

An inaugural dissertation on universal dropsy : submitted to the examination of the Revd. John Ewing, S.T.D. provost ; the trustees and medical professors of the University of Pennsylvania ; for the degree of Doctor of Medicine : on the twelfth day of May, A.D. 1791 / by Elijah Perkins. A.B. of Connecticut, Member of the American Medical Society, at Philadelphia.

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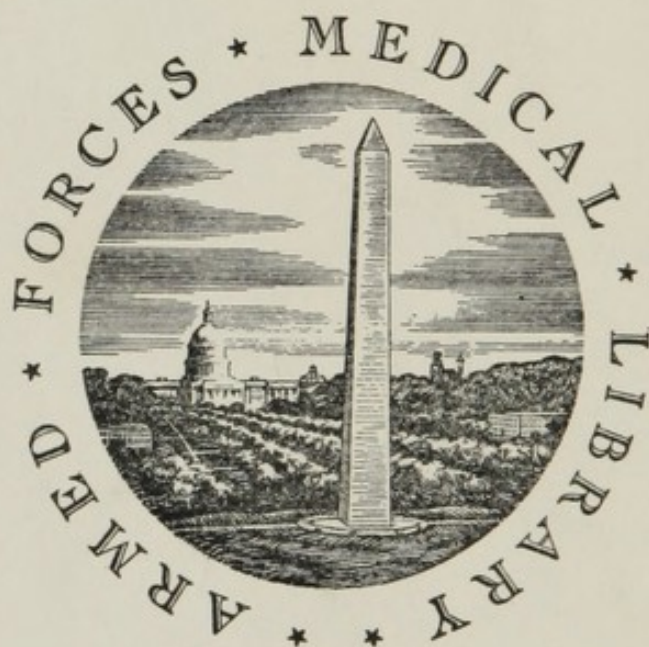
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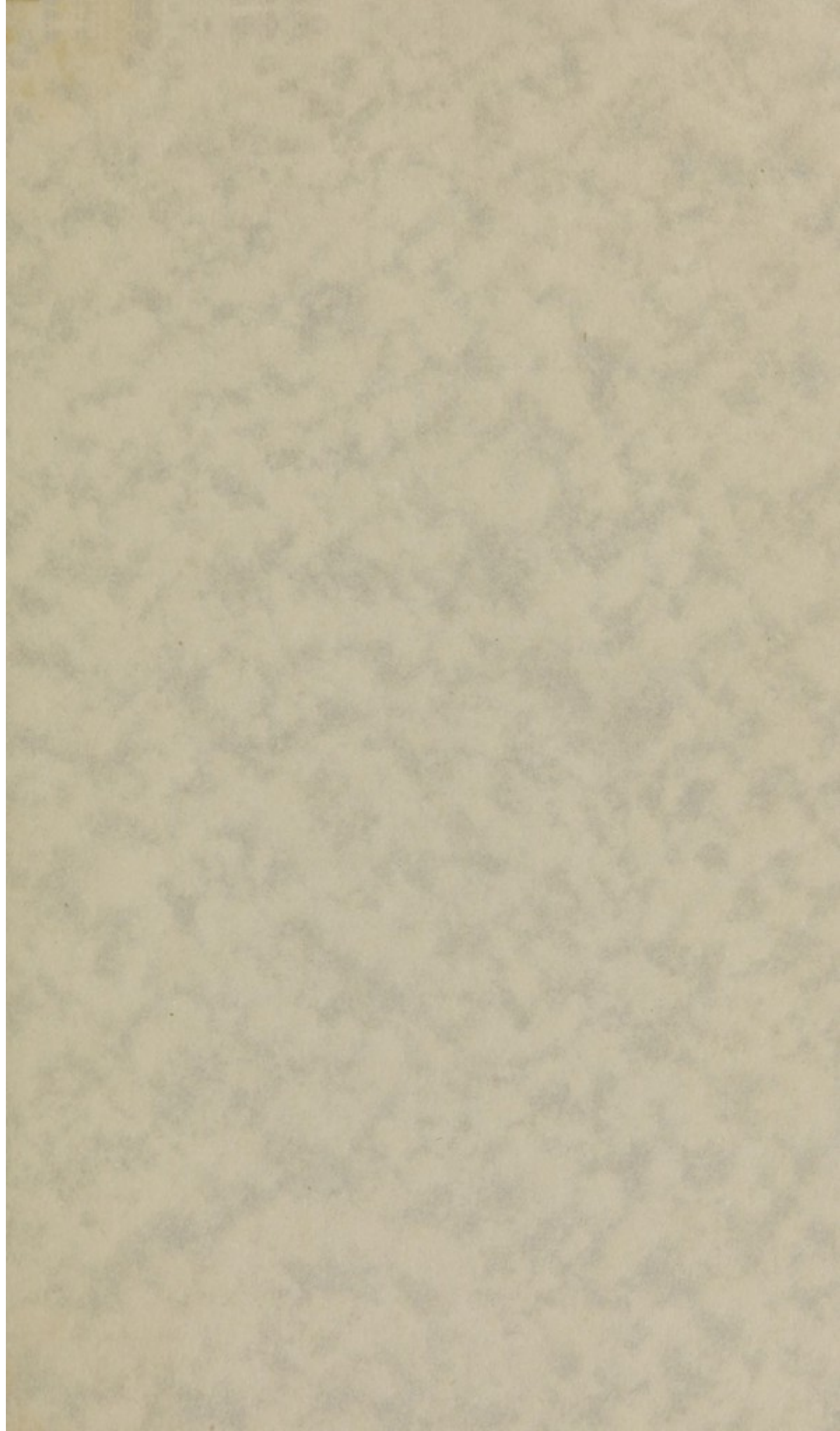


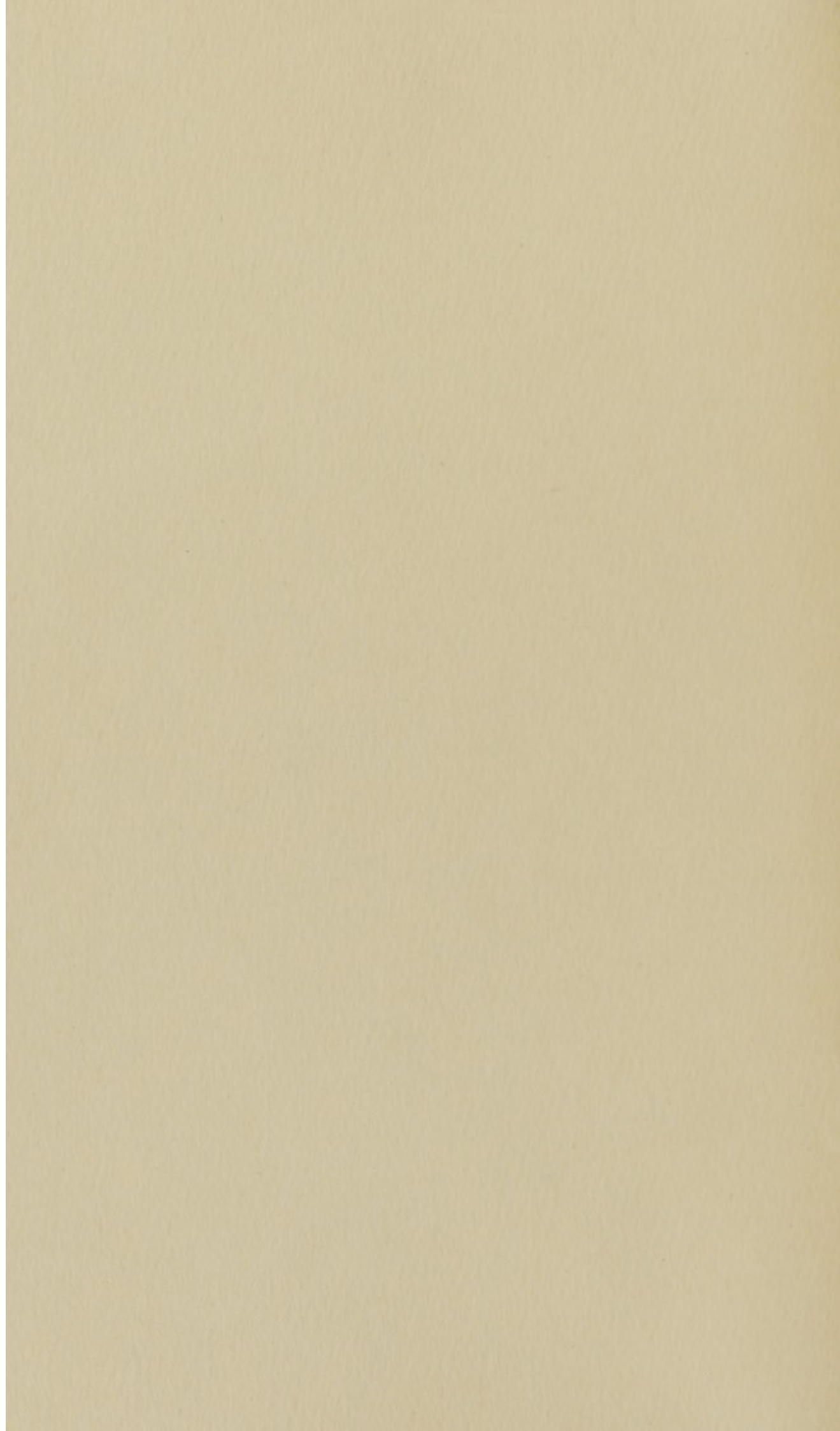
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



FOUNDED 1836

WASHINGTON, D.C.





A N
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
O N
UNIVERSAL DROPSY;
SUBMITTED TO THE EXAMINATION
O F T H E
REV^D. JOHN EWING, S. T. D. PROVOST;
T H E
TRUSTEES AND MEDICAL PROFESSORS
O F T H E
UNIVERSITY O F PENNSYLVANIA;
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MEDICINE:

ON THE TWELFTH DAY OF MAY, A. D. 1791.

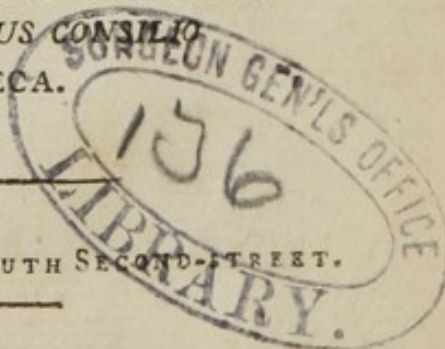
B Y E L I J A H P E R K I N S. A. B.
O F C O N N E C T I C U T,
M E M B E R O F T H E A M E R I C A N M E D I C A L S O C I E T Y,
A T P H I L A D E L P H I A.

*NIHIL EST INDAGATIONE NATURÆ MELIUS, NIHIL DULCI-
US, NIHIL MEDICO DIGNIUS.*

*RATIONE DUCE PER TOTAM VITAM EUNDUM EST:
MINIMA MAXIMAQUE EX HUIUS CONSILIO
GERENDA SUNT. SENECA.*

PRINTED BY PETER STEWART, No. 34, SOUTH SECOND-STREET.

M, DCC, XCI.



ANNUAL DISSERTATION

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

PRESENTED TO THE EXAMINATION

BY JOHN EWING, M.D.

PHYSICS AND MEDICAL PROFESSOR

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

DOCTOR OF MEDICINE

BY JOHN EWING, M.D.

PHYSICS AND MEDICAL PROFESSOR

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

THIS
DISSERTATION
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED
TO
WILLIAM SHIPPEN, M. D.
PROFESSOR OF ANATOMY AND SURGERY,
BOTH IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
AND
COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA.

Equally respected in *Europe* and
America for his universal Information
as a Man of Science,
Superior Abilities in his Profession,
Politeness of Manners,
and
Unequalled Eloquence,
Perseverance, and happy Talent of communicating his Ideas on the most
abstruse Subjects as a Lecturer.

By his much obliged,

And most affectionate

P U P I L.

DISSEMINATION

THE MOST EFFECTUAL METHOD

OF THE

WILLIAM A. B. L. & C. 1815

PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

AND

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY

OF THE

ARTS

OF THE

UNIVERSITY

OF

THE

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THE

A L S O,
T O T H E
REV^D. EZRA STILES, S. T. D. L. L. D.
PRESIDENT OF YALE COLLEGE,
IN C O N N E C T I C U T:

A Man deservedly respected
By the Friends of Virtue and Science,
For his universal Literature,
Penetrative Mind,
Consummate Piety,
Boundless Philanthropy,
Unwearied Labours in spreading and
establishing the Truths of the
Christian Religion,

By his most obedient

Humble Servant,

E. PERKINS.

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LIKEWISE,
TO
JOSEPH PERKINS, M. A.
PRACTITIONER OF MEDICINE,
IN THE
STATE OF CONNECTICUT;

Whose Abilities and extensive Practice have
justly ranked him with the most respectable
of his Profession; who, at present,
affords a pleasing Example how serene and easy the Decline of Life
can be made, by a Recollection
of his many important and
successful Services, for the
RELIEF OF THE
DISTRESSED;

By his most affectionate

Grandson,

THE AUTHOR.

WILKINSON

TO

JOSEPH PERKINS, M.D.

FRACITIONER of MEDICINE

IN THE

STATE of CONNECTICUT

Where Ability and experience have

justly ranked him with the most

able of his profession; who, at present,

affords a glowing example of how to

serve and save the lives of his

can be made by a resolution

of his party important and

deserving of notice, I have

RECEIVED OF THE

DISTRICT

of the State of Connecticut

the following

of the State of Connecticut

INTRODUCTION.

AT a period when a freedom of enquiry prevails in every department of science, and the mind is no longer passive to any particular sect or set of teachers; but presumes to think and act for itself. When medicine is no longer considered as a conjectural art, but about to emancipate from the chains of bigotry and error, and hold a ~~re~~respectable rank in the several departments of human knowledge. It has fallen upon me to write a dissertation on some medical subject, therein giving a specimen of my diligence and application; which, by the laws of this University, has become necessary to the obtaining a Doctor's degree in medicine. Had I adopted the long established custom of publishing inaugural dissertations in the Latin language, I might, in a great measure,

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have

have avoided the censure of those, who are too ready to overlook the merits, if any there be, and expose to public view the defects of every performance not sanctioned by authority, or supported by some respectable society: As there are some things advanced, in this *Thesis*, contrary to the general received opinions, and common methods of practice, I expect the shafts of criticism will not be unprepared. But the propriety, notwithstanding the many difficulties a young man has to encounter, of publishing in a living language, I think, is so evident, that it needs little or no apology.

OF
UNIVERSAL DROPSY.

BEFORE entering upon my subject, I shall mention the different genera of dropsy, as given by Dr. Wm. Cullen, in his *Synopsis Nosologiæ Methodicæ*. Tom. II.

CL. Cachexiæ.

Ord. Intumescentiæ.

Sect. Aquosæ Sive Hydropes.

In this section he has mentioned several kinds of dropsy, to which he has given different appellations derived from the parts of the body, in which the affection is principally seated.—As

A N A S A R C A.

Corporis totius vel partis ejus intumescencia mollis, inelastica.

HYDRO-

HYDROCEPHALUS.

Capitis intumescencia mollis, inelastica,
hiantibus cranii futuris.

HYDRORACHITIS.

Tumor supra vertebrae lumborum, mollis
exiguus, hiantibus vertebrae.

HYDROTHORAX.

Dyspnœa; faciei, pallor; pedum œdema-
ta; urina parca; decubitus difficilis; subita
et spontanea ex somno cum palpitatione ex-
citatio; aqua in pectore fluctuans.

ASCITES.

Abdominis intumescencia tensa, vix elasti-
ca, sed fluctuosa.

HYDROMETRA.

Hypogastrii in mulieribus paulatim cres-
cens tumor, uteri figuram referens, pressui
cedens fluctuansve; citra ischuriam et gra-
viditatem.

HYDROCELE.

Tumor scroti non dolens, paulatim cres-
cens, mollis, fluctuans, pellucidus.

Some of these genera he has subdivided
into different species, according to the dif-
ferent circumstances with which they are
combined.

In

In this differtation I fhall confider the different kinds of dropfy recited above, as one and the fame difeafe, depending upon the fame diathefis, to be cured by the fame remedies; and the different phœnomena which take place, as arifing from a difference in the feat and degree of the difeafe. If a general affection fhould be diffufed over the body, and not yeilding to general remedies, fome local caufes muft be fufpected; fuch as fchirri, polypi, ruptures of veffels, impofthumes, tumors, and other caufes of obftruction and compreffion. When the prefence of any of thefe can be afcertained, the complaint muft be confidered as local, and not depending on the general powers which give origin to an idiopathic difeafe. In thefe cafes, the cure, if it can be accomplished, muft depend upon the removal of the morbid ftate of the part firft affected, and not on thofe powers which alter the general ftate of excitement over the whole body.

Whenever this difeafe is owing to fome morbid change in the ftate, or to fome alteration of the organization of a particular part, and not depending on thofe powers which effect the general ftate of the fyftem; it is for the moft part incurable by our art,
and

and cannot be considered as an object of practice; therefore not coming within the limits of this thesis. Those, who wish a particular account of the different species of dropsy, depending on previous local affections; I refer to Dr. D. Monro, who has fully and amply treated the subject.

DEFINITION.

DR O P S Y is an increased effusion of water into the cellular membrane, or some principal cavity; thereby producing an enlargement of the whole, or a part of the body.

SYMPTOMS.

The dropsy is said most generally to attack those advanced in life; particularly the female; but this disease is not confined to any age, sex, or temperament; for it attacks all indiscriminately. In giving the history of this disease it is difficult, nay, impossible to mention a set of symptoms, which will occur in every case. Some peculiarity of constitution, or accidental circumstances, may

may cause different appearances to take place in different persons, and in the same person at different times in life.

A variety of symptoms is narrated by authors, as peculiar to this disease; but as they are equally applicable to other diseases which have debility for their cause, I shall only mention those which most commonly occur, and which I have, in several patients, observed to take place.

In this disease there is always an enlargement of the whole, or a part of the body, from a collection of water in the cellular membrane, or some principal cavity. From a communication subsisting between every part of the cellular membrane, this enlargement is much influenced by the different positions of the body. This intumescence is inelastic, and when the finger is pressed upon it, it, for a short time, retains the impression, the water gradually returning on the pressure being removed. This disease most commonly makes its appearance first in the feet and legs, which become swollen in the course of the day; the swelling disappearing in the morning, if the patient has been in an horizontal posture during the

the night. I have known it to appear in the abdomen in the form of ascites, and continue for several months, then yielding to suitable remedies, no other part of the body showing a disposition to an hydropic swelling. When it begins in the feet, as the debility increases, the swelling proceeds upward till it arrives at the chest; seldom entering that cavity, unless the primary affection, which gave rise to the general debility, was seated in that part. The prepuce and scrotum are sometimes amazingly distended, in consequence of the water descending along the processes of the peritonæum into the scrotum, and along the cellular membrane into the prepuce, the latter is many times so swelled as to obstruct the passage of the urine.

In women the labia are much enlarged, the vagina considerably elongated; when this is the case, they complain of a difficulty in passing the urine, and a bearing down of the uterus. A very frequent and difficult respiration attend this disease, arising either from a collection of water in the chest, or from the waters of the abdomen pressing against the diaphragm; thereby diminishing the cavity of the thorax, and obstructing
the

the circulation of the blood through the lungs. A cough is many times a very troublesome symptom, this proceeds from the exhalation into the bronchia being diminished, in consequence of which, a disagreeable tickling sensation is excited about the glottis.

In the advanced stages of dropsy the appetite fails, the thirst is almost unsupportable, the perspiration diminished, the skin dry, and the urine in small quantity.—These symptoms indicate great debility, particularly in the secretory and excretory vessels, destined to those particular offices, and show, that, the determination to these parts is not sufficiently supported. The appearance of the urine is very precarious, it is sometimes white and turbid, sometimes clear, but most commonly depositing a la-teritious sediment: the pulse small and frequent, often very irregular, and scarcely to be felt.

In women some of the principal symptoms, which distinguish hysteria, occasionally supervene, and the mind is very much affected, as in hypochondriasis. Livid spots appear on different parts of the body, most commonly on the extremities; if they open, a

watery liquor is discharged, frequently of an acrid nature, which corrodes the adjacent parts; to this, sphacelation soon succeeds, and puts a period to the person's life. In proportion as the abdomen and lower extremities swell, the upper extremities become emaciated: sometimes it happens that the upper extremities are swelled, when this is the case, the swelling passes from one arm to the other, seldom, both equally affected at the same time. The tympanites accompanying this disease is very justly considered as a dangerous symptom; for scarce an instance is recorded of a person, who recovered after this symptom came on.

The symptoms, which prognosticate death, are, a difficulty of breathing, so that the patient is obliged to keep an erect posture; a loss of appetite and strength; a difficult cough; an emaciation of the upper extremities; excessive thirst; scarcity of urine; small and frequent pulse, some degree of fever; livid spots on the legs, and a violent diarrhæa. When the whole, or a principal part of these symptoms supervene, death soon closes the scene.

CAUSES.

C A U S E S.

Such has been the activity of investigation in the minds of those, who have written upon this disease, that, not only a variety, but opposite causes have been assigned. By one, it is said to be caused by obstruction, for instance, of the menses, by another, to arise from an excessive evacuation of them, and the same author, who gives obstruction as a cause, a few pages farther, relates this case: A woman, forty or fifty years of age, never married, a valetudinarian for twenty years, and subject to an immoderate flux of the menses, was affected with an universal anasarca. *Monro*.—If an obstruction of the catamenia is the cause of dropsy; why does it not always observe an uniform effect? Why does not dropsy take place in asthenic mania—In epilepsy? in which diseases the catamenia seldom or never appear. Why should this obstruction produce dropsy in preference to any other disease of debility? I presume no physician at the present day, because this symptom is present, will fly to it, to account for the different phenomena which take place in every asthenic disease. This is no other than a symptom of debility,
and

and depending upon the same causes as the disease which I am now treating.

For instance, repeated salivations, by inducing debility, bring on this disease; an obstructed menstruation is produced by the same cause. After a salivation, a regular appearance of the catamenia does not take place for several months; not till the system has acquired a considerable degree of vigour. If this disease depended on obstruction, we could not expect a cure till this morbid affection was removed. But this is seldom or never the case, and it is well known, that the œdematous swellings disappear a long time before this natural and healthy discharge is again established. I will give one case in confirmation of what has been advanced.

C——— M———, a lady of about three and twenty, of a delicate habit, and whose catamenia had been obstructed for more than five months; her legs and feet much swelled, and covered with livid spots; she had a troublesome cough, and at times was a little costive. To please her more than myself, I ordered a gentle laxative. She made a free use of the several kinds of diffusible stimuli, as wine, brandy, porter and opium,

opium, as she found best to agree with her stomach. Her appetite being bad, she took but a little aliment for the first three weeks, after which, her appetite returned. She then confined herself principally to an animal diet, and that of very easy digestion; omitting the diffusible, as she found her strength to increase, and in about six weeks the œdematous swellings entirely disappeared. This plan was pursued till she perfectly recovered; though her catamenia did not return for three months from the time I first saw her.

Whether any one cause to be mentioned, is, of itself, capable of producing this, or any other idiopathic disease, is uncertain: but, that, part, or the whole of them, when combined, are adequate to this effect, I think, is incontrovertible. The causes are, cold long applied to the body; this occasions a loss of appetite, and other symptoms of debility. A case of this kind is related, by Dr. Monro, in which cold alone produced an universal anasarca. Abstinence, or such articles of diet, as are not sufficiently nutritive: these are all kinds of vegetables, particularly the different kinds of salads. To these, the lower class of people, in many countries, are much confined, and it is on this account, together

together with their other irregularities, that, there are more instances of this disease, amongst them, than persons of higher stations in life. These afford but a small quantity of matter from which chyle can be formed, consequently, a small quantity of blood; as the latter, must always be in proportion to the quantity of the former, generated in the process of digestion, provided, no impediment offers to its being taken up by the absorbents, and carried into the circulating system.

Dropsy is often the result of cold, and watery drinks, when joined to a sedentary life. Thus we have instances of this disease in some professional characters, who, fearful of the vice of intemperance, do not adhere to the passage, where it is said; "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and thine often infirmities." A large quantity of cold water taken into the body, after excessive heat or fatigue, has been known to favor the accession of this disease; not by increasing the watery parts of the blood, as it has been supposed, but, by adding a directly debilitating power to a state of indirect debility. Excesses of all kinds, such as heat, drink, watching, venery
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and the like ; large and repeated evacuations of the vital fluid, either by accident or design, greatly tend to the production of that diathesis, which gives occasion to this generical distinction. The cold bath has been the cause of dropsy more frequently than has been generally supposed, especially, if had recourse to when the body is in a state of debility. An instance of this lately happened in this city ; a gentleman, just recovering from a fit of sickness, as he was walking on one of the wharfs, by accident, fell into the water, though before recovering his health very fast, he was after this immediately seized with ascites.

Certain affections of the mind, as fear, sorrow, anxiety, grief, shame, remorse, and an indolence and inactivity, greatly contribute to the same end. *Fastidium Animi* is likewise very debilitating. It frequently succeeds diseases which have continued for a considerable time, such as intermittents, dysenteries, or those in which the antiphlogistic regimen has been too rigorously adhered to. Repeated salivations, or when they have been too long continued, are often succeeded by this complaint ; particularly, if the patient is afterwards exposed to cold and moisture.

One

One of the causes mentioned, I fear, by some, will be objected to, as it is recommended by a much celebrated author as one of the most powerful remedies in the cure of this disease.

This is the *Gold-Bath*. Dr. Cullen thus observes ; “ Cold bathing is upon many occasions the most powerful tonic we can employ ; but at the beginning of dropsy, when the debility of the system is considerable, it can hardly be attempted with safety. After however, the water of dropsies has been very fully evacuated, and the indication is to strengthen the system for preventing a relapse, cold bathing may perhaps have a place. It is, at the same time, to be admitted with caution ; and can scarcely be employed till the system has otherwise recovered a good deal of vigour. When that indeed has happened, cold bathing may be very useful in confirming and completing it.”

In this paragraph he subjoins a caution, and says, it must not be used till the system has otherwise recovered a considerable degree of vigour. In this he is certainly right, for now the system is capable of resisting its debilitating power ; but if we have recourse to
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the cold bath when any considerable degree of debility is present; what will be the event? If facts are to be relied on—an increase of all the symptoms, and ultimately death—But if opinions, which few dare controvert, are to prevail—an increased tone and strength over the whole body. What does he farther observe? At the same time he is speaking so highly of the bath, he strongly recommends a very considerable degree of exercise, and a free use of strengthening medicines. Had he omitted the last mentioned remedies, and tried the effects of the bath alone, it is probable, that the event would have furnished us with an argument not easily to be refuted.

It is generally remarked, that, after using the bath, unless it is soon followed by a glow or warmth, it does harm; for unless this takes place, and the strength of the system is able to support it, the bath serves no other purpose than to chill and cool the body, thereby diminishing the force of the circulation, and instead of promoting, diminishes the absorption and excretion of the fluids. An antient author, when speaking of the effects of the bath, observes; *Balneum atque humor omnis alienus est.* Cel. ———

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What

To what is this sense of heat owing? Is it not owing to the vital heat being abstracted from the extreme vessels, and these left in a state of torpor and inactivity, and soon after being stimulated from a return of the vital fluid into them a *tergo*, together with the warm clothes with which the body is immediately covered, and not to the stimulus of the bath; as it has been commonly supposed? This is the most probable conclusion.—From analogy, we should suppose it to be the case. If a person is exposed any length of time to a considerable degree of cold, he finds himself to be stiff and inactive; but, if he is gradually returned to a warmer temperature, and takes something warm internally, he finds, that, from a dozing and depressed state, he has become active and alert, and that, the increase of excitement has become uniform and universal.

If cold be a stimulus and heat debilitating as many would insinuate; how are we to account for the beautiful and lively green, when the gentle spring succeeds the furly winter and the ravaged vale? And how are we to account for the many insect tribes, after a temporary death, starting into life,
under

under the influence of the penetrative fun? These are questions which I thought proper to ask; but, as limits are set to this dissertation beyond which I cannot proceed, I must leave this part of the subject for the consideration of others.

From a blind attachment to former customs, and former methods of thinking, the truth is very apt to escape us. Had the author, just quoted, laid aside antient prejudice, and considered, that cold was but a negative power; that its apparent effects depended not so much on the cold itself, as on the previous state of the body to which it was applied; that cold only operated by diminishing excitement, and keeping the body within the boundaries of vigour: he would not have endeavoured to prove that cold when applied to the body, had not only several, but different and opposite effects; such as sedative, stimulant, tonic, astringent, &c. Is it to be supposed that any one power can be creative of such opposite effects? Is it agreeable to reason? Can it be explained upon any principles of philosophy whatever? If this is such an useful remedy in all diseases of debility; why does he recommend it in a disease of the highest degree of excitement? viz. Sthenic Mania.

The

The character of Dr. Cullen is such, it may be thought presumption by some, that a young man should dare to contend with so formidable a personage. Yet, however great a man's authority, or however distinguished his abilities, if he delivers things contrary to truth, we are not passively to receive them. A physician ought to be studious to examine into the legitimacy of every fact, to scrutinize with diligence every circumstance relative to his profession; and though many times he may not be able to offer any thing new or improving, it is frequently of service even to dare to doubt. If we may judge from the spirit of enquiry that now prevails; the desire of searching into the hidden recesses of nature, and investigating her secret operations; we may expect, that the period will soon arrive, when medicine will be no longer a subject of reproach, but nature's paths so clearly pointed out, that the meanest capacity may trace her through her labyrinthian course, wipe away every offending cause, and drive every enemy from her molested habitation: and that the time will come, when those diseases, which now remain the *approbria medicorum*, may be as easily cured as the most simple diseases with which we are at present acquainted. I will relate

relate several cases in which the cold bath was used, which cases I noted at the time.

P——— H———, a young man, who led a sedentary life, was, at the age of eighteen, seized with pneumonia, of which he was cured; but his physicians, not considering his former habits, adhered too closely to the antiphlogistic treatment; of course he was left very low and weak. Soon after he perceived a shortness of breath, particularly on lying down; his abdomen was somewhat swelled, though no undulation could be perceived. His shortness of breath at last became constant; his physicians gave him several cathartics, and between these the diuretics usually recommended. These they found by increasing the general debility, to increase his other complaints. They then advised the cold bath; he had used this but a few times before he was so debilitated, that, he could not walk ten rods, though before, he could walk a considerable distance without much fatigue. They then desired him to try the salt water; this he found to produce similar effects. He then dismissed his physicians, and confined himself to a free use of the diffusible and durable stimuli; he rode every day as much as his strength would permit,

permit, and in two months perfectly recovered, notwithstanding he had been troubled with this complaint for more than twelve months.

D—— T——, and J—— H——H, two boys, one two years, the other two years and six months old, had been for some weeks troubled with a lax, which had produced an emaciation of the whole body. They took a variety of medicines, but to no purpose. They were then put into the cold bath, soon after they began the use of this, their legs and feet began to swell, in one the swelling advanced as far as the abdomen. They then omitted the bath, but both died in a few days.

J—— F——, aged three years and six months, had a diarrhæa, he took many medicines, but getting no better, was put into the cold bath. After he began the use of this, he immediately grew worse, and died in about six days.

J—— S——, aged thirty, had the rheumatism, for which he tried the cold bath, but finding his feet and legs begin to swell, he omitted it; and by the use of strengthening medicines soon recovered. This patient

ent took no medicines at the time he was using the bath, purposely to ascertain its effects.

PROXIMATE CAUSE.

The true idiopathic dropfy, I shall consider as ever depending on a state of debility over the whole body, but predominant in some particular parts: though it is much contended by some that this disease may arise from different and even opposite causes. These are, an excess of irregular, or a defect of regular action, in the arterial system *. Why this action should be termed irregular, when there is an excess, and not when a defect of action, is difficult to conceive: for a deviation from the standard of health either towards a sthenic or an asthenic disease, we should suppose, must depend on hurtful powers capable of producing some general morbid state of the system; of course some irregularity in the exercise of the different functions of an animal body. As to the propriety of terms little need be said concerning it, for custom soon establishes the propriety of expressions, however inconsistent they

they might have appeared at the time they were adopted.

If the symptoms of increased action should supervene in the course of this disease; it must be considered as a mere accidental circumstance, or from the exciting hurtful powers, either through mistake or some other means, having been applied in too great a degree, and not depending on the general diathesis, which constitutes the true nature of the disease. It is a fact, I believe, which few will deny, that debility gives a predisposition to diseases of increased action, and, that powers, which in an ordinary state of health, would not have produced any very sensible alteration, if applied, when the body is in a state of debility, will produce a very considerable degree of excitement. That an antiphlogistic treatment is sometimes necessary in the cure of this disease, I readily agree; when this is the case, it must depend on foreign powers being accidentally applied, and not on the general diathesis, giving occasion to the different phenomena which take place. In such cases the disease must be considered as transferred from a disease of debility to a disease of increased action; therefore a different plan
of

of cure becomes necessary. How an increased action of the arterial system should so operate as to produce an uncommon effusion and consequent accumulation of fluid, and the absorbent system lie an idle spectator, must with difficulty be accounted for upon the general received opinions with respect to the animal œconomy.

Can so important a part of the body, as the arterial system, be affected with an high degree of excitement, and particularly their extreme branches, and their corresponding absorbents not in the least partaking of this excitement? If it be allowed that there is an increased action of the absorbents corresponding to that of the arteries; how is this to prevent absorption? Supposing this increased action to be predominant in the arteries; would this produce effusion? If the degree of tone in a muscular fibre depends on the degree of excitement, and the degree of density is always in proportion to the degree of the former; if density implies contraction, or a tendency in the constituent particles of a muscular fibre to be brought nearer each other, thereby being better enabled to resist any distending power; if this density takes place in those fibres which encircle the ex-

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treme

treme vessels, which cannot be otherwise, if there is an excess of action, and this depending on excitement. Upon these principles, we should suppose the diameters of the extreme vessels would be diminished and not enlarged, and instead of an increased, that there would be a diminished effusion, consequently no dropsy. But as hypotheses never yet led to any real or useful information, I shall dismiss this part of the subject, and proceed to give what I conceive to be the proximate cause.

The proximate cause of dropsy consists in a debility of the whole body, but greater in the exhalent arteries, or their corresponding absorbents, or both; than in any other equal parts. Thus we conclude, that those powers which act most urgently on the vascular system, are the most common in bringing on this disease. There is always a quantity of watery parts passing off from the blood by the several outlets; when this is particularly determined to the exhalents, there must be a diminution of the several secretions and excretions, so necessary to the preservation of the healthy state; consequently an accumulation and stagnation of fluids in some part of the body. Agreeable to the proximate

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mate cause now laid down, our indications of cure, are,

- I. To remove the causes.
- II. To evacuate the water.
- III. To regulate the excitement.

The fulfilling of our first indication is not always in our power, for many of the causes have ceased to act long before this disease makes its appearance, and are only known to have been present from their effects. But if any still continue to operate, they are very easily removed, when once discovered, and indeed, in fulfilling our third indication, our chief object is to remove some of the principal causes, mentioned in the preceding part, under that head.

II. To evacuate the water.

For the intention of answering this indication, a variety of means has been recommended, and though I should not expect much good from the use of some of them, it is proper to give them some notice, as they are by many, considered very effectual remedies in the cure of this disease. These are,

a. *EME-*

- a. *EMETICS.*
- b. *CATHARTICS.*
- c. *DIURETICS.*
- d. *SUDORIFICS.*
- e. *SIALAGOGUES.*
- f. *ISSUES.*
- g. *SETONS.*
- h. *SCARRIFICATIONS.*
- i. *PUNCTURES.*
- k. *BLISTERS.*

EMETICS. With respect to these, their use appears doubtful: they are known to debilitate the organs of digestion, the strength of which is necessary to the cure of this disease. Their operation is not confined to the stomach, but extended to the principal abdominal viscera, and the plentiful evacuations from these, which they occasion, must increase that debility on which this disease depends. The other effects generally ascribed to vomits, cannot in this complaint be very considerable, and the impropriety of attempting to cure a disease of debility, by debilitating remedies, is too obvious to require any

ny refutation. Whatever has been said with regard to spontaneous vomitings curing this disease, thence arguing that vomitings, produced by artificial means, might be useful, appears quite futile, as the legitimacy of facts cannot always be depended on; though a vomiting has sometimes taken place, it might have depended on a cause quite different from that, which produces vomiting, when any foreign matter is thrown into the stomach. Emetics never fail of occasioning great pain and anxiety during their operation; I have seen them given, but never could perceive any good effects from their use; and one patient I saw die during the operation of the emetic. This, I think, is sufficient to deter any man of humanity from a second trial.

CATHARTICS. Of these, it is said, if the two or three first does not have the desired effect, it is best to omit them, and I think, it would be much better, if the majority of them were omitted from the beginning; as they tend greatly to increase that debility on which the proximate cause depends. There is one which may be given, but the action of this is not confined to the intestines, for it soon shews its effects in the most remote parts of the body. This is
Mercurius

Mercurius Dulcis; it should be given in small doses and frequently repeated: when given in this manner, it opens every outlet through which an escape can be made. If we wish to bring on a salivation, it is best combined with opium. There are but few cases of dropsy, which will resist a salivation, if had recourse to early in the disease.

DIURETICS. To mention all the particular medicines, belonging to this class, would be tedious, I therefore refer to the different writers on the materia medica. The fixed vegetable alkali is one of the best, it has a much better effect when given in an infusion of wormwood or chamomile, the bitters improve its diuretic powers. Emetics and cathartics, when boiled, possess a diuretic power, and it is probable that the action of all diuretics upon the secretories of the kidneys, depend very much on the quantity of liquid taken in. The spirit, distilled from the berry of the juniper, combined with some tonic medicine, is one of the best diuretics I have yet seen employed. The *digitalis purpurea* has sometimes been of service in increasing the discharge of urine; this is said to be more useful in the hydrothorax than in any other species of dropsy, but upon what principle

ciple is not yet determined. And I imagine it is in a great measure from the difficulty of ascertaining the presence of this species of dropsy, that this medicine has obtained its credit: for, we find, it does not answer the intention, as we might expect, considering how much has been ascribed to it by Dr. Withering.

SUDORIFICS. The discharge by the skin is best promoted by stimulating drinks and warmth externally. The antimonial preparations have been recommended, but if the obstructed perspiration depends upon debility, I should suppose, that these would rather retard than promote a diaphoresis. A gentleman, not long since, gave me a case of a lady of his acquaintance in South-Carolina, aged eighteen, who was cured of a dropsy, after the usual remedies had failed, by burying her every day in the warm sand on the beach, till a profuse sweating came on. This lady had, previous to the use of this remedy, been twice tapped. The hot bath is one of the best remedies for answering this intention; the bath should be at least from 112 to 115 degrees of Fahrenheit; a person in this disease will bear a much greater degree of heat than a person in health. The patient

patient should not be continued in the bath for more than two or three minutes; after being taken out and wiped perfectly dry, he should be dressed in flannel, or put into woollen blankets; for linen, by conducting off too great a quantity of heat, is apt to become wet and cold. The bath not only cleanses and deterges the skin, but gives a general stimulus to the whole body, particularly the extreme vessels; and from the consent between the external and internal parts, there is a particular determination to the secretories of the kidneys; this is announced by the profuse discharge of urine which immediately follows the use of the bath.

J—— P——, a boy, aged two years, had been for some time troubled with a lax, which had brought on a general emaciation, he had taken some medicines, and had tried the cold bath. When I began the use of the hot bath, the child had a diarrhæa, an universal anasarca, its abdomen considerably swelled, its prepuce so distended with water it could scarce pass its urine; and that I might rightly ascertain the effects of the bath, I gave it no medicines at the time, except a few drops of laudanum at night to quiet it, for it was very restless. It had
used

used the bath but four mornings when the water was entirely evacuated. I then gave it a few restorative medicines, and directed the nurse to confine it to an animal diet. In a few weeks the child perfectly recovered, and now enjoys a good state of health. A similar case since occurred, I began the use of the bath, after which the child immediately mended, but from an insuperable prejudice in the parents, I could not prevail upon them to continue it; the child, by a suitable regimen and exercise, recovered in about two months.—

SIALAGOGUES. The most valuable of this class are the different preparations of mercury; the effects of which have been sufficiently spoken of under the head of cathartics.

With respect to *Issues, Setons, Punctures, Scarrifications, and Blisters*; if ever they are used, it ought to be with great caution, for they are very apt to be succeeded by gangrene, particularly in those advanced in life. As to the operation called paracentesis, I have omitted saying any thing with respect to its use or manner of performing it, for it belongs more properly to the practice of surgery, than to this place.

It may be observed here, that, the earlier we attempt the cure of this disease, the more probability there will be of success; for when the body has become furcharged with this particular fluid, and any of the large cavities filled with water; though we may, by any of the means now recommended, cause it to be evacuated, if the water has been suffered to remain for a long time stagnant in the body, and the parts a considerable time over-distended, and macerated in the water, it is a great chance indeed, if they ever recover their proper degree of tone, and the proper and healthy degree of excitement ever established in the system.

III. To regulate the excitement.

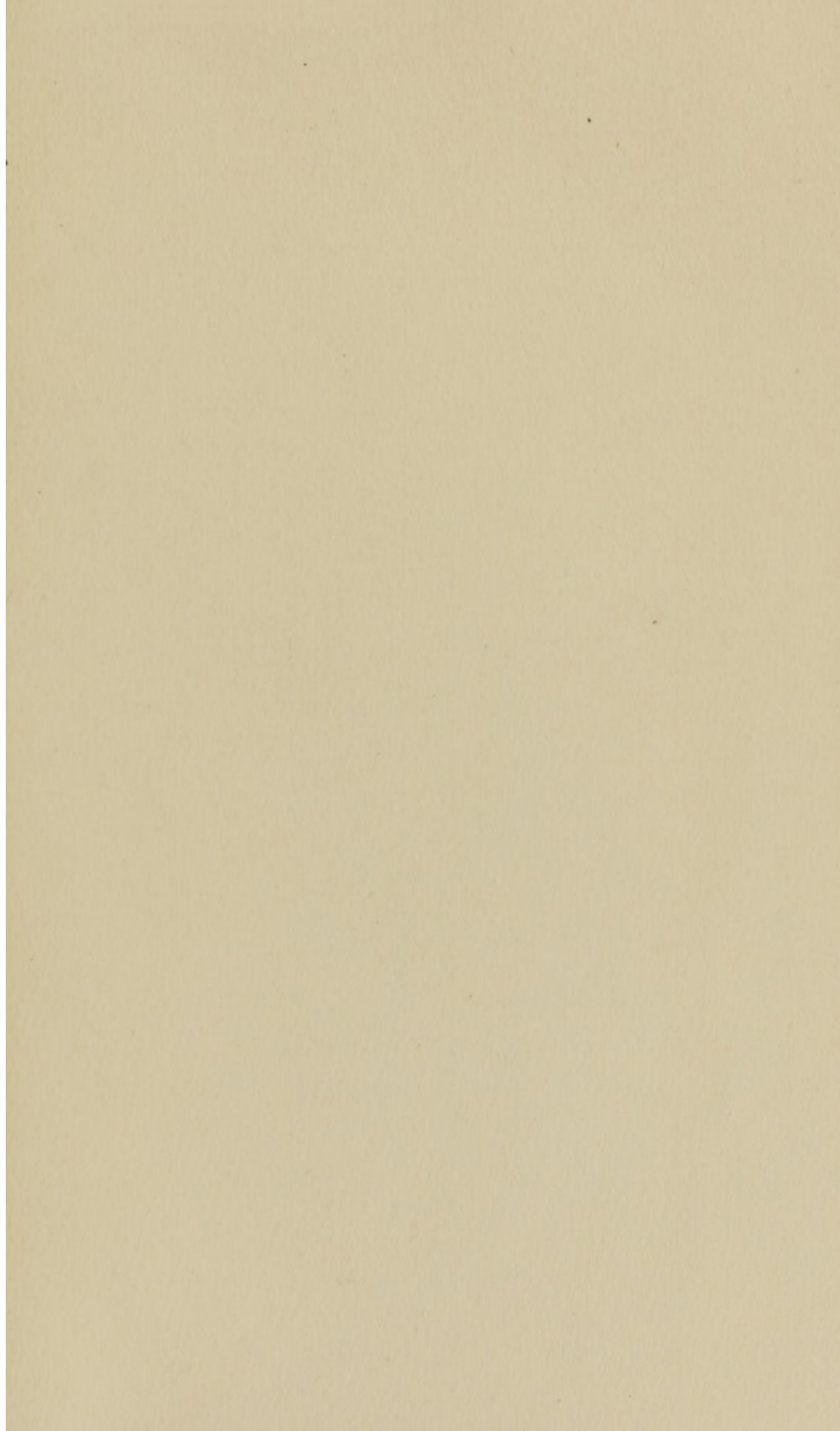
If the force of every power is in proportion to the degree of its application, or the sensibility or extent of the part to which it is applied; we should suppose our first object should be to restore the quantity of that fluid, the presence of which is so necessary to the support of tone and vigour over the whole body. But we are sometimes prevented from answering this part of our indication by the great debility of the digestive organs, and their incapability of converting the mat-
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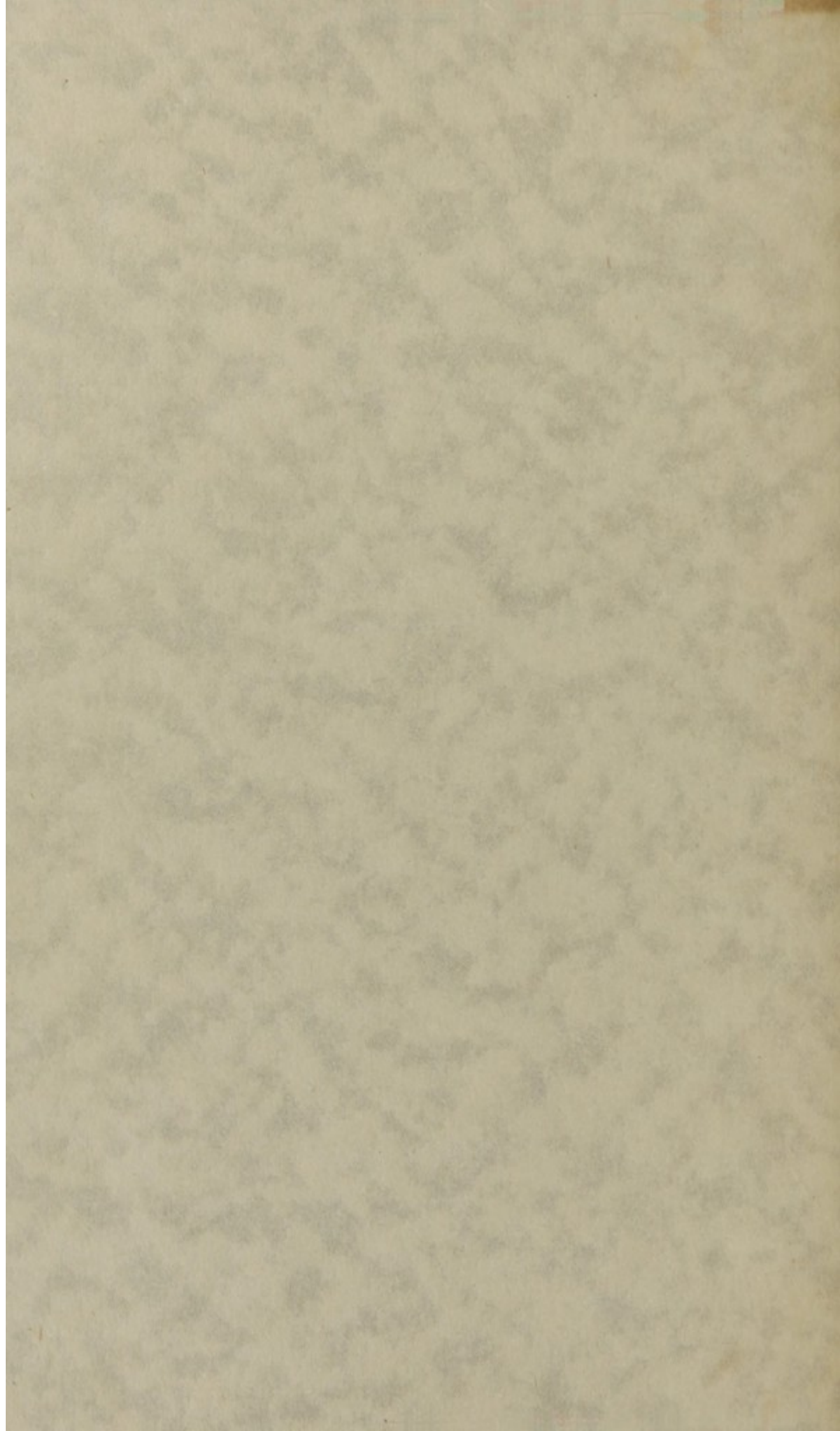
ters t^e in, into good chyle and blood, for the purposes of filling and distending the vessels. Many times the debility is so great that the matters taken in will not be retained on the stomach, when this is the case, we must have recourse to such medicines as are calculated to give a proper degree of tone to those parts, thereby enabling them to answer the purposes intended. The medicines best calculated to give strength to the digestive organs, are the whole round of diffusible stimuli, bitters, and chalybeates. When this intention is gained, the patient should confine himself to a well seasoned animal diet of easy digestion, and in as large quantities as his stomach will bear, omitting the diffusible, as he finds his strength to increase. He should be clad in flannel, use friction, and moderate exercise in the open air, as much as his strength will permit. It ought to be here remarked, that the convalescent should be gradually returned to his usual plan of life, and should never be considered as out of danger, or health completely established, till this end is accomplished.

PRINCIPAL ERRATA.

Page—line from the top,

- 9— 9 *For rerespectable, read respectable.*
11— 6— *Intumescentiæ—Intumescentiæ.*
13— 9— *yeilding.—yielding.*
16— 24— *attend—attends.*
26— 6— *a tergo—a tergo.*





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