegetation comes forth in the Spring—until our woods are covered with herbage, and the whole face of the country abounds with plants—the disease does not show itself. Neither does it appear after the heavy Fall frosts: after the frosts have been severe enough to freeze the ground, and entirely kill all vegetation. I well know, that there are some who contend that it is water—others, that it is an exhalation from certain spots of ground, containing some kind of mineral, from which exudes or emanates a deleterious and destructive poison; and that we frequently meet with it in winter. But such ideas will not receive a moment's credence in a neighborhood where the disease is prevalent. I have no doubt but that an occasional case does occur in winter, by animals eating of the dried stock, coming across some defended spot, where the plant might still contain sufficient acridness to produce the disease. I have known cases to occur in the middle of winter; but, upon examination and inquiry, I have, universally, found them to be generated by persons eating salted meat—meat that was killed off pasture and put away for family use. Many cases are, no doubt, produced in our cities, by the use of dried meat and butter, which are there taken and sold. I lately noticed, in a paper published in New-York city, that a number of persons had there died from eating meat, which, upon examination, was found to have been transported from Ohio. I have no doubt but that many of those *strange diseases*, as termed by Physicians, which occur in our cities, and which are dubbed “*Bilious Congestive Fever*,” for want of a better name, are the true and genuine **SICK-STOMACH**.

LOCALITY.

I believe that Professor DRAKE, in his pamphlet entitled “*Drake on Milk-Sickness*,” has given a clear and correct description of the character of the country in which this disease abounds. The soil, locality, place,

timber, undergrowth, and every appearance, is as fully delineated, in my opinion, as could be. His conclusions and remarks were drawn from examinations of sections of country ranging from fifteen to thirty miles from where I now write. It might be well to add, that we find the disease prevailing on high dry ridges, as well as in low, flat, marshy, timber land. I know of some high, dry spots of country, where cattle have been enclosed, and were not permitted to run in any other situation, that produce the disease, and those purely limestone in their character.

While writing this article, I received a communication from an intelligent Medical friend, DR. T. B. JOHNSTON, whose residence is now in Southern Indiana, which says :

“I entered the State at its south-eastern corner, in the county of Dearborn. I passed next into Switzerland and Jefferson—in which last county, there is said to be two small sections, one near and a little below Madison, supposed not to comprise more than one square mile in extent. Next I passed into Clark, where it has not been noticed until the last two years—since which time it has appeared in that portion of the county situated between that range of hills called knobs, and the Ohio, where I know there is much of that oak land, somewhat similar to the land in other regions where it prevails. From this county I passed into Washington, which is exempt. In coming into Harrison, I found the disease prevailing on a small stream called “Whisky Run”—the timber, soil, stone, &c., similar to the other adjoining counties.

“It was not, however, until I reached Paoli, the county seat of Orange, that I was in the midst of the disease. In the mean time, I had passed from the purely limestone region, and in its stead, the sandstone formation had taken its place. I had then entered the great Coal Basin. Near Paoli, the country becomes more uneven. Persons with whom I conversed, generally thought it originated on the hills; but, on inquiry, I found that there were streams with small flats in the immediate vicinity; yet, in some places, it must have originated on the hilly land. The country from Paoli to the French Licks, is very broken—the hills are covered, principally, with oak, beech, and sugar-tree: the two latter are often absent. On leaving the French Lick, the country became, gradually, less rough and uneven. Some seven or eight miles towards Portersville, there was a farm described to me, which was situated on an elevated plateau, similar to those in Ohio. On this farm, the disease was said to prevail to a great extent—the timber, soil, &c., similar to the above described. At Portersville, once the Seat of Justice of Dubois county, I found a small collection of wretched looking houses, situated on the east fork of White River. The inhabitants there almost universally located the

disease in the flat land, which has almost depopulated the country. It prevails throughout much of the rich land of Gibson county, where there is a dense growth of ash, elm, and walnut. I might as well here add, that I never knew the Trembles to prevail where there was a dense growth of beech, or where there was not a free growth of weeds. I well know that it is circumscribed—that a small section will produce the disease—then an exemption for some distance, when it will again recur. So of some farms—a portion will produce it, and the other will not. In fact, there is not a county from Floyd to the mouth of the Wabash, and as far north as White River, that is exempt from Milk-Sickness; and it often occurs in both Southern Illinois and Kentucky. I have never heard of it above the forty-first degree of north latitude, and it seldom reaches that line.

“The sum total of my observations as to the aspect of the country in which it is found, is, that it prevails most in the level rich lands; but is often found in the hills, and even in the barrens.”

CAUSE.

While I so fully concur with Professor DRAKE as to the locality of the disease, I cannot agree with him respecting its *true cause*. Our difference, however, consists merely in a name: in distinguishing between a different species of plants of the same genus. He appears to be pretty well satisfied, that the *Rhus Toxicodendron*, (Poison Oak,) or *Rhus Radicans*, (Poison Vine,) is the plant that produces the disease. Now, it is a well-known fact, as the DR. states, that the sections of country in which the disease is prevalent, abounds with both species of *Rhus*. It is also found there in much greater abundance, than it is in regions where the Trembles do not prevail.

My firm convictions are, that the disease termed Sick-Stomach, is produced by the *Rhus Toxicodendron*, or Poison Oak; and that it is a separate and distinct species from the *Radicans* or Poison Vine. I believe there are none, who have examined these plants, but will readily admit, that the Poison Oak, notwithstanding they contend that it is nothing more than sprouts or scions from the roots of the Poison Vine, is much more acrid in its character than the Poison Vine. This is a fact universally admitted among all our farmers. Now, if this is the case, would it not be entirely contrary to the general order of vegetation? For, it is a well-known fact, that in proportion to the age and size of a plant or tree, in that proportion it contains more active, efficient matter.

All along Mad River-bottom, (for the disease does not occur nearer than from one to four miles of the river, on the east side,) grows

abundance of Rhus, particularly on the west side. The bottom land abounds in elm and walnut timber—and a tree is scarcely to be seen, which has not on it more or less of the Rhus. In examining it, I find it almost universally to accord with the Rhus Radicans or Poison Vine. You can discover no shoots springing from it, notwithstanding it may be in a loose and defended spot of ground; and I am not apprized of a single case of Milk Sickness ever occurring west of Mad River and east of the Big Miami.

A writer in the Springfield (Ohio) Republic, animadverting upon Professor DRAKE's pamphlet, speaks positively upon the subject, and says, that the Poison Oak never vines—that it is never seen to take hold on trees, but that it grows from one to three feet in height—that it is much more rigid in its character; and finally attributes the Trembles in animals, to the action of that plant. *acid*

There is another distinguishing mark between them, and that is, the Toxicodendron having three leaves, and the Radicans five. We are not alone in this matter—we have some botanists who think that the Radicans and Toxicodendron are distinct species. I well know, that the weight of botanic authority is on the other side of the question; but, it appears to me, from the fact of the Toxicodendron possessing more acridness of character, and it being distinguished by a different number of leaves—also, that we have the testimony, to sustain our side of the question, of farmers and woodmen, who have resided, many of them, the whole period of their lives, in the very midst of the disease; and who, by the by, are pretty good judges of every thing connected with the location, soil, timber, etc., of a country, especially when the same intense interest and anxiety are felt, as have always been manifested in discovering the true cause of Sick-Stomach.

Inasmuch as the controversy, in our region of country, is assuming quite an important character, will some one who is “skilled in plants,” give us the true result of their botanic investigations?

Another reason I might urge, why the Rhus Radicans, or common Poison Vine, is not the cause of Trembles, is in consequence of finding it in sections of country where never a single case of what is here termed Milk-Sickness occurred. You will find the Radicans abundant all along the River counties in this State—commencing at Hamilton, Clermont, Brown, Adams, Scioto, and so up the river; and I do not, after a residence of 20 years in that section of the State, ever remember hearing of a single individual being affected with what is termed Sick-Stomach. And, furthermore, I do not remember ever seeing there any of what is here termed Poison Oak. I am not aware of their being

many shoots from the vine—but if there were, I think they were not distinguished from the Radicans, like the *Toxicodendron*, with three leaves. From these, and other considerations of equal weight, I am constrained to believe, that the *Toxicodendron* is a distinct species—native of a different soil.

In confirmation of our views, we will again recur to the letter of Dr. JOHNSTON, who spent much time in making discoveries concerning the disease :

“ The plants growing over the hills from Paoli to French Licks, did not differ much from the country previously passed through, and I was assured, by those that could have no interest in deceiving me, that the disease did not there prevail—the road running generally along the ridges—indeed, in no place did I see but little, if any, of the small *Rhus*. Here there were many persons engaged in fencing up the seeps or weak springs, which ooze out of the hills, the waters of which are often impregnated with iron, and traces of this mineral may be seen throughout this region. On approaching many of the streams, a sulphurous odor can be discerned half a mile distant. The streams in this region are very inconstant—rising from small sources that issue from the hills, which have a light covering of earth to retain moisture—dry up early in the season, and the fact that stock are frequently found dead near those springs, on the slope of the hills, has strengthened the opinion, that the water has caused the disease. But, it may be accounted for otherwise. The great thirst that always attends the disease, would cause animals to seek water, and those springs constitute the principal water that is to be found there, and after drinking they are both unable and unwilling to go away. The opinion that the disease is caused by water, is strengthened by Dr. SEATON’s pamphlet, which is now considered, by the discerning, to be a real humbug.

“ I travelled on through a section of country in which the disease did not prevail, and I could not discover any appearance of *Rhus*, particularly of the *Toxicodendron*, until I came within five miles of Portersville. I there found the *Rhus* in considerable abundance, and on inquiry, found the disease prevailed. From this place to Portersville, the *Rhus* became more abundant—the features of the country changing as I approached White River—the bottoms becoming more extensive. Half a mile beyond Portersville, I stopped at a farm which I learned had been often depopulated by the disease—upon examining around the adjoining land, the greatest abundance of the little *Rhus* could be discovered. From this place to Petersborough, the *Rhus* is quite abundant—indeed, on some of the flats adjoining the small

streams, the ground is entirely covered with a luxuriant growth of Rhus—so much so, that it excludes all other vegetation. There is no place, that I ever have seen, where the disease prevails to such an extent, as it does here; many improvements, in this county, have been abandoned, and much fine land vacated, on account of the great prevalence of Milk-Sickness.

“On the flats of Patoka the disease prevails. There is one small portion of land, some seven or eight miles from Petersborough, which is grown up with small oak and hazle, much resembling the Barrens in Ohio—and contrary to what I have ever seen there, the Rhus is growing in great abundance. In conclusion, upon this part of the subject, I would merely say, that I have, invariably, found the Rhus to abound in all the Milk-Sick regions that I have ever seen; and, in proportion to its abundance, so is the disease; and I have never known the disease where it did not abound; and, further, that it is distinct and separate from the large Rhus which grows in such abundance throughout the west and south-west. I have often seen the latter ascending nearly every tree, where the former was not to be found, and *vice versa*; frequently, however, we find both growing in the same woods.

“That the disease does not depend upon the water, is evident from the fact, that many of the fine farms in Gibson county, and some of the adjoining counties, have been cleared from the very spots where the disease was known to have previously existed to an alarming extent, and now large numbers of stock are there fed with perfect impunity—drinking the same water that they formerly drank. Dr. OWEN, of New Harmony, has analyzed the water from many of the Springs supposed to cause the disease, and in no case did he find any agent contained in it deleterious to health—and declares his willingness to drink the water of any spring in the State.”

To sum up our conclusions on the cause of Milk-Sickness, we must be allowed to express our decided conviction, that it is produced by the Rhus Toxicodendron, or Poison Oak, for the following reasons:

I. Sick-Stomach does not prevail where there is no Rhus—that in every section of country where none of the small Rhus can be found, there can be none of the Trembles found.

II. It does universally exist where there is an abundance of the smaller Rhus.

III. It never occurs until vegetation comes forth in the Spring.

IV. Where it prevails most, the Rhus is in its greatest luxuriance.

V. After the heavy frosts kill all vegetation, the disease subsides.

VI. It is a well-known fact, that cultivation kills the Poison Oak—entirely destroys it.

VII. It is equally as well established, that animals kept within a well-cultivated enclosure, are perfectly exempt from the disease.

VIII. Almost every observant and intelligent individual who has been raised amidst the disease, has come to the conclusion, that the *Rhus Toxicodendron* is the cause of Milk-Sickness.

IX. That it is distinguished from the Radicans, or common Poison Vine, by its different number of leaves—also, by its acridness of character.

X. A certain locality produces the disease, find it where you may, such as flat, heavy timber land, interspersed with hazle and other underbrush, which is quite productive of the *Rhus*.

XI. The seldom appearance of the disease on hilly, dry ground, is in consequence of such a place not being congenial to the production of that plant, so that what little does exist, is not so apt to produce the disease, in consequence of its unhealthy growth.

TIME.

The disease termed Trembles occurs at all periods from May till December. Cases, however, occur but seldom in May; but we have frequent attacks during the month of June. It is altogether owing to the forwardness of the season—if we have an early Spring, and the face of the country is covered with herbage, we may look for the disease in proportion to the season. In the Summer of 1841, I had quite a number of cases early in July; indeed, the majority which occurred that summer, was in that month. But cases, perhaps, have occurred more frequently in the months of September and October, than any other.

ANALOGY.

I wish to call the attention of Physicians, to a disease of cattle, analogous, in my opinion, to that of Trembles, produced by eating the Buckeye. Reared, as I was, in the midst of Buckeye, I had frequent opportunities of seeing cattle, as we termed it, *Buckeyed*. As the Buckeye is among the first trees that put forth in the Spring, it was no uncommon thing to see cattle down with a disease that we then termed *Trembles*. From the best recollection I have of animals thus affected, I am at a loss, upon comparing that disease, with what we here call *Trembles*, to distinguish them apart: The same nervous excitement—the same inability to walk—the same train of symptoms developed upon exercise—as much constipation of the bowels—persons resort to

the same curative treatment. In short, a greater similarity of symptoms I never beheld in any disease; yet, I never knew of a calf becoming affected from sucking—neither did I ever know of a person becoming sick from the use of the milk. I merely mention these things for the purpose of calling the attention of Physicians to the subject.

It appears to me, the circumstance of cattle becoming affected in a similar manner to Trembles, by eating Buckeye, is proof conclusive and undeniable, of the vegetable origin of the disease. The disease brought on by eating the Buckeye, appears to be as powerful on animals, as what is here denominated Trembles. I am well satisfied, that there are as many cattle that die from the effects of the Buckeye, as do from the effects of the other poison. It is no uncommon thing, in a neighborhood where the Buckeye timber largely predominates, to find, in the Spring season, dozens of cattle down—some dying, some dead, and others completely unable to walk. There is the same muscular inability—the same trembling—the same want of power to stand erect—as we see in animals similarly affected, with what is generally understood by Milk-Sickness.

I am well aware, that the meat, butter, or milk, of a Buckeyed animal, does not produce the same general effect upon persons or animals, as does the poison which generates what we call Trembles. Indeed, I never have seen but little effect from it, excepting once in the case of two dogs, which had eaten freely of the dead carcase of an animal that had died from this cause. They both manifested the same symptoms as did the animal—such as, trembling, muscular debility, &c.; but they both finally recovered. Whether this was an anomalous case or not, I am at a loss to determine, it having been some considerable time since I had an opportunity of knowing much concerning the particular effects of the Buckeye.

SYMPTOMS.

There is but little diversity of opinion concerning the leading symptoms of Sick-Stomach. At first a weariness—a general lassitude of the whole system—muscular prostration and inaction—a dull, drowsy, rather melancholic, disposition—but little inclined to talk. These symptoms continue for a longer or shorter period; and if the disease is not gradually thrown off, it generally increases in severity; perhaps, by some sudden muscular exertion, or some considerable excitement, it will often set in with a burning sensation at the pit of the stomach—accompanied, occasionally, by an acute, lancinating pain. Directly after which, nausea generally takes place, which, at first, is often attended

with free vomiting, but soon terminates in continued and distressing retching. At first, there is discoverable quite an anxiety in the countenance—a sharpness of features, something resembling those noticed in Cholera. Indeed, all the distinguishing symptoms of acute inflammation of the stomach exist, but with increased aggravation. There is a deathlike coldness of the hands and arms—scarcely ever much febrile excitement—a peculiar fetor of the breath—not merely of the breath alone, but of all the secretions, and particularly that of perspiration. Here is a distinguishing mark, sufficient of itself to identify the disease, and class it at once. An experienced person can detect the disease the very moment he enters the sick chamber, particularly if retching and vomiting are going on. Perhaps the greatest distinguishing symptom, is in perspiration. In some cases, there will be, at times, rather a profuse sweat, which will be of a cold, clammy nature—it is then that we have that peculiar odor, which is truly Pathognomonic of the disease. These symptoms, added to obstinate constipation of the bowels, are sufficient to determine the disease at once, and lay aside all idea of confounding it with Fever, or any other of the Phlegmasia.

PATHOLOGY.

As to the Pathology of this disease, I know but little. I have treated quite a number of cases, but have never been favored with a *post mortem* examination; consequently, I have had no other means of ascertaining morbid appearances, than that of judging from symptoms: the mere external developments of the internal condition. We are told, however, that in animals which die of this disease, the *many folds*, or Mesentery, is in a hard, dry condition, and, in many cases, perfectly black—and that all the folds which lie enclosed in the bowels, and are in close contact with them, are frequently in such a brittle condition, that they can be readily broken, particularly those that envelope the stomach—and that traces of inflammatory action can be frequently discovered the whole length of the intestinal canal; but the greater amount, those that have left the deepest marks, are to be seen in and around the stomach and duodenum.

If this should be a true condition of the morbid appearances of the animal, which we are satisfied it is, we may reasonably expect, that the same results are to be seen in the human subject. So far, however, as my opinion goes, I believe that the poison, when taken into the stomach, produces inflammation of that organ, particularly confined to the mucous coat—that inflammation continuing, thickens the mucous

lining to such an extent, that it closes, in proportion to its severity, the passage from the stomach to the bowels. I am satisfied that there is inflammation down to the upper part of the bowels, but, generally, in a slight degree. I do not believe that there is any general inflammatory condition of any of the chylopoetic viscera, but that the entire force of the disease, is spent upon the stomach, and, perhaps, duodenum.

From what observation I have been able to make upon the subject, I am inclined to the opinion, that the lower portions of the bowels remain, measurably, if not entirely, exempt from inflammation—that it is entirely a disease of the stomach—that in proportion to the severity with which that organ is attacked, in that proportion will the chylopoetic viscera become deranged.

Another proof that the disease is inflammatory, is the constipated condition of the bowels. There could not be such a dry and hardened condition of the fecal matter produced by any other derangement, excepting that of inflammatory action.

I have been led to make these remarks, in consequence of an opinion that is prevalent with some of our practitioners, that the disease is nervous—that the great gastric irritability is, or might be, attributed to nervous excitement. This, to me, appears impossible; for, if the nerves of the stomach were in such a morbid condition, acting under such a powerful excitement, as to produce such distressing symptoms, would not the brain become sympathetically affected? Would we not have an apparent case of Phrenitis? Whereas, the mind, *generally*, remains quiet—we sometimes see mental depression, but rarely ever mental aberration.

TREATMENT.

We are now called upon to try the realities of all our investigations; and test the truth of our conjectures, as to what may, or may not, be the cause of Trembles—and what is our Pathology of the disease. We now stand as an interposer between the disease and death. As much interest as there may be in our former investigations, there is none that so importantly demands our attention, as does the curative plan which we may adopt. It is the touch-stone that tries—the key that unlocks—the balance that weighs—the mirror, in which are to be seen, reflected, and tried, the permanency and efficiency of whatever superstructure we may have reared. The success of our treatment is either to establish it, or demolish it—it is the criterion by which a discerning and impartial community are to judge of its mechanism—its durability—its power—its force—and its certainty.

We find but little diversity among physicians, in the plan of treating Sick-Stomach. Some depend, considerably, upon bleeding—others, upon emetics—some spend most of their time in trying to stop vomiting; but there appears to be, in general, but one Therapeutic agent, which is implicitly relied on, and that is *calomel*. It is given in the forming, middle, and advanced stages of the disease—given, too, not merely in grain doses, but in drachm doses, repeated at short-intervals.

In examining the different theories set forth in the treatment of Milk-Sickness, I must, to a considerable extent, dissent from the generality of practitioners; yet, in so doing, I will not merely condemn, but will give such reasons as I consider plausible and worthy of attention. There is no way of arriving at any certain Therapeutic means, without resorting to some different practice from the one that is commonly adhered to; for, it is a well-known fact, that a great number of individuals perish annually from the disease; and, in no other way, but by a comparison of remedies, can we arrive at any definite or satisfactory conclusions.

BLEEDING.—As to bleeding in Sick-Stomach, I, perhaps, have not tried it sufficiently to give a correct decision; but, in several cases where I have resorted to venesection, I am satisfied that the result was not what I had anticipated. I had expected to have found some diminution of the gastric disturbance—some abatement of the general uneasiness and inquietude; but I was disappointed. Instead of bringing these results about, it only had a tendency to prostrate—to produce a feeling of languor and faintness, which was too apt to continue. I see no good reason why we should bleed. The pulse is soft and slow—there is but little heat of the skin—in fact, there is a general shrinking of the flesh—and it is but very seldom that they complain of pain in the head.

EMETICS.—As to the use of emetics, there is, in my opinion, but one objection. If, after the emetic has operated freely, you can succeed in throwing its effect upon the bowels, you accomplish all that could be desired, overcoming their constipated condition; and you frequently have but little trouble afterwards, in keeping up a soluble state of the bowels. But if you do not thus succeed, which you scarcely ever can, you increase the inflammatory action of the stomach, and cause much more distressing nausea.

STOPPING VOMITING.—This is a curative plan about which, I think, there should not be much diversity of opinion. It is a matter of plain observation and remark, that such cases as are treated with a view to prevent emesis, are, in general, much more difficult in managing, and too often end in death. The reason is obvious. Vomiting is nature's

cure. She resorts to it when the stomach is loaded with any foreign substance—when there is contained in that organ a principle that is deleterious or destructive to the best interest of the animal economy; and you might almost as well stop the breath itself, as to put a stop to this outlet of the virus.

Laudanum, essence of mentha, and the other paraphernalia of remedies that are too often resorted to for the purpose of allaying the gastric irritability, are so many engines of destruction. Besides preventing the stomach from rejecting the morbid matter that there accumulates, they increase the constipation of the bowels, and assist in bringing about that state of the stomach, from which there is but little chance of recovery.

The next Therapeutic agent that claims our attention, is CALOMEL—the lion, as it is generally termed, of Sick-Stomach. I must beg leave, with all due deference to the opinions of many eminent medical men, to discard its use, at least in the onset of the disease.

Viewing the disease in the light which I do, I must reject the use of all powerful and drastic agents. I have tried calomel, scammony, aloes, &c., to my entire satisfaction. I find, immediately after their administration, that they complain of increased distress—a general restlessness seizes them—perhaps greater nausea succeeds, with augmented thirst. You will find practitioners, whose only prescription is from twenty to forty grains of calomel, given every two or three hours, trying to effect a passage in this way. I have witnessed this exhibition with horror; I have stood by and seen such doses administered until you would see a fair maniac made of the patient—until you would see the last, fair, bright hope of life, merged into that dark and hopeless state, from which you would, but seldom, witness a recovery.

And why should not this be the case? How could it be possible, that calomel, with its slight purgative power, could overcome the powerfully constipated condition of the bowels? How could it break through that barrier of hardened, dry, and compact fecal matter, which is always an attendant on that disease? Response answers, how? Indeed, without other aid, the administration of any medicine *per orem*, will often effect but little. If it should succeed, as in many cases it does, in producing the desired purgation, all will be well; but if it does not—if it remains in the stomach, adding poison to poison—inflammation to inflammation—the result cannot help but be disastrous to the patient.

Mr. B., a carpenter of our place, told me, that the first season he was here, which was in the year 1817, he made fifty-one coffins, all for persons who died of sick-stomach; and I am informed, by the very best of testimony, that the almost universal practice, at that time;

was the free administration of calomel and other drastic drugs, and solely and entirely depended upon—that it was no uncommon thing for families to keep calomel in the house, and at the very first onset of the disease, to take it in thirty, fifty, and one hundred grain doses, washed down with a little cold water. This is mentioned for the purpose of showing the manner of treatment and the result.

I do not, by any means, wish it to be understood, that I am opposed to the administration of calomel in all diseases; I am perfectly friendly to its use, and in a great number of disorders to which the human constitution is liable, I consider it indispensable; but I do wish it distinctly understood, that I object to the continued use of any article, no difference what, that has been often and repeatedly proven to be deleterious and destructive to the best interests of the thing to which it has been applied. I furthermore protest against that dogmatism, which blindly leads a man to adopt a practice, because of its being sanctioned by some high authority, which has proven itself almost as destructive as the Bohon Upas, to every individual that would fully come within its entire embrace.

That such has been the case, to a very great extent, in the treatment of Milk-Sickness, is utterly undeniable. In proof of this, let us sum up a little history. Take the case just above cited, where such a vast number died in one season. Go to the verge of the furthest boundary of the disease, and there inquire, what has been the result. The answer will be, *mortality, mortality!* Summon from the commencement of the disease up to the present time, any individual who has been at all conversant with the prevalence of the disease, and he will tell you, that it has been death general, and very frequently death universal.

Let us come a little nearer home, and see what we will there find. In looking over Dr. DRAKE'S pamphlet on Sick-Stomach, we find it stated, that in ten families, numbering thirty-five persons, who were afflicted with this disease, the mortality was so great, that nearly two-thirds of the whole number died; also, that in another family, six died between the 1st of July and the 18th of August of the same year. Indeed, throughout the whole history of the disease, it has been characterized by great mortality. And what has been the treatment? An almost universal sameness—the administration of drastic medicines, to the exclusion of all others.

I claim no infallibility in the treatment of this disease—I claim not to be the discoverer of any thing new in this matter—I do not pretend to be possessed of any specific which I can apply, and proclaim entire safety to the patient; but one thing I do claim, and that is, the right of rejecting the old and long-established routine of practice, which has

failed in performing that degree of curative effect, which we would like to have produced; and to substitute, in its place, a method which I consider much more effectual, and much less injurious to the system.

The means which I generally use, and, as yet, they have been favored with entire success, are few and simple. When called to a patient laboring under the disease, I give but little medicine of any kind. If the stomach is not *too irritable*, perhaps a little oil or senna and cream of tartar, with the addition of a *little* ginger, and that in but small doses, repeated as often as the stomach will bear it, without producing vomiting. At the same time, I make use of the stomach pump to administer injections; I introduce one of the tubes up the bowels as far as I deem necessary—perhaps a foot, eighteen inches, or more—at all events, sufficiently high to pass above the sigmoid flexure of the colon, and thereby stimulate the upper bowels. The first injections which I employ, are but small—afterwards, if the torpor of the bowels is great, use them more freely. I have, in some cases, thrown into the bowels as much as a gallon of warm water, in the course of three or four hours, and let it pass off, before the fecal matter would become sufficiently softened to allow it to come away. This, of all means I ever used, or ever saw used, I consider the most effectual. The common syringe is most generally used; but that merely empties the rectum, and does not reach sufficiently high up to stimulate the bowels, or moisten the scybalous matter, so that a passage can be effected.

I once attended an intemperate man, who was attacked with this disease. The inflammatory action of the stomach ran so high, that it was almost impossible for any thing to be retained, so that a passage could be effected. I used more than fifty injections, of ordinary size, administered with the common syringe, without any apparent effect. I then had recourse to the stomach pump, which I introduced high up into the bowels, and throwing up a large quantity of water, salt, and oil, a passage was finally effected; and in the first and second operations, there was a large quantity of scybala passed, as large as the end of a person's thumb, softened on the outside, and so completely dry and hard, or rather tough, that you could scarcely break it to pieces with a hammer. Now, I would ask, if the administration of any purgative whatever, not excepting Croton oil, could possibly have effected an opening of the bowels in a case of this kind?

I am well aware, that this course of procedure is attended with a great deal more trouble than that of any other. I well know that it is much easier to administer a few doses of some convenient drug, than it is to perform a more complicated and laborious task; consequently, some of the most powerful drugs that we have, are given with a view to meet

the exigency of the case—thinking that it will be all-sufficient; and often, in this way, a case is allowed to go on until all remedial means are useless.

It appears to me, that an epispastic is another valuable agent in the successful treatment of Sick-Stomach. It seems to allay, frequently, to a considerable extent, the extreme sickness of the stomach, and to allow a freer and fuller respiration.

Another simple thing I universally use, and that is yeast. Procure it from the distillery—make it sufficiently thin, with water, to drink, and use it freely. It is well known to be a powerful anti-septic, and that it is possessed of no inconsiderable share of purgative quality. I have seen it, from the first, allay the nausea and vomiting, and assist the stomach, not only to receive other medicines, but aid in its operation. I also advise its free and frequent use in clysters. As simple as this may appear, it has often been attended with the greatest benefit.

I have, more than once, seen the free exhibition of cream of tartar and flour of sulphur, produce the happiest effect. This may be in consequence of their laxative quality, combined with the perspiratory effect of the sulphur. At all events, their mildness and blandness, added to their anti-septic properties, are not, in the least, injurious, and may be productive of good.

The reason why I object to the use of calomel, scammony, aloes, Croton oil, and all those drastic drugs, particularly at the onset of the disease, is because of the uncertainty of producing an operation upon the bowels. We frequently see cases, where the constipation of the bowels, will continue, in despite of every attempt to overcome them, from five to fifteen days and upwards, and still they would recover; therefore, in consequence of this uncertainty, we object to the use of powerful means; for, if we fail in opening the bowels, which, with such means, we are very apt to do, we hurry on a gangrenous state of the stomach and bowels; whereas, the mode of procedure which we adopt, I am convinced, will be much more certain in its effects, and will not assist in bringing about that morbid condition of the parts from which there is no recovery. I firmly believe, that many cases of Sick-Stomach are thrown off by spontaneous vomiting, and others would be, if the energy of the stomach was not retarded and prostrated, by the exhibition of such articles as either have too much specific gravity, or are otherwise of such a nature, that it cannot reject them.

Furthermore, we object to the use of calomel, in consequence of its slight purgative power. Is not the opening of the bowels considered by all as a *sine qua non*, in this disease? Every person is ready to respond, IT IS. Then, I would, in sincerity, as a person who wishes

to treat this matter in a true spirit of rational inquiry and investigation, ask, why it is that so many persons contend for the use of calomel in this disease, and continue its administration from case to case, when they know, that but slight purgative property belongs to it, and certainly must admit, that if it does not produce catharsis, the stomach has but little power to throw it off.

These are some of the many reasons which we might adduce against the use of calomel, and every other powerfully irritating medicine. I am well satisfied, that in many cases, inflammation of the mucous membrane of the stomach is so great, that it thickens to such an extent, that the passage from the stomach to the bowels become entirely closed. Now, I would ask, which would be the more likely to allay that inflammatory action, which is there going on, and conduce to a healthy return of those organs, that mode of treating the disease by drastic medicines, (such as have but little tendency to open the bowels, and are constantly exciting and keeping up that state of irritability, by their drastic effect,) or a soothing course of procedure? such as rest—giving but little medicine, and that of a very mild nature—using, freely, bland and cooling enemata, administered by the stomach tube, or some other apparatus that will reach sufficiently high into the bowels to stimulate their upper portion, cleansing it of all vitiated secretion, and thereby conduce, largely, to the allaying of the inflammation of the pylorus. I merely ask a consideration of these facts, and I am willing to leave the response to every candid and reflecting individual.

I well know that many physicians will tell you, that they must use calomel; that the liver is locked up, and by no other means can they stimulate it to action. Well, better would it be, if the key, for a time, was lost and it should remain locked, than to let the bowels continue closed, and give such powerful, drastic drugs, which increase the inflammation, open not the bowels, and finally produce a gangrenous state of the stomach, with death to close the treatment.

I say nothing against the use of calomel, after you have produced free purgation; then it will pass off in due season, without producing any of its ill-effects. I must confess, however, that I have seen but few cases that showed much biliary derangement. I have noticed some cases, where consecutive fever followed the disease, that they would become slightly jaundiced. In such cases, calomel becomes a proper agent; but when the bowels are once moved, and kept open, the disease most generally, yields, and a cure speedily follows.

There is an opinion prevalent, that a person once affected with Trembles, never entirely recovers. Now, this may be true, to some extent; but, I believe that many of those who think they labor under

the effects of the disease, actually are suffering from the effects of the medicine. Such powerful remedies are employed, and frequently lie in the system so long before they are carried off, that they produce lasting effects. Out of twelve or fifteen cases treated in the summer of 1841, they tell me that they feel but little, if any, of the effects of the disease.

These suggestions are all the sincere convictions of my mind, produced by a careful and candid consideration of facts, which have been brought to light, both by observation in my own practice, and in that of others; and they are not formed for the purpose of opposing any man's theory, further than I deem truth: and, as such, they are offered for consideration.

In conclusion, in order to strengthen our testimony in this matter, we will give the following extract from a recent letter from Dr. JOHNSON, who has had some experience in the treatment of Milk-Sickness, and quite an extensive observation upon the subject. He says:

“ Nowhere is the disease treated with more success than in southern Indiana. Formerly, most persons died who were treated by mercurials. This agent is now *never* used, by those who are successful in the treatment of the disease. Much of the success in the treatment, is to be attributed to the skill of Dr. TRAFTON, the oldest physician in Evansville. For several years he treated it, as many physicians still continue to do, with mercurials, and was unsuccessful. At length, a particular friend of the Doctor's died, and on a *post mortem* examination, there was found all the evidences of violent inflammation of the stomach, particularly in the region of the pyloric orifice. This occurrence led to a more enlightened view of the disease, and an entire change in the treatment. Instead of calomel, and active purgatives, the milder articles of cathartics, and gentle laxatives, were used—such as sulphur and bi. tart. pot., senna, soda, seidlitz, &c., with a free use of enemata. With this treatment, the mortality of the disease, which had hitherto been great, was measurably arrested. Instead of being considered the most fatal disease of the southern portion of the State, it is now, if taken early, and treated as gastritis, thought to be completely under the control of the proper medicines. I may venture the assertion, that calomel has never done good in the early stage of the disease, and seldom, if ever, at any period, and by far the majority of cases thus treated, prove fatal; whilst under the opposite treatment, with the milder articles of *Materia Medica*, a case seldom proves fatal. I am sustained, in this assertion, by all the physicians in this portion of the State, who treat the disease successfully; and so thoroughly are the people convinced of these facts, that they will not employ a practitioner, in a case of Milk-Sickness,

who is known to use this article in the treatment of that disease.

“The question naturally arises, why is calomel so deleterious in this disease? Is it from its specific action on the system, or its chemical action on the coats of the stomach? I think neither will account for it satisfactorily. Admitting that the disease is one *sui generis*, caused by specific poison taken into the stomach, causing inflammation of that organ, and consequent derangement of the whole system; yet, why calomel should be much more injurious in the inflammation thus produced, than when produced by other causes, can hardly be answered satisfactorily. It may be said, that it enters into combination, or is chemically changed by the virus which causes the disease—or, that it is long retained in the stomach, and is acted on by the vitiated gastric juice, forming a corrosive compound, capable of producing much mischief. These I think rather unsatisfactory. I believe that it is not so much that calomel has any of the above pernicious effects, that the treatment of the disease with it has been so unsuccessful. Calomel, moderately used, may, in some cases, be advantageous, as where the disease is complicated with bilious fever; and I have no doubt but that one of the reasons why it has been considered an article so certainly producing evil consequences, is, that those who have used it, have nearly always neglected the most important part of the treatment, depending upon it alone, or in combination with other heroic medicines, to perform a cure. From what has been said of the pathological condition of the stomach, this treatment would generally prove disastrous to the patient. This shows the fallacy of treating a disease merely by its name. Should the disease, because it is produced by some agent contained in the meat, butter, milk, &c., be treated different from a similar disease, produced by a different cause? I should think not. The same symptoms should be met by the same treatment, and that treatment should be rational. What medical man would, in a case of pure gastritis, give powerful and drastic purgatives? Then, if we have the same evidences of a similar condition of the same organ, (as tenderness of the epigastrium, vomiting, extreme thirst, anxiety of countenance, and great muscular debility,) why not adopt a similar treatment? It is not the name that gives the symptoms, but the symptoms the name of the disease; and these symptoms are the evidences of the departure of some organ from a healthy condition—and in Milk-Sickness, the organ most seriously affected is the stomach. Then the remedies used should be such as would act as gentle laxatives, given often, and in small quantities—but the proper treatment is better known to you than me. But it does appear to me, that those who treat the disease with mercurials, and are unsuccessful, do

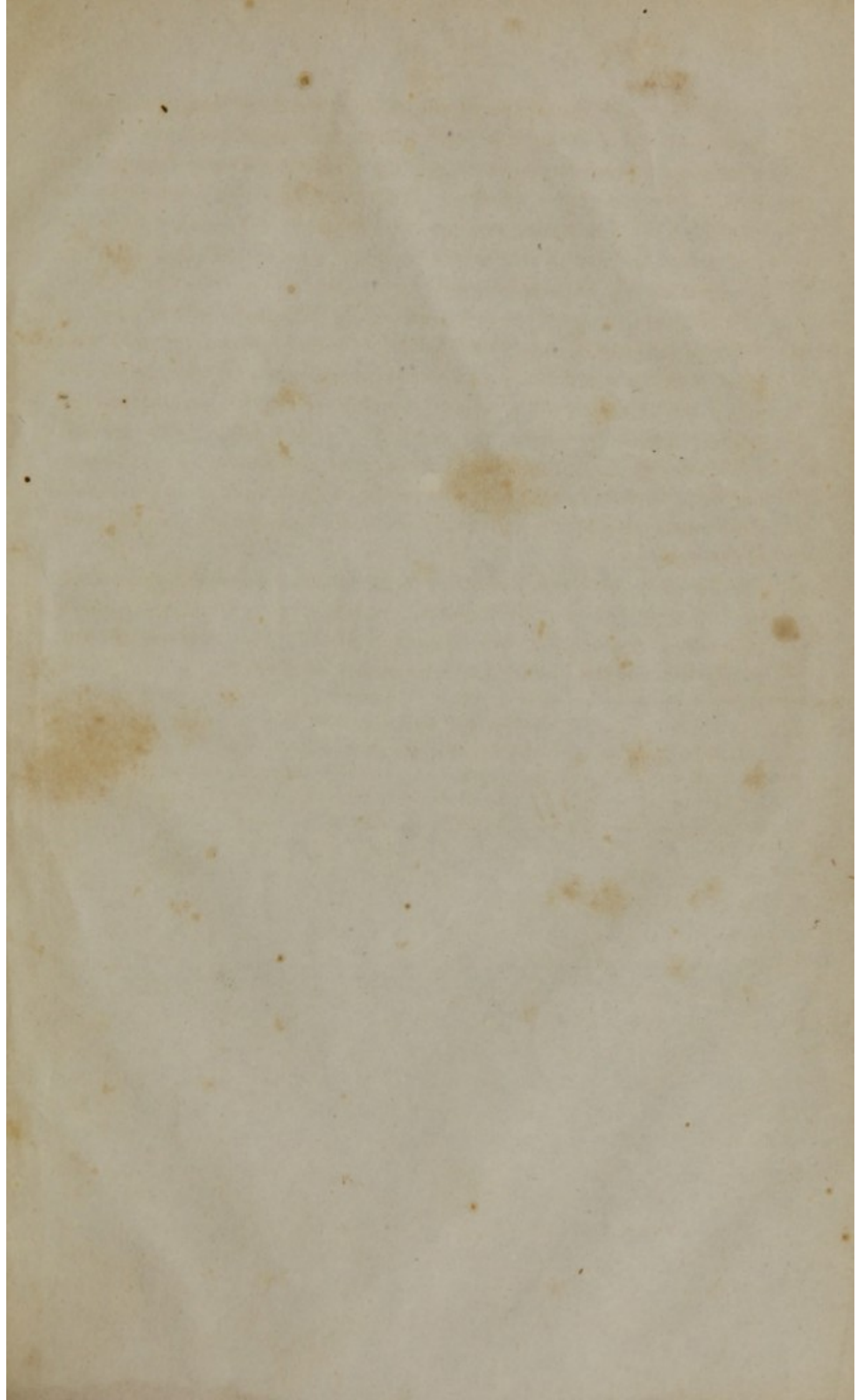
not fail so much from the evil effects of calomel, as from a mistaken notion of the disease, and the consequent neglect of the proper treatment. They try to overcome the obstinate constipation of the bowels, by powerful cathartics. These are generally rejected by the stomach; and I doubt not, but that in many cases, the passage from the stomach to the bowels is nearly or entirely closed; and this condition is aggravated by the articles used.

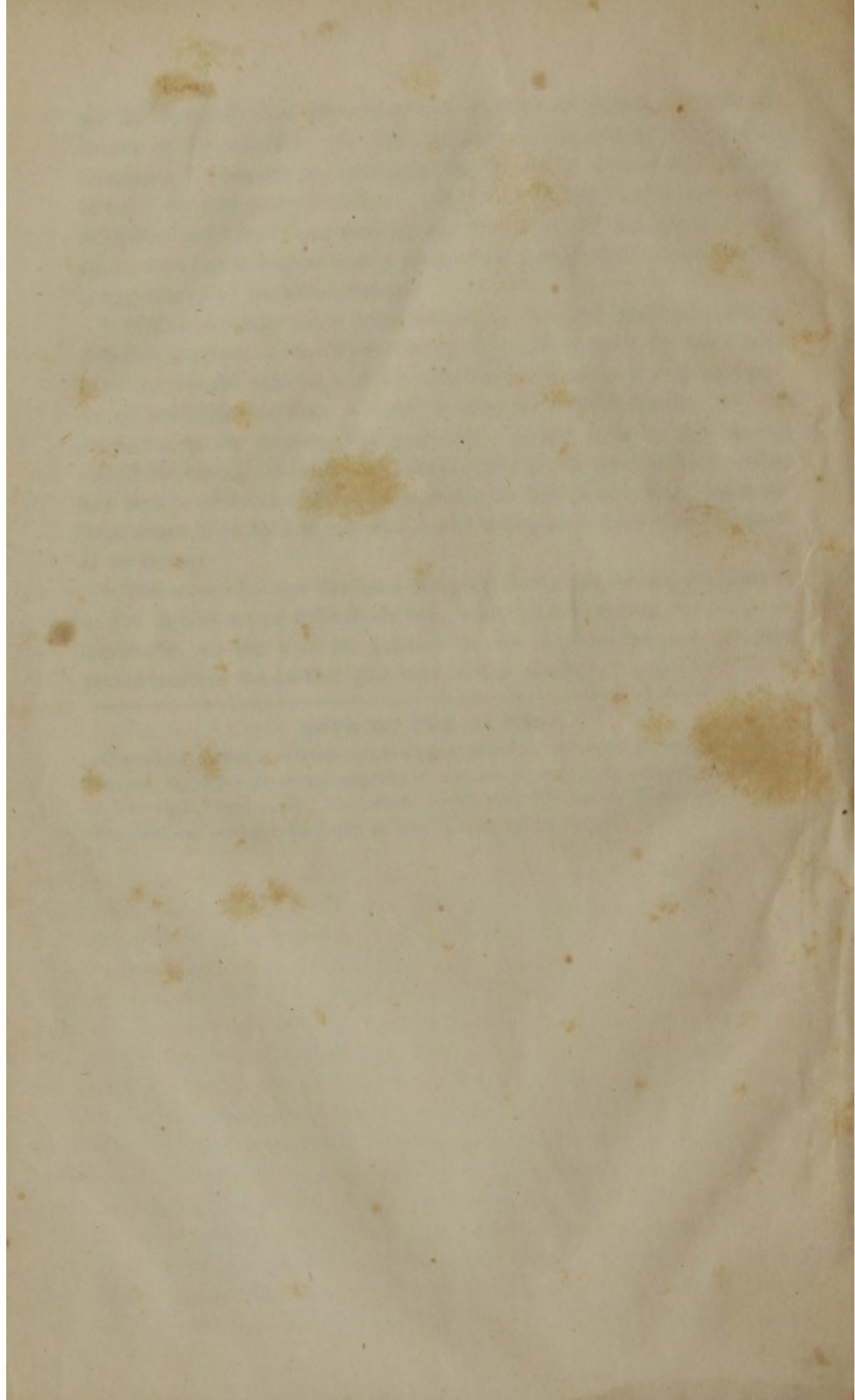
“Whilst volumes have been written by different medical men, in different portions of the West affected with this disease, by men who stand high in the estimation of the citizens of the country, as practitioners of medicine, nothing, as yet, worthy of the profession, on the treatment of the disease, has appeared. If the labor and research (which have been directed to an investigation of the cause of the disease, had been bestowed on efforts to ascertain its Pathology, many valuable lives might have been saved, and it would long since have been stripped of its terrors.

“The man who can dissipate the prejudices, and correct the errors in the treatment of Milk-Sickness, which now prevail to such a lamentable extent, will be entitled to the highest honors of the profession, and the eternal gratitude of his country.”

NOTE BY THE AUTHOR.

Owing to the hurry of business, some few errors have escaped detection. None, however, that alter the actual meaning of a sentence, excepting one on page 7, line 13, for “rigid,” read acrid. The others which occur are merely typographical and orthographical errors, which will be readily seen by the reader.





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DR. McILHENNY

ON

MILK-SICKNESS.

