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MEDICAL SKETCHES,

ON THE

Following Subjects;

I.—ON THE USE OF HELLEBORE, AS A REMEDY FOR INSANITY
AND OTHER DISEASES.

II.—OF *COLCHICUM AUTUMNALE*, AND ITS USE IN MEDICINE.

III.—OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUDDEN DEATH OF WOMEN IN
CHILD-BED.

BY GEORGE KERR.

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MEDICAL SKETCHES.

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BY GEORGE KILBURN.

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THESE Essays were written some time ago—that which appears last in order towards the close of last year, and the other two about the time that the composition of the Eau Medicinale D'Husson, was a subject of inquiry and discussion. The facts mentioned, from what the writer believes good authority, are certainly important—and as he has reason to think they are not generally known, he submits the Sketches to the Public ; for, in whatever manner Theory, or more properly speaking, Hypothesis, may be altered, the results of experience will ever retain their just value.

ERRATA.

To be corrected with the Pen.

- P. 10, l. 6, for ὀλευκος read ὁ λευκος.
l. 7, for καθαρηγειων read καθαρηγειων.
l. 9, for πρηγει read πρησσει.
l. 11, for Θαλαων κρηων read Θαλασσα κρησσον.
l. 12, for τεπει και υγειας read τη περ και υγειας.
11, l. 8, for νισων read νισων.
l. 12, for εισω read εισω—for πρηγει read πρησσει.
12, l. 2, from bottom, for Ælius read Ætius—idem p. 13, l. 10.
14, l. 6, for continued upon read ventured upon.
30, l. 6, for Lenis read Servis.
53, l. 4, from bottom, for εισει read εισει.
65, l. 12, for acid read acrid.

ON
THE USE OF HELLEBORE,
IN THE
CURE OF INSANITY,
AND
OTHER DISEASES.

ALTHOUGH it is unquestionably true that many improvements in the healing art have been made in modern times, it is equally true, that from the prevailing neglect of the writings of the ancient physicians, much valuable information is lost to the world, and many supposed discoveries and improvements, are merely revivals of ancient practice. It would be easy to

point out many instances, both in medicine and surgery, in which the approved and recently adopted practice of the present day exactly coincides with the ancient rules ; but the purpose of this Essay is to draw the public attention to the use of one remedy, once most successfully used, but now fallen into disuse, and even considered as a poison ; and that is, Hellebore, as applied for the cure of Insanity, and other diseases. Not only are we assured of the efficacy of this Medicine, by the most respectable medical writers of antiquity, but we find that efficacy proverbially noticed by the poets and historians of Greece and Rome, and notwithstanding the discontinuance of its use, allusions to its once highly-estimated virtues occur in the writings of the moderns. *O Caput hellebore dignum !* and *ad Corcyram !* were

familiar terms of reproach when the sentiments uttered appeared unreasonable, and were equivalent to the expression "the man is mad." Indeed, of all other remedies mentioned by the ancient physicians, *Veratrum* appears to have been the most generally used in their most obstinate cases of mania, melancholia, gout, and elephantiasis, and its manner of exhibition is presumed by Hippocrates to be so well known that he does not describe it; but shortly says, that in certain cases ελλεβριζεωχην, "recourse must be had to a course of hellebore," the frequentative verb strictly implying the repeated use of the remedy.

At what particular period this medicine was introduced into practice, we do not find in the writings of Hippocrates, who lived in the time of Artaxerxes, in the

third century before the Christian era; but the Cnidian physician Ctesias, the contemporary of Plato and Xenophon, who wrote about a century earlier, expresses himself very particularly on this subject, and warrants the supposition that the medicine was introduced into general practice about four hundred years before Christ. His words are, “ In the time of my father
 “ and grandfather, no medical practitioner
 “ administered hellebore, nor were its qualities, the manner of preparation, or
 “ proper dose known. But if any one
 “ gave hellebore, it was with this admonition to the patient, that he must necessarily be in great danger; for of those
 “ who took this medicine, many were suffocated, and few preserved; but it appears to be now given with safety.” From the time of Ctesias the medicine was in

general use among the Greek, Roman and Eastern physicians for many centuries ; yet, as in all ages medical men have in some things differed in opinion, we find Alexander Trallianus, who lived long before the time, representing it as dangerous, and recommending as a substitute in the cure of melancholy madness, the Lapis Armeniacus. The commentator on Dioscorides Matthiolus, who lived about the middle of the sixteenth century, briefly noticing the dangers apprehended from the use of this remedy, adds, “ Cæterum albi
 “ quoque Hellebori dilutum exhibuimus
 “ quibusdam Melancholicis, magno sane
 “ successu, nullo tamen ægrotantium in-
 “ commodo, nullaque cum noxa.” I may have been thus successful, he goes on to say, because the Hellebore growing in the neighbourhood of Trent, may be milder

than that raised in hotter climates ; but I have no doubt, that by the proper admixture of other remedies, the very strongest Hellebore may be safely administered. Here it may be observed in passing, that we have the very idea of the “ Eau Medicinale D’Husson,” if it be really true, that this so much boasted remedy consists of three parts tincture of white Hellebore, and one of laudanum, as Mr. Moore thinks more than probable. It is unnecessary to trace very minutely the gradations by which this medicine disappeared in medical practice. Spigelius, certainly one of the most learned physicians of the earlier part of the seventeenth century, makes no mention of it, although he wrote a treatise on gout. Morgagni mentions a case in which he believes that death was occasioned by the exhibition of three grains of the

powder ; and Chomel*, who wrote a short treatise on medical plants in the time of Louis XIV. says, that white Hellebore is used as a purgative for *horses*, but is too violent in its operation for internal use in medicine. He however adds, that an infusion in wine has been given with good effects in certain cases of mania. In our later dispensatories its external use in certain eruptions, is mentioned, but no formula is given, as far as I have observed, for its internal use.

If, then, we would know the manner of

* “ Au rapport de Tragus l’Ellebore blanc infuse vingt-quatre heures dans le vin, ou dans l’oxymel, et seche ensuit, puis donne a demi dragme, dans un verre de vin blanc, peut-etre utile a Maniaques, et a ceux qui sont sujets aux vapeurs, hypochondriaques.”

exhibition of this very powerful medicine, we must recur to the writers who assure us that they used it successfully; and these are the elder Greek physicians, for the Arabians are but their translators on this subject; and Celsus borrowed from them almost every thing valuable in his work, and would probably have given the same advice to medical students as Horace gives to young poets,—

Vos exemplaria Græca
Nocturna versate manû, versate diurna.

Hippocrates, as before mentioned, although he recommends the medicine, gives no particular directions for its exhibition; nor has Galen, his great successor, supplied the deficiency. Aretæus, of whom it may be justly said, that had not his book descended to us in a mutilated state, he

would have been the most valuable of all the Greek writers on medicine, describes the cases in which this remedy ought to be used, but descends not to the description of the manner of exhibition, as supposing it well known ; and his book, as we have it, concludes with a beautiful eulogium on its virtues. He had before frequently mentioned this medicine as the remedy of all others the most to be depended upon in gout (και γαρ τοιςι ποδαγρικοιςι ελλεβορος TO META AKOΣ) ; and in several other formidable distempers ; and he is finally describing the cure of elephantiasis, a disease, which in his time, as well as now, was with the greatest difficulty to be overcome ; and after proposing many remedies, he at length comes, as to the most powerful of all, to the exhibition of Hellebore ; recommending the

white as an emetic, the black as a purgative. Lest it should be supposed, however, that he had recommended this medicine merely as an emetic, producing no other effect beyond the evacuation of the stomach, he adds, και εστι ὀλευκον (ελλεβορον) οὐκ εμετηριον μνον, αλλα και ξυμπαύων ὁμα καθαρητηριων ὁ δυνάτωλας, καὶ τω πληθει και τη ποικιλίῃ της εκκριοῦ τοδε γαρ και χολερη πρηκει· εδε ενίασεσι και βίη τησι ἐπι τοισι ἐμέλοισι· ες τοδε γαρ ναύη και θαλάωον κρηων· αλλα δυναμι και ποιοτήτι· εἰ φαυλη τεπερ και ὑγείας της καμνονίας ποιεῖ, και ἐπ' ὀλιγῃ τη καθαροῖ και ἐπὶ σμικρῇ τη ἐνίασι.

And white Hellebore is not to be considered merely as an emetic ; but also of all other cathartics put together the most powerful, not from the quantity or variety of the matter evacuated, for this is effected by cholera ; nor by the violence of its action in producing vomiting, for sea sick-

ness is excellent in that respect ; but by its own power and excellent specific quality ; for by that it restores health to the sick, and that with but little evacuation and slight retching.

Then follows the more emphatical part of the elege in language highly poetical :
 Αἴαρ καὶ πάντων τῶν χρονίων νοσῶν ἐς ρίζαν ἰδρυ-
 μένων ἢν ἀπαυδῆσῃ ταλοῖσθα ἀκεᾶ, τοδὲ μὲνον
 ἰήηριον. Πυρὶ ἱκελὸν γὰρ ἐς δυνάμιν λευκῶ ελλε-
 βορῶ, καὶ ὅτι περπῦρ ἐργαζέσθαι ἐκκαῖον, τὰδὲ πλεον
 ελλεβορῶ εἰὼ παρεκθεῶν πρῆναι, εὐπνοίαν μὲν ἐκ
 δυσπνοίας, ἐξ ἀχρείας δὲ εὐχρυσίαν, καὶ ἀπο σκελῆς
 εὐσαρκίαν.

“ But farther, of all inveterate chronic
 “ diseases, if other remedies have failed,
 “ this only is to be depended upon for cure.
 “ For in power white Hellebore is like

“ unto fire ; and whatever the fire operates
 “ by burning out, Hellebore, by pervading
 “ every inward part, does still more effec-
 “ tually, producing free respiration where
 “ it was difficult, a healthy complexion for
 “ paleness, and the healthy fulness of body
 “ in place of emaciation.”

This passage, from the most learned me-
 dical writer of antiquity, is given at length,
 as the testimony of a man worthy of all
 credit, that the remedy was of all others
 known to him the most efficacious, and
 that it had been in his time found success-
 ful, when all other remedies had failed.

The writers who particularly mention
 the mode in which it was administered by
 the ancients, are Oribasius and Ælius, of
 the third century, and Paulus Ægineta,

supposed to be of the seventh, when the medicine had been in common use for nearly a thousand years. Of these writers Oribasius gives the fullest account, and his work is not only valuable for what it contains describing his own practice, but as a collection containing the practice and formulæ of other distinguished physicians, whose writings have not come down to our times. From Oribasius, *Ælius*, *Paulus Ægineta*, and succeeding writers copy, and it is believed that until the medicine was discontinued in practice, no improvements or even alterations were made in the manner of exhibition which he so minutely describes.

He commences his treatise on the exhibition of Hellebore, with a description from Archigenes of the manner in which

the patient is to be prepared who is about to use a remedy so powerful ; and this preparation consists in repeated evacuations by vomiting and purging after stated intervals, during twenty days, and then the use of Hellebore may be continued upon, provided the patient possesses sufficient strength of body, and firmness of mind,—that is supposing the medicine to be administered to a patient, not a maniac. Then follow many rules concerning the diet proper for those about to take Hellebore, and this ought to consist chiefly of vegetables of easy digestion, and having a tendency to move the bowels. Thereafter vomiting is to be excited by the acrid radish, as an immediate preparative for the most powerful medicine of all ;—and this, says he, will teach what is to be expected from Hellebore—for radish “ *morsus excitat quandoque*

“ animi defectiones—quandoque etiam gut-
 “ turis angustias parit.” The dose he pre-
 scribes appears very formidable—not less
 than a *pound*, nor more than a *pound and a*
half; and this to be taken after having taken
 a little food, and drank some water. There
 can be no doubt that such a dose of our
 acrid radish, in common use as a condiment,
 would excite the violent symptoms just
 mentioned; but there is some doubt with
 regard to the part of the plant to be used.
 “ Acres autem raphanas et teneros esse oportet—
 “ sique dulciores sint, caulem capere
 “ oportebit, et cum eo etiam pars foliorum,
 “ quæ tenerrima sint, et transversa.” The
 intention evidently was to produce full and
 more violent vomiting by this acrid vegetable,
 as a preparative for the still more
 violent operation of Hellebore, and although
 there appears something indistinct in the

directions for its preparation and use ; there can be no doubt that by cautious trials, the effect desired may be produced at the present day as successfully as in former times. From the writings of the same author Archigenes, rules are given for choosing the Hellebore proper for medical use. That from Mount Oeta is preferred—next that produced in Galatia, and if these cannot be obtained, the Sicilian is recommended.

The marks by which good Hellebore is to be distinguished, generally are a fair white colour, not approaching to livid, or having any dark spots, and when broken, no dust ought to appear, but a smooth and very white fracture. When taken into the mouth, it ought not to be immediately felt hot and acrid, but at first of a sweetish taste, thereafter gradually becoming more stimu-

lant, and provoking a great flow of saliva, and that frequently attended with vomiting.

The preparation of Hellebore for exhibition is thus described from Herodotus, who says, that it may be used without any considerable danger.—A pound of Hellebore is to be macerated for three days in six hemina of water, thereafter a decoction is to be made over a slow fire, till a third part of the water is evaporated, when the Hellebore is to be expressed; then we add two hemina of honey to the decoction, and again replace it over the fire, and continue the decoction until it does not adhere to whatever may be immersed—*donec non inquinet*. Of this preparation we give to those, who do not stand in need of the more violent operation of the medicine, *cochlearia duo*;

but to the robust the quantity of a quarter cyathus, *ad mystri magnitudinem*.

Here it is necessary to attend to the quantities ordered, and to reduce them as nearly as we can to the measures of the present day. The *libra* is certainly twelve ounces; the *hemina*, although frequently termed a pint, is in fact but three-fourths of the quantity, or nine ounces, or according to others *ten*; the *cochleare* is the twelfth part of the cyathus, which contained an ounce, five drachms, and two scruples; and the *mystrum* the fourth part of a cyathus, or ten scruples five grains.

Supposing then that we were at the present day to order a preparation of Hellebore, according to the above directions, the formula would stand nearly thus:

& Radicis veratri infrustulas scissi, lb i.

Aq. fontanæ - - - lb v.

Macera per dies tres—deinde leni

igne imposito et decoque ad - lb iii. ℥ iv.

Veratrum deinde exprimendum—

et addendum decocto mellis

despumati - - - lb i. ℥ viii.

et iterum decoque—*donec non inquinet* :

Capiat æger—grana septemdecem—vel si robustior sit, ad—℥ ii. gr. xi.—Hellebore in this form, says Herodotus, may be exhibited with perfect safety.

Another prescription, nearly resembling this, is given by Archigenes :

& Radicis veratri ramenta - - lb i.

Aq. fontan. sextarios tres - - lb v.

Triduo macerandum—tum co-

quendum donec tres sextarii - lb ii. ℥ iv.

relinquantur, postea diligenter expressas vergulas abjicere oportet. Tres deinde libræ mellis reliquæ addendæ, et coquendum donec ad eclegmatis consistentiam redigatur, tum in vase vitreo aut argenteo reponendum, adhibita curâ ne perspiretur.

The medicine however was frequently administered in substance ; finely cut down, the same author says that two drachms may be given for the greatest dose ; a middling dose ten *oboli*, or five scruples ; and the smallest eight *oboli*, or four scruples.

Another formula is given by Antyllus :

℞ Ramentorum radicis veratri - - 3 v.

Madescant in aquæ pluviae heminæ

atticæ semisse - - - - - 3 v.

Cola deinde trajiciendum et in duplici vase

calefaciendum, et ita propinandum.—

What is meant by *vas duplex* I do not exactly know, and never having been able to procure a copy of this author (Oribasius) in the original, I cannot say what the Greek is.

In cases of insanity, when the patient could not be prevailed upon to take any of the forms of the medicine mentioned, we are informed by Dioscorides, that it was usual to powder it finely, and mix it in the bread which hunger compelled the patient to eat, and that even thus it often proved successful.

It must however be attended to, that the ancient physicians never expected a cure by means of Hellebore, until they had used it several times, and each time so as to pro-

duce violent symptoms. The author I quote has a chapter with this title, “Qui
 “ faciendum sit quum *strangulatio* occupat
 “ eos qui Elleborum sumpserunt.” By
 “ *strangulatio*” I conceive the author
 means that suspension of respiration which
 spasms of the stomach produce, which the
 Greeks termed $\pi\nu\iota\zeta$; they also applied the
 same term to the suspension of respiration
 in violent cases of hysteria, $\pi\nu\iota\zeta$ $\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\rho\iota\kappa\eta$.
 The remedy in this case was the immediate
 evacuation of the stomach, by drinking,
 should the patient be at all able to swallow
 a weak infusion of bruised roots of Hellebore
 warmed. If the patient could no longer
 swallow, (and during completely suspended
 respiration, that is scarcely possible,) they
 irritated the fauces with feathers dipt in oil,
 and at the same time administered the most
 acrid glysters, which were said to alleviate

symptoms for a time, until other remedies
 might have effect.—Another chapter de-
 scribes what is to be done, “ubi vox et
 “ sensus amittitur.” In this case the teeth
 are to be forced asunder by small wedges,
 “cuneolis,” that the fauces may be irritated
 as before-mentioned ; the powder of Helle-
 bore, or euphorbium, is to be blown into
 the nostrils ; but if these remedies prove
 ineffectual, recourse is then to be had to an
 operation which I shall give in the author’s
 own words, lest it might be supposed that I
 were describing the vulgar operation of
 tossing in a blanket. “Si vero et vocis et
 “ sensûs privatio ita perseveret, vestimen-
 “ tum aliquod admodum firmum et robus-
 “ tum extendemus, et ex duobus partibus
 “ tenendum juvenibus robustis, et aliis
 “ qui contra sese sint constituti, ac jubebi-
 “ mus ut ipsum vestimentum sublime â

“ terra extendant, tum in eo reclinabimus
 “ hominem qui Elleborum sumpsit, quan-
 “ doque vero in latus utrumque devolve-
 “ mus, aliis id latus quod properos sit
 “ attollentibus ; aliis vero deprimentibus.”

After describing thus particularly the man-
 ner in which the patient is to be exercised,
 he very coolly adds, “ ac tunc quidem scire
 “ convenit ; nisi homo his quassationibus
 “ et commotionibus à sensûs privatione
 “ non sublevetur, eum non esse postea sen-
 “ sum recuperaturum.” A following chap-
 ter treats of the singultus and convulsion,
 which for the most part come on after a full
 dose of Hellebore. If these prove moderate,
 the physician is desired not to interfere, as
 they prove useful by agitating the stomach,
 and provoking a more perfect discharge of
 its contents ; but if they prove excessive,
 a warm infusion of such plants as are grate-

ful to the stomach is prescribed, together with sternutatory. In still more urgent cases, tight ligatures are put upon the extremities, perhaps with the view of checking convulsive motion, as we sometimes do in cases of epilepsy, and the patient is to be put into the warm-bath. It is added, that strong passions of the mind are to be excited, “adhæc pavores quosdam machi-
 “namur, et contumeliis incessimus et ut
 “magnas inspirationes edant edicimus.”—
 Another effect of Hellebore, when the stomach is no longer in danger, is yet to be guarded against, and that is hypercatharsis.
 “Nimias purgationes sistemus calidissi-
 “mum potum propinando, et extrema
 “ligando, et vehementi frictione, et vali-
 “dis Cucurbitulis tum Hypochondrio tum
 “verò dorso admotis, et vi etiam avulsis;”
 and if these prove unsuccessful, narcotics

are to be applied. It is to be observed, that the cupping here mentioned is what we term dry cupping ; for when it was the intention to draw off blood, scarifications of considerable depth were used. A medicine so powerful, after the more violent effects were over, left the patient exceedingly languid, and profuse debilitating sweats are mentioned as frequently demanding the attention of the physician. These he is to moderate by ventilation, spunging the surface with cold water, or *posca*, a kind of oxycrate ; and the patient is finally to be restored by light nourishing diet and wine.

From the above sketch we see, that however efficacious Hellebore may have been in the cure of many diseases, its exhibition must have been formidable to all concerned, the practitioner, as well as the patient

and his friends. The account given of the patient's situation, when in danger of suffocation, is shocking. " *Ingens vomendi*
 " *appetitus excitatur sed nihil excernitur,*
 " *facies intumescit, oculi exeruntur,—col-*
 " *ligantur, et constipantur partes ad respi-*
 " *rationem pertinentes, cum respirandi*
 " *summâ difficultate—nonnulli linguam*
 " *exerunt, & copioso sudore madescunt,*
 " *alii dentes concutiunt eisque mens*
 " *tentatur.*" Yet it appears that cautiously used, Hellebore has been and may still prove a very valuable remedy, without producing the violent symptoms just described, or endangering the life of the patient. In what variety of forms it was administered has been mentioned, and the doses are certainly large; yet Morgagni says, that in a case that came under his observation, three grains of the powder proved

fatal, by exciting inflammation of the stomach. I cannot help thinking that there must have been some misapprehension or mistake in this case, for in thousands of cases, far larger doses have produced not the slightest bad consequence. We all know with what timidity laudanum, calomel, and digitalis, were used not many years ago, and as they could not always cure, they were no doubt often unjustly accused of killing the patient.

When in the ancient prescriptions *ramenta veratri* are mentioned, I rather think that scrapings of the fresh root may sometimes be meant, such as we use of radish as a condiment at table, at the same time, the directions given for choosing it good, already mentioned, prove that it was frequently used in the dry state. At the

same time it is reasonable to suppose, that like other bulbous roots, it would prove most active in its fresh state. It is however to be considered, that in many countries of Europe it is not indigenous, and must, in those countries where it does not grow, be used in the dried state, as we have it in our shops. It has been said that according to Aretæus, Hellebore was anciently used in many different chronic diseases; it was, however, more especially used in cases of insanity, and even the poets bear testimony to its efficacy as well as the moral writers and historians. Horace describes a case of partial insanity, if I may use the expression, where the patient's ideas were deranged on only one subject, and that case he says was cured by Hellebore.

—————Fuit haud ignobilis Argis

Qui se credebat miros audire Tragædos,
 In vacuo lætus sessor—plausorque theatro;
 Cætera qui vitæ servavit munera recto
 More; bonus sane vicinus, amabilis hospes,
 Comis in uxorem, posset qui ignoscere, Lenis,
 Et signo læso non insanire Lagenæ,
 Posset qui Rupem, et puteum vitare patentem.
 Hic ubi cognatorum opibus, curisque reffectus
 Expulit helleboro morbum—bilemque Meraco,
 Et redit ad se: Pol me occidistis amici,
 Non servastis ait; cui sic extorta Voluptas
 Et demptus per vim mentis gratissimus Error:

A case something similar we have for many years witnessed in this place. A man, of the name of Morison, now I should suppose nearly eighty years of age, well informed for his rank in life, and in every other respect perfectly correct and sound in mind, has, for more than forty years, firmly

believed that a certain non-descript diabolical tormentor had and has power over him by means of a loadstone. He believes that this tormentor can stop him from the performance of the common actions of life, render it impossible for him to handle a knife, fork, or spoon, at table; arrest his progress in walking; stop his watch, or deprive his violin of all sound in a moment.

When I first knew him, he had about a thousand pounds, which he had acquired in the service of a gentleman abroad, but he would not trust it out at interest, nor in any bank, as he said he was sure the tormentor would abstract it. He kept it in a little iron chest, secured, as he thought, by crucifixes (for he is a Roman Catholic);

it consequently rapidly diminished, and he now subsists upon charity. Whether in a case such as this, Hellebore could have been serviceable, I do not know ; but we have reason to think that in former times it was tried in cases not dissimilar.

Three parts of the tincture of white Hellebore and one part of laudanum, the tincture being prepared with white wine, was supposed by Mr. Moore to be the *Eau Medicinale D'Husson*, nearly resembling it in its sensible qualities and effects. On the other hand, as was mentioned formerly, Mr. Want believes the *Colchicum Autumnale* to furnish the active ingredient in that celebrated medicine. A spirituous tincture is kept in the shops, which I have often prescribed in gouty affections, and often

used myself for rheumatism, and always with some relief. The dose is from one to two drachms ; but I cannot say that I have ever known it produce the strong effects ascribed to the Eau Medicinale, or any symptoms similar to those described by Oribasius. That both the Colchicum and Veratrum are most powerful remedies, is not to be questioned, and should they again come into general use, more convenient formulæ will no doubt be contrived.

The botanical description of plants not growing in this country, is not so interesting ; but it may be proper to say, that the Veratrum is of the Class III. *Polygynia*, Order I. *Monoecia*. No calyx ; corolla six petalled, stamina *six*, pistils *three*,

capsules *three*, with many seeds. It is a native of Asia Minor, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria; flowers from June to August, and is found to be most powerful in warm climates.

OF
COLCHICUM AUTUMNALE,

AND ITS USE IN

MEDICINE.

AT the present day, when Colchicum is again coming into use, as an approved remedy for gout, it may contribute towards its more general and ready reception, to shew that it was prescribed for this disease, and very successfully in former ages, and with many other valuable medicines, fell into disuse, as trifling novelties prevailed. Many of our most efficacious articles of the *Materia Medica*, indiscreetly used, are virulent poisons, and, indeed, of the vegetable kingdom, we have scarcely a simple that may be depended upon as a remedy,

that is not dangerous when improperly used.

That Colchicum was classed among poisonous plants by the ancient Greek and Roman physicians is certain—but Hellebore, hyoscyamus, and digitalis, with many others, of much efficacy, were placed in the same class; although, by attention to proper cautions, they were safely, and advantageously administered. The descriptions of antidotes, ordered when Colchicum had inadvertently been eaten in the field, are connected in the writings of the older medical authors, with an account of the symptoms produced by the poison, and these symptoms appear from the account given by Nicander, to have been violent in the highest degree; but yet this poison, by proper management, became a valuable and

effectual remedy, for one of the most distressing maladies to which the human body is liable. The effects of Colchicum are very particularly described by Paulus Ægineta and others; but about the year 1260, a small treatise was written in Greek, by Demetrius Papagomenus, at the command, as he informs us, of the Emperor Michael Paleologus, in which he recommends Hermodactylus (Colchicum) as the remedy to be relied upon in preference to all others, when we may suppose that experience had fully sanctioned its use, and established its reputation.

This little work appears to possess much merit in the practical part, and owing to some extraordinary causes, not well explained, has been unjustly neglected. In the year 1558, it was published, with the

author's name; a very fair translation into Latin, being annexed by a physician of Paris, whose name is not given. The editor, who designs himself by the initials A. B., says, that the work was highly approved by the most eminent physicians—that he had it translated by one of the wisest and most learned men of the day—
 πρὸς τινος σοφίστα καὶ λογιώτατος ἀνδρὸς τῶν κατ’
 ἡμᾶς διαπρεπούς—and it was beautifully printed by Morelius. Yet, when nine years afterwards, Henry Stephens was about his great work, the “*Artis Medicæ principes, post Hippocratem et Galenum*,” a work in which he frequently amends the errors of the Greek editions, he indeed inserts the Tract as the work of an unknown author, but gives a miserable translation, by an ecclesiastic, *Marcus Musurus*, who apologizes for having translated a work of

no value. He calls the author, “infans et
 “elinguis, ut qui ne sciret si quid vel arte
 “didicisset, vel usu compertum habuisset,
 “exprimere,” and declares that he undertook the translation at the request of Lascari. That a priest should be very ill qualified, as a translator of Greek medical writers, may well be conceived; but it is surprising, that an accomplished scholar, such as Henry Stephens, should have given a place in his valuable work to a vile mis-translation, when the original, with a very good version, had been published in Paris only nine years before. The merit of the original appears, however, to have been estimated by this faulty translation; and *Friend*, while he admits that the author is not quite so contemptible as the translator would represent him, adds, that he is of very inferior merit, producing

nothing new, and copying for the most part from *Alexander*. The author does not pretend to bring forward novelties; at the same time I know of no author extant in Dr. Friend's time, who gives the same account of the origin of the disease, the prophylaxis, or the cure. In one place he mentions Alexander; but his quotations are chiefly from Hippocrates and Galen, and with their writings he appears to have been so familiar, that in giving their words, he did not consult their books, for after a quotation from Hippocrates, he goes on, *καὶ πάλιν ὁ αὐτὸς φησι*. “*And again the same author says*”—and then gives the words not of Hippocrates but Galen, an error that will not lower him in the esteem of those who see that it is a mere oversight, and in fact a proof of his learning, for had he been less familiar with the

language and sentiments of these authors, he would not have ventured to quote from memory, which he has done very accurately, the mistake of the name excepted.

The medicine so much depended upon by Demetrius, he calls *Hermodactylus*, and a question has been agitated whether *Hermodactylus* and *Colchicum* be indeed the same plant—the same with the *meadow saffron* of England; Matthiölus and Murray say that they are altogether dissimilar, but the evidence that they are really the same, much predominates. In the first place, Dioscorides particularly describes *Colchicum*, giving the very same distinguishing marks as Withering does of English meadow saffron, which is without doubt the *Colchicum Autumnale*. Then Serapion describing *Hermodactylus*, gives the very

words in which Dioscorides describes Colchicum, and among the Arabian physicians, the plant is generally called by that name. In England, till very lately, meadow saffron was known by the same appellation ; and in an English translation of Wirtzung's *Praxis Medicinæ Universalis*, printed in the time of Queen Elizabeth, we have the following passage : “ *Hermodactyles*, in “ Greek Colchicum, in Latin *Ephemerum* “ *deleterium*. Bulbus agrestis—of the her- “ banists Canineca, panis Ciconiæ, and bul- “ bus caninus. Our common Hermodactyles “ is the Hermodactyle root, and true Col- “ chicum which Galen calleth Ephemerum “ deleterium : Avicenna, Serapio, and other “ Arabian physicians do affirme the same, and “ it availeth nought, that some will distinguish “ the Colchicum of the Greeks from the Her- “ modactylus of the Arabians : their false

“ and erroneous opinions are easily with-
 “ stoode, for you neede but only compare the
 “ Chapter of Hermodactyles of Serapio, with
 “ the Chapter of Colchicum of Dioscorides,
 “ then you shall evidently see that it is
 “ one and the same roote.” This passage
 occurs in the Index of the work, and it
 may be questioned whether it apply to
 England; but in one of our oldest English
 Herbals, under the head Saffron, several
 species of meadow saffron are mentioned,
 and applicable to the same plant, immediate-
 ly follows. “ Meadow saffron is hot and
 “ dry; the roots of Hermodactyls purge
 “ and helpe the goute, and hurt the stomach;
 “ stamped and mixed with the whites of
 “ eggs, barley meal, and crumbs of bread,
 “ and applied as a plaster, they help the
 “ gout and swelling aches of the joints.
 “ Hermodactyls of the shops, are corrected

“ with the powder of ginger, long pepper,
 “ anise or cummin seeds, and a little mas-
 “ tick ; those of the meadows with cowes
 “ milk.” This plant is said to be found in
 Cambridgeshire and other counties of Eng-
 land, and as the description of meadow
 saffron given by Dr. Withering, exactly
 agrees with that of the *Colchicum* of Dios-
 corides, and *Hermodactylus* of Serapion, and
 other writers, there appears no reason to
 believe that the descriptions do not
 apply to one and the same plant. What
 Paulus Ægineta says of the effects of
Hermodactylus when prescribed for gout,
 agrees very exactly with the reported
 effects of the *Eau Medicinale*, of which
Colchicum is thought to be the chief ingre-
 dient. “ Some,” says he, “ during the
 “ paroxysms of gout, use *Hermodactylus*
 “ as a cathartic ; but it is to be attended

“ to, that Hermodactylus injures the
 “ stomach, creating anxiety and loss of
 “ appetite. It should therefore be used by
 “ those only who are engaged in business
 “ that cannot be deferred, for it speedily,
 “ and for the most part within two days,
 “ removes the symptoms. I also knew a
 “ man who prescribed Hermodactylus not
 “ according to the usual forms, and in
 “ substance, but he boiled the plant with
 “ anise or parsley, and gave the decoction
 “ to be drank ; and it is astonishing how
 “ the patients are relieved by the discharge
 “ from the bowels.”

De Lobel says, that *Colchicum strangula-*
torium is termed *wilde saffron*, or *meadow*
saffron ; and Clusius refers to his account
 of *Colchicum* for the description of Hermo-

dactylus*. From these authorities, it would seem probable, that the Hermodactylus of Paulus and Demetrius, is really the Colchicum, the meadow saffron; but Colchicum is the most ancient name, and it appears that several species were called Hermodactyls, so that some confusion might naturally arise, and writers might call different plants by the name of Hermo-

* Chomel, who wrote about the beginning of the last century, under the word "*Hermodacte*," says that it is the Greek Colchicum, although different opinions have been entertained concerning it; that it purges easily the humours that create pains of the joints, and is ordered successfully in gout, sciatica, and rheumatism.—That it is an ingredient in the arthritic powder of Paracelsus—the panchimagogue of Quercetan—and pills of Mesue.

dactylus. Those who deny the identity of Colchicum and Hermodactylus, allege that the last is used in many parts of the East as an esculent vegetable without the smallest inconvenience ; but it is to be attended to, that the root, at one season of the year altogether mild, and of no disagreeable flavour, becomes afterwards so acrid, that it has been called εφημερον, from its destroying life in one day ; occasioning, according to Nicander, symptoms of extreme violence ; and at all times it is rendered by the use of fire altogether innoxious.

Demetrius says, that having been directed by the Emperor, of whose talents he speaks very highly, to write upon the subject of Gout, and describe the proper means by diet, medicine, and external applications,

of guarding against the disease, or removing it after it had actually come on ; he proceeds in obedience to his commands, to execute the task, although many ancient and eminent physicians had written excellent treatises upon the same subject. And this, he says, he was the more inclined to do, because although diseases may be generally described, there is an unbounded variety of constitutions, climates, and external circumstances—according to the diction of Hippocrates, “*Naturæ a naturis*” “*multùm differunt, et a locis, loca.*” He proceeds to state the causes of the disease, observing, that he who well understands these, will be most successful in his attempt to cure.

“Nature,” he says, “being devoid of rea-

“ son, yet acts conformably to its rules*; and
 “ men eating, and from food receiving nourish-
 “ ment, it follows that after digestion, what-
 “ ever part of the food is fit for the pur-
 “ pose of nutrition and assimilation to the
 “ body, should to that use be applied, and
 “ whatever is useless should pass off as ex-
 “ crement; and nature thus operates in
 “ the secretion of the liver, the veins, and
 “ arteries, and all other parts.”

And first, excrementitious matter is sepa-
 rated from what affords nourishment to the
 body, through the whole course of the
 intestines, even to the rectum. The liver,
 according to Galen, produces two several
 secretions, and yet not entirely dissimilar;
 of which one proceeds from the gall blad-

* Η φύσις αλογῶ ἔσα, ἵα καὶ αὐτὴ λογὸν ποιεῖ.

der, the other from the spleen ; standing in the same relation to each other as the *flower* of wine, and its dregs*. The yellow bile

* *Ανθος οινος*—*καὶ ἰσχυρὸν*.—What is here meant by the “flower of wine,” I do not perfectly understand. Sir Kenelm Digby says, “The wine merchants observe in this country (and every where else) there is wine, that during the season the vines are in flower, the wine which is in the cellar makes a kind of fermentation, and pusheth forth a white lee upon the surface of the wine (which I think they call the *mother* of the wine), which continueth in a kind of disorder, until the flowers of the vines be fallen, and then this agitation being ceased, all the wine returns to the same state it was in before.” Supposing this periodical appearance on the surface of the wine really to take place, the analogy would be very incomplete between that and the constant secretion taking place at all times of bile. Perhaps, however, the *ανθος οινος*—is referrible to the fermentation of the liquor, before the additions are made, that render it fit for use.

descending into the intestines, resembling in some measure the *flos vini*; while that supplied to the stomach is black bile, of an irritating quality, which Galen says is provided by nature to excite appetite for food. The excrementitious matter from the veins and arteries, is to be considered as the whey of curdled milk, separated by the kidneys, and transmitted to the urinary bladder. Sweat is the most refined of the sensible secretions; and some called *fuliginous*, on account of their subtle nature, entirely elude our sight.

According to Demetrius, gout and rheumatism proceed from disordered digestion, a redundancy of bile, and consequent corruption of the blood, and as the disease attacks different parts of the body, he says it is called "Ischias, podagra, arthritis, or

“ odontagra.” Whatever we may think of his theory, we must admit that it leads to the most effectual practice, for the free discharge of bile never fails to relieve the pain to a certain degree, and sometimes removes it entirely; indeed after the disease has continued for some time, cathartics alone can be depended upon for its cure, attending at the same time to proper regimen. Blood letting, he says, may be useful during a first attack, but not in chronic cases; and even in the most dangerous cases, when the brain, the liver, or the heart itself is affected, he relies upon powerful cathartics for the speediest and most effectual relief. He recommends early and steady efforts for the cure of the disease, as after some time it becomes so rooted in the constitution, that according to some, it becomes hereditary; and when not heredi-

tary, he observes, that it arises from some excess, or error in regimen; introducing one meal into the stomach before that previously taken is digested—excessive use of wine, and venery, and want of exercise or over-fatigue.

His prophylaxis accords with his opinion of the cause of the disease, and this he says is very easily enjoined by the physician, but most difficult to be observed by the patient. The rule is by all means to avoid indigestion, and to eat and drink no more than the stomach easily bears, for the words of Hippocrates are true, “the
 “man who eats and drinks little will
 “suffer from no disease.” Εἰ ὀλίγα ἐσθίει
 καὶ ὀλίγα πίνει ὁ ἀνδρῶπις, καὶ οὐδὲν νοῦσον
 ὑπάγει. He adds, from the same author,
 an injunction, that moderation should

be used in food, drink, labour, sleep, and venery. Σίλα, πόλα, κοποι ὕπνοι αφροδισια συμμείρα, and seems to approach very nearly to the precepts of the Pythagorean regimen. *Evacuation*, according to Hippocrates, is the natural cure of whatever diseases are occasioned by *Repletion**; and as the stomach first suffers by excess, Demetrius recommends as the first remedy to be tried, its evacuation by emetics. He gives the rules laid down by Hippocrates concerning the diet to be used, before the exhibition of emetics, but prescribes no particular medicine for the purpose of producing vomiting, directing the patient to fill the stomach with certain roots, and *fat flesh not perfectly*

* Ὅσα γὰρ πλεσμονὴ τικτεῖ, κενωσις ἴηται.

chewed, and drink abundantly of sweet wine; and when the patient has thus eat and drank what he can, he is to wait twenty minutes, then to drink warm water (from honey, μέλα μελίτος) and inserting the finger, or a feather into the throat, he is to excite vomiting; and drinking again of warm water, is to repeat the operation till the water is returned pure. This practice to us appears very disgusting; but he subjoins the rules of Hippocrates and Alexander Trallianus, which are very nearly the same; and the quotation from the latter deserves particular notice, because there is reason to suspect an essential error in the Greek text, which materially affects the sense. The passage is this: ἔπειτα ἐν φαινοίλοισι δι' ἐμέων κενῶσαι τοὺς λυποῦντας χυμούς, φευγεῖσι χρῆσθαι φαρμακοῖς ἐμέλῃς δυναμένος κινῆσαι. The Parisian translator renders it thus:

“ Si igitur tibi apparet noxios humores vo-
 “ mitu purgandos esse cave aliâ utaris me-
 “ decinâ, si vomitum ciere possis.” This
 translation appears faulty, because there
 is no word in the Greek to warrant the in-
 troduction of the word “ alia,” as con-
 nected with “ Medicina”—nor the “ si”
 as connected with the words “ potes con-
 citare vomitum.” Alexander, in my opi-
 nion, intended to say, that if the evacua-
 tion of the stomach should appear neces-
 sary, he would advise that the end should
 be obtained, without having recourse to
 drugs ; for he adds, that diluted wine will
 effectually answer the purpose ; and if in
 place of *δυναμενος* we read *δυναμενοίς*, the
 sense is complete, and perfectly agrees
 with the context. The translation would
 then run thus : “ Si igitur tibi apparet
 “ noxios humores vomitu purgandos esse

“cave medicinis uteris emeticis. Facile
 “autem innatabunt et rejicientur redundan-
 “tia, si large et sæpius *vino diluto utaris.*”

The ecclesiastic Musurus, translating the word *εὐχεράιον* *temperatum*, in place of *vinum dilutum*, makes nonsense of the whole, being ignorant of the medical import of the word.

Demetrius next proceeds to recommend the use of purgatives, moderate and simple, to be administered, if possible, once a month, to those who are threatened with gout, and gives the following formula, in *parts*, which in definite quantities may be thus expressed :

R Aloes 3 i.

Hermodactyli 3 ss.

Cinnamoni 3 i. ss.

Scammoniae gr. x.

Ex iis fiant pillulæ denturque pro viribus,
materiæ copia, &c.

In the original thus :

Αλοης μερ^ϥ ἓν, ἑρμωδακτύλῃ S'' (ἡμισυ) μερ^ϥ. Γλυ-
κανισ^ϥ ἢ κινναμων^ϥ δια το κακοσομαχον τ^ϥ ἑρμω-
δακτύλῃ μερ^ϥ και ἐξ αὐτ^ϥ S'' (ἡμισυ) σκαμμονιας
καλλιστης μερ^ϥ ἕκλον· Γενεθωσαν ταύτα κοκκία,
και διδόσωσαν καλά την δυναμιν, και καλά το ποσον
της ὕλης—κ. τ. λ.

In this prescription we have no account
of the exact preparation of each of the in-
gredients, nor of the medium to be used in
forming them into pills, most probably the
dry root of the hermodactylus was pow-
dered, and some simple addition made to

the aloes, that the whole might be formed into a ductile mass. It is evident that small doses were first to be tried, and increased according to circumstances.

The remedies already mentioned are adapted to the first attacks of the disease, when the stomach and *primæ viæ* only, are affected ; when the disease has become constitutional, purgative medicines are absolutely necessary, and blood-letting can be of no service. The author recommends the use of whey, complete abstinence from wine, but at the same time a moderately nourishing diet. Of cathartics he gives the decided preference to *hermodactylus*, which from his own proper experience, he says, he had found of the greatest service, and the preparation he thus describes :

℞ Hermodactyli	℥ i.
Cumini	}	ā ā ℥ vi.
Pyrethri		
Aristolochiæ		
Agarici		
Sii		
Zedoariæ	} ℥ vi.
Alypiadis		
Mastiches		
Stachyos		
Gentianæ		
Galangæ	}	ā ā ℥ ii.
Moschi		

Dantur scriptula quatuor ex mulsa et scammonia pro purgationis instituto.

If the fluxion (ὁ ρευματισμὸς) frequently recurs from mere bile, with obscure fever, the following formula is recommended :

℞ Hermodactyli ℥ i.

Glycanisi (Sextulas tres) ̑ xii.

Floris Cinnamoni . . ̑ viii.

Senæ (Sextulas quatuor) ̑ xvi.

Mannæ ̑ i.

Arida scite contundito et macerato deinde paulum cum Scammonia ferve facito, et pro voto et viribus cujusque bibendum dato.

With regard to the first of these two prescriptions, viz. for the pills, the author says, that the composition ought to be prepared two, or at least one month, before it is used; that the powers of the several ingredients may be properly blended and rendered one: *χρη δε την τοιαύτην αν̑ιδόλον εχειν εσκευασμενην προ μηνων δυο η το ελατ̑ον ενος, οπως η των ειδων φυσις και δυναμις ως μια και εν σωμα γενησείαι.*—This may be a very proper rule, but neither of the prescriptions are sufficiently exact to enable an apothecary

to make them up with the certainty that the medicines shall be in every respect those of Demetrius. Are the materials of the first to be merely pounded and mixed, or to be formed into a mass? With regard to the second, in what fluid are the component parts to be macerated, in what quantity, or how is the medicine to be boiled with scammony? Perhaps the word *macerato* would be better rendered *mafacito*, for the Greek is ἀποβρεξας, which would rather imply simple moistening; but still the mode of preparation is left in obscurity, and we merely have the enumeration of active ingredients.

Another formula for the preparation of pills, he gives as follows:

℞ Hermodactyli (Sextulam unam) ℥ iv.

Aloes (Sextulæ dimidium) . .	ῥ ii.
Mastiches (Sex. tres partes) . .	ῥ iii.
Croci	g. iii.
Floris Cinnamoni	ῥ iv.

Et δακρυδία Scammoniae pro magnitudine fluxionis et viribus ægri. Facito pillulas et dato.—Paris Translation.

In this direction I suspect another mistranslation. The words in the original are δακρυδία πρὸς τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς, καὶ τὰ νοσήσας, which cannot apply to the disease, “magnitude fluxionis,” but simply mean that scammony is to be added to the ingredients according to its quality, and the strength of the patient.

The Ecclesiastic enumerates the several ingredients, and finding that δακρυ signifies a tear, concludes the prescription thus:—

Croci gr. iii.

Floris Cinnamoni ℥ iii.

Lacrimulæ, pro magnitudine, &c.

Facies grana et pro tolerantia ipsius ægroti dabis.

After these prescriptions the author proceeds to justify the use of cathartics in this disease, against some who condemned the practice, at the same time again repeating, that by temperance the necessity for such remedies is done away. The last part of the treatise relates to the use of external remedies, and the author approves of such as produce moisture on the skin of the part affected, if the disease be yet recent, as a cabbage-leaf; but if the proper use has been made of cathartics, and the disease is of longer standing, repellents may be safely used, as *Solanum Hyoscyam*.

mus, &c. or even cold water. Η και αυτο το
 υδωρ ψυχρον επιβιθεμενον μελα πανις η ομαλων.

Throughout the little tract, *Hermodactylus* is mentioned as the most active ingredient of all the prescriptions, and the dose is left to the discretion of the practitioner, who is to consider the strength of the patient, and other circumstances, before he proceed to the exhibition of a remedy so powerful. The preparations used are however left very indefinite: and as it is agreed that the plant is most acid in summer, and loses much of its activity on being dried, we may infer that when accidentally eaten in the fields, the effects must be much more violent, than the same quantity officinally prepared would produce. It is well known, that fresh garlic bruised and applied to parts affected with

gout, affords very considerable relief, by blistering the skin, and Petrus Hispanus informs us, that Hermodactylus thus used, occasions violent pain, as if the part had been burned, but very powerfully relieves.

In later times Hermodactylus retained its credit as an effectual remedy for gout. Sennertus mentions it with approbation, very closely adhering to Paulus Ægineta in describing its effects; and Fernelius, the most eminent physician of his time, says, “ Hermodactylus pituitam crassam ex artibus trahit et expurgat, podagræ et arthritidi confert tum sumptus, tum admotus in Cataplasmate;” but he adds, that it ought to be combined with other remedies, to give it full effect.

The German author already quoted, Wirtzung, gives very ample directions for its exhibition, and fully makes up for the omissions of Demetrius. The following passages are from a translation of his work published in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

“ In summer the matter (i. e. gout) is
 “ thus to be handled, the patient is to be
 “ purged with that which ensueth:—Take
 “ agaricus one dragme, sugar one ounce,
 “ Hermodactils one dragme and a half,
 “ water of field cypers three ounces, make
 “ the water warme, and steep the rest four
 “ and twenty hours in it; afterwards wring
 “ it hard out and drink it warme in the
 “ morning, and then fast six hours upon
 “ it.

“ In harvest is the patient to take every

“ fortnight one dragme of these pills fol-
 “ lowing:—Take aloes two ounces, agaricus
 “ and Hermodactyls of each one quarter of
 “ an ounce, coloquinte one dragme and a
 “ half, ginger, cinnamon, asarabacca, cloves
 “ and mace, of each one scruple; turbith
 “ and epithymus of each one dragme,
 “ saffron one scruple—stamp each alone;
 “ afterwards temper them together, and
 “ poure sufficient field cypers water upon it,
 “ and then set it out to drie in the sun;
 “ lastly, pour more of the same water upon
 “ it, and let it dry again, to the end you
 “ may fashion pills of it.”

In cases of sciatica (for that he considers
 as a species of gout) he recommends the
 external use of Hermodactylus, and directs
 pills to be prepared as follows:—

Turpentine, half an ounce.

Field cypers, two dragmes.

Hermodactylus, one dragme.

Make of a dragme six pills, and take one every night and morning.

But although Wirtzung strongly recommends this remedy as effectual in gout, his translator, Mose, entirely condemns it. “ Dioscorides and Serapio,” says he, “ affirm their Colchicum and Hermodactylus “ to be a poyson, and commaund that it be “ in no wyse used or eaten; and although “ Serapio do saie that the Hermodactyles “ be good for the gowte and other jointe “ diseases; yet he addeth, that if one use “ too much of them, that thereby the “ muscles and the stomach are marvellously “ weakened, but then he speaketh of the “ root of the white Hermodactyls, and sup-

“ poseth that they which are red and
 “ blacke should absolutely kill one. See-
 “ ing then they are so dangerous, these
 “ rootes ought not to be tolerated at the
 “ apothecary’s, and much lesse to be used
 “ inwardly. Whereas then we know suffi-
 “ ciently that our Colchicum or Hermo-
 “ dactylus is so venomous, therefore must
 “ they needes lie extreamly, that bragge
 “ that they can cure all joynt diseases with
 “ it. For it is most true that they that
 “ use these Hermodactyles for the goute,
 “ whether it be in pilles, potions, or any
 “ other way, waxe worse and worse everie
 “ daye, and at last are constrained to die
 “ an untimely death, as hath been seen in
 “ divers men, notwithstanding that learned
 “ men have warned them that use such
 “ dogged medycynes: but no man will be
 “ taught of another, which is the only.

“ cause that we will not leave our owne
 “ opinions and errors, which thing doth not
 “ only bereave many a man of this life,
 “ but also of the life to come. Wherefore
 “ I would admonysh and warne every man
 “ to take heed of them, and where he
 “ findeth Hermodactyls in any receipt that
 “ he omit them; and so not fear any mis-
 “ hap or danger from which I could not
 “ omit to warn every good body. It is
 “ very true that divers Grecian writers, as
 “ Actuarius and Nicolaus Myrepsus have
 “ left unto us certain compositions, wherein
 “ are both the white and the red Hermo-
 “ dactyl, but these authors have not meant
 “ the Hermodactyles of the Arabians, or the
 “ Colchicum of Dioscorides, but they have
 “ meant the *Behen* album, et rubrum,
 “ which very well ought to be noted, that

“pretious confectiones be not defiled with
“the Hermodactyles.”

If we suppose this translator, Dr. Mose, to have been a physician of repute in his day, his denunciation of the remedy may have contributed to deter practitioners from its use. Yet we find it approved of by Sir Theodore Mayerne*, in the time of James

* Pulvis Arthriticus, of Mayerne.

Rx. Cranii humani insepulti.

Turbith.

Hermodactyli.

Senæ Jalapii.

Tartaris Cremoris.

Diagrydii opt. preparat.

Caraphyllorum āā ʒi. M. fiat
pulvis tenuissimus.

the First. Dr. Lewis, in his Pharmacopœia of 1751, gives a place to Colchicum, with the synonymes, Hermodactylus, meadow saffron; and Sir John Hill says, that no person who has seen the Hermodactylus of the East, and compared it with the meadow saffron of England, can, for a moment, doubt that they are the very same plant.

From the authorities quoted, I think it may be concluded, that our meadow saffron, Colchicum, and Hermodactylus, are the very

Dosis sit ā ʒi. ad ʒiv. e juscule, vino albo, hordeato, sero Lactis, cujus haustum amplum, superbibere operæ pretium fuerit. Sumitur circa plenilunium quum maxime humores turgent. Qui gravius ægrotant circa novilunium itidem repurgandi.—*N. B. In casu D. N. Regis qui ανδροποφαγος odit, cranium humanum poterit in ossium Bubulorum rasuram permutari.*

same plant, although some writers have differed on the subject, and confused the synonymes.

We may also conclude that Colchicum judiciously used is a powerful remedy, and well deserving the attention of the faculty, in cases of gout and rheumatism. Mr. Want, of London, has again brought this medicine into notice, and believes it to form the active principle of the “Eau Medicinale D’Husson.” A formula for the preparation of a syrup is now in our Dispensatories, which is used in doses from a drachm to an ounce, as a diuretic; but I believe Mr. Want’s preparation is an infusion in white wine, and is of a much more powerful nature, and is to be very cautiously administered.

Thornton gives the following description:—The *Colchicum Autumnale* is of the class *Hexandria*, order *Trigynia*, bearing a corolla divided into six, on a radical tube, capsules connected, inflated. The leaves are flat, lanceolate, erect.

The root is a double succulent bulb. The flower is large, of a purple colour, and comes directly from the root. The leaves appear in spring, and are radical and spear-shaped. Corolla consisting of a single petal, divided into six lance-shaped erect segments. Capsule three-lobed, divided into three cells, containing globular seeds, which are not ripened until the ensuing spring, when the capsule rises above the ground upon a strong peduncle.

It is perennial, and grows in wet mea-

dows in the temperate climates of Europe ; it flowers in the autumn, when the old bulb begins to decay, and a new one is formed. In the following May, the new bulb is perfect, and the old one wasted and corrugated. The roots are dug for use in the beginning of summer, when its powers are most active, producing the horrid effects described by Nicander, when eaten by accident in the fields, and ranked as the most deleterious of the *Colchica venena* of Medea. When dried, it loses its active qualities in a great degree, and by the action of fire is rendered altogether inactive, being safely used as an article of food.

The derivation of the name of the plant *Hermodactylus* has been strangely mistaken, “ Quid enim vult *Hermodactyli*,” (says Matthiolum) “ nisi *digiti mercurii*?”

It grows in great abundance on the banks of the River Hermus, in Asia Minor, and resembling, as the root does, the *date* ($\delta\alpha\lambda\iota\upsilon\lambda\textcircled{\text{C}}$), while it bears not the most distant similitude to *fingers*, a rational derivation presents itself which had not occurred to Matthiolus. Upon the whole, Hermodactylus was a powerful remedy for gout, and, properly prepared and administered, will no doubt prove to be so still, and regain its high character, for we have much reason to believe the words of the wise man true—

That which is, hath been, and that which hath been shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun.

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

SUDDEN DEATH

OF

WOMEN IN CHILD-BED,

IN CONSEQUENCE OF SPASMODIC AFFECTION OF THE UTERUS.

THE sudden death of women during labour, or soon after delivery, occurs when the subsequent inspection of the body affords no information concerning the cause of the misfortune; and in such cases it is commonly said that human skill can be of no avail. The bursting of a blood-vessel

of considerable size, and several other causes of sudden death, become evident upon examination; but cases are unfortunately too frequently to be met with in which death suddenly takes place when no organic lesion can be discovered, for the most part preceded by convulsions more or less severe.

A very melancholy case of this description occurred here in summer last. A young lady, of a good constitution, was safely delivered of her first child, a fine boy, and fell into convulsions, which terminated in death in about two hours after she had first been taken ill. When the convulsions first came on, the placenta had not come away, but it was without much difficulty removed, and sooner than in other circumstances would have been

thought necessary ; the loss of blood being not at all extraordinary. In this case, there was great anxiety and violent tossing ; the countenance pale, or rather livid, and the respiration exceedingly difficult ; the pulse fluttering and feeble. The patient spoke, although with difficulty, and declined taking some brandy and water, saying, “ I know I am gone.” The event of this case led me to inquire into what probable causes might be assigned for the catastrophe, and I had already prepared some notes upon the subject, which another disastrous case, which has so deeply interested the whole empire, and which appears to have had some features in common with that just mentioned, has induced me to finish and submit to the inspection of the public.

In alarming attacks of this nature various remedies will no doubt be tried by the practitioner who may be in attendance, but no modern author, as far as I know, has accounted for the symptoms, or laid down any regular plan of prevention or cure.

Denman says, that he was led by accident to try the effect of dashing cold water in the face, and in some cases the benefit was beyond expectation or belief; and concludes, that convulsions may remain (during labour) with evident and extreme danger of the patient dying every time they return; and we shall be driven by necessity to wait quietly for the termination of the labour in the natural way, hoping she may struggle through; or we shall be obliged to seek farther resources, in the delivery of the patient by

art*. He adds, afterwards, that the convulsions that come on after delivery bear an appearance of more imminent danger than those that occur before it, frightful as they always are; and very candidly says, that there is yet room for much improvement in our knowledge of the causes, effects, and treatment of convulsions depending upon pregnancy and parturition. “We may be truly said to be ignorant, “or to have a very imperfect knowledge “of the subject of sudden death under “such circumstances; and it deserves “more accurate observation and greater “consideration than has hitherto been “given it.”

* Denman's Introduction, Vol. II. pp. 387, 388.

A question will here naturally occur, whether the disease producing consequences so lamentable, and of which we know so little, be *new*, occurring only in later times, as we appear to have derived so little advantage from the experience of the older physicians? The answer is, that the disease is most minutely described by the ancient physicians, and their plan of treatment, which was said to be eminently successful, continued in use for more than two thousand years, and until medical practice came to be influenced by the physiological speculations broached during the seventeenth century*.

* Mauriceau, who wrote in 1668, says, that he was induced to believe the pathology of the *suffo-*

Without entering upon disputed points in physiology and pathology, the fact may be stated with confidence that in former times the physicians believed that they understood the causes of these alarming attacks, provided against them, and used certain remedies which we are assured were frequently successful; while we, as Dr. Denman says, entertain very confused notions of the causes of such accidents, have no determined mode of treatment, and often stand by as mere spectators, while the patient perishes. It may then be useful to bring once more into public notice the simple doctrine of the ancients.

cation de la matrice unnecessary and inapplicable, in consequence of the discovery of the "mouvement circulaire du sang."

It is in the first place necessary to state what was really implied by the $\pi\alpha\lambda\iota\chi\ \upsilon\sigma\epsilon\rho\iota\kappa\eta$ of the Greeks, which the Latin authors term "*Suffocatio matricis*," and the French continue to call "*Suffocation de la matrice*." That the uterus is peculiarly liable to spasm, forming what we call hysteric fits in the unimpregnated state, inducing convulsions during labour, and producing fatal effects when it comes on after delivery, if timely remedies be not applied, is generally acknowledged, and the earlier writers on medicine took great pains, as has already been stated, to describe the disease minutely, and point out the proper remedies. They particularly impress upon the minds of their readers, the great sensibility of the part affected, so that it is immediately acted upon even by certain odours—that owing to the construction of its ligaments,

it changes its place very considerably when under the influence of spasm*—and that from it other parts become affected by a

* A very elegant account of the disease is given by Lommius.—“Uterus etiam ferri è sua sede potest, isque
 “ modò ascendere modò descendere, vel prolabi, et in-
 “ terdum in alterutrum latus inclinare. Ascensio adeo
 “ in quibusdam vehemens est, ut ad ventriculum etiam
 “ uterus velut globus aliquis afferatur, eumque gra-
 “ viter premat, indeque manu depelli suum in locum
 “ possit.—Haud leve vitium est ab utero factus
 “ strangulatus, qui Græcis *πυλὸς ὕστερινος* vocatur. Eo
 “ incipiente nausea multa fit, ferèque sine vomitu,
 “ sequitur cibi fastidium, cum ventris quoque rugitu,
 “ tametsi hic iste non semper comitatur; post hæc
 “ incipit esse spiritus difficilis, creber ac brevis,
 “ idemque post paulum ita arctatur, ut veluti vinculo
 “ præstricti fauces videantur, magno metu præfoca-
 “ tionis, inter quæ leviter anima deficit, ex qua tamen
 “ re vix pulsus immutatur.—Sæpius autem altus

like spasmodic action, by which the most violent and dangerous symptoms are produced. Of the danger of such attacks immediately after delivery, when the uterus and parts immediately connected are necessarily in a state of inflammation,

“ incidit quasi sopor, sub quo obmutescit fœmina, tota-
 “ que pallescens atque oculis clausis corruit, at veluti
 “ attonita jacet, sensûs motûsque expers, sic ut comi-
 “ tiali morbo videatur prostrata. Spiritus huic summè
 “ parvus, rarus, et obscurus est, adeo ut vix superesse
 “ ullus credatur: pariterque ipse prope concidit
 “ pulsus tametsi is (ubi levius malum est) interdum
 “ constet. Cum remittit accessio uterus paulatim laxa-
 “ tur, et humores quippiam emittit; tum obmurmurant
 “ intestina, oculi aperiuntur, malæ rubescunt, pro-
 “ tinusque mens, sensus, ac motus fœminæ re-
 “ deunt.”

Med. Observationes, Amstel. 1726, pp. 241, 242.

they were fully sensible, and had in preparation the remedies upon which they depended for relief. *Hippocrates* says, that in such a case, unless relief be speedily obtained, the woman is suffocated and dies, *αποπνιγείαι ἡ γυνή*, and *Aretæus* has a complete chapter upon this affection of the uterus; the substance of which I shall give in English, subjoining part of the original in a note.

He begins his chapter "*de uteri strangu-
latione*," with a short account of the viscus, its situation, and great mobility, so that it very readily changes its situation from side to side, upwards or downwards, and "in a word is altogether erratic*." Spasmodic

* καὶ ξυλληβδην εἰπωμεν, πάνη ἐστὶ πλα-
νωδης.

affections of the uterus, he says, produce violent and dangerous symptoms, by affecting the heart and organs of respiration. "The pulse intermits, becomes quite irregular, and fails, the respiration is violently interrupted, the patient becomes speechless and insensible, the breathing is with difficulty perceived, or is altogether imperceptible, and death suddenly and unexpectedly closes the scene*." In this concise, and in the original very elegant account of the symptoms, brought on by violent spasm affecting the uterus, the author does not particularly allude to the disease as it affects women in childbed, for

* σφυγμοι διαλειπόντες, αλκίλοι, εκλειπόντες, πνιξ καρτερη, αφωνιη, αναιθησει, η αναπνοη ασημα, ασαφης, ωκισος και απισος ο Θανατις.

he says that young women are liable to violent attacks of this nature, and we know that, although not very frequently, hysteric fits prove fatal.

It is however universally agreed upon, that immediately after delivery, the uterus is peculiarly liable to spasmodic affections, which produce immediate corresponding effects on the vital organs, and sudden death more frequently proceeds from such spasmodic affections, than from any other cause, hæmorrhage alone excepted.

Proceeding to describe the proper means of cure in such cases, Aretæus again repeats a short description of the peculiarities of this viscus—stating that it is sensibly affected by odours, which powerfully affect it, even in a state of disease, a point on

which all the physicians of antiquity are agreed; and although at the present day we disregard their physiology, we still to a certain degree retain their practice, in having recourse to strongly odorous remedies in cases of this description. He again describes the various ways in which the uterus is affected by inflammation and spasm, and particularly states that when by spasm it is carried upwards, so as to affect the parts concerned in respiration, it occasions immediate death, unless the proper remedies are promptly applied*. In such a case he says, the patient can neither complain nor call for assistance, and therefore adds, that it is necessary to procure medical

* Ην δ' ανωθεν φοιλοιν ως οξυαλα την ανθρωπον
απεπνιξε πλεζει δ' αγχονη της αναπνοης.

aid immediately, before the patient expire*. If then, says he, *you fortunately arrive in time* in such a case†, you are to open a vein in the ancle, and if that do not discharge blood freely, open one in the arm; but again repeat your attempt to obtain blood from the ancle, and have recourse to those remedies, which, supposing inflammation not to be present, prove useful in relieving symptoms which threatened suffocation. Ligatures are to be applied to the limbs, and tightened until torpor of the extremities is produced, fœtid odours are to be applied to the nostrils, as liquid pitch, the ashes of

* ΕΙΧΟΣ ὦν τοις ἐν ἰατροῖσι καλεσάι τον ἥληρον πριν τον ἀνδρωπον θανειν.

† So I think the words ἀλλ' ἣν κόπε ἐκ συνίυχις ἥκης may be fairly rendered, although the common translation is somewhat different.

burnt wool, or the smoke of an extinguished torch, or castor, long kept fœtid urine, which produces wonderful effects when life seems almost extinct, and relieves that spasm which raises the uterus upwards. At the same time fragrant odours are to be applied to the parts affected, mixed with mild ointments; and if these remedies prove ineffectual, the hypochondria are to be strongly squeezed by the hand of a vigorous attendant, or a bandage is to be tightened below the sternum, so as to compress all the abdominal viscera. Sneezing is to be produced by the administration of proper errhines, and cupping glasses are to be applied to the muscular parts surrounding the pelvis, and strong friction applied to the face, and tearing out hairs have sometimes produced good effects. Sitting over a decoction of aromatic herbs, is also

recommended, and care is to be taken upon the woman's recovery, that the menses may be brought on as soon as possible*.

* Σχασαι φλεβα, μαλιστα μεν την επι τω σφυρω, ηνδεμη ευροον ἐη, την εω' αγκωνι· επαφαιρειν δ' απο τε σφυρα. πρησσειν δε τα αλλα ὁκοσα αν και ανευ φλεγμασις αρηγη πνιγι. Δεσμοι χειρων και ποδων σφιγγούτες αχρι ναρκωσιⓈ.—οσμη κακωδεων, πισσης ὕγρης, τριχων ειρεα κεκαυμενων λυχνη φλογος εσβεσμενης κασοριε·——ερον παλαιον και την αισθησιν εξανισησι, καρτα τε νεκρωδεⓈ, και την ὕερην κατω διωκει. τοιγαρεν και τοισι προσθείοισι ευωδεσι ες την χωρην επιβλήτεον της ὕερης, μυρω ὁκοιον αν· εη προσηνες, ἡδε αδηκλον την ἀφην, ναρδον ἡ βακχαρι το Αιγυπτιον, ἡ το δια των φυλλων τε μαλαβαθρα τε δενδρεος τε Ινδικε, η κιναμωμον κοπεν ξυν των ευοσμων τινι λιπαϊ· εγχρειν δε ταδε τοισι γυναικειοισι χωροισι. κ. τ. λ.

The Greek scholar will see that what is given above, is not a literal translation from the original, it is however the substance of what Aretæus recommends for the cure of this very formidable disease, expressed sometimes in a paraphrastical manner, but keeping in view, as I think, the general scope of the author. Remedies of the same kind are directed by Hippocrates, and we have reason to believe that the method of cure was in use at a period of very remote antiquity. With some variations, the same description of the disease, and enumeration of remedies, were given by medical writers, till the hypothesis of Harvey concerning the circulation of the blood prevailed, and since that time the causes of the disease have been held to be inexplicable, and the patient is left to her fate. It deserves to be remarked, that in cases of

insanity, where violent spasms had been induced by the exhibition of Hellebore, and affecting the organs of respiration, so as to induce the $\pi\nu\iota\zeta$ already explained, the practice was to apply ligatures with a view to prevent *deliquium* in subjects of the male sex, as Aretæus enjoins 'when females are threatened with suffocation from the $\pi\nu\iota\zeta$ $\psi\sigma\epsilon\rho\iota\kappa\eta$. The object in applying these ligatures was, no doubt, to prevent the dissipation of heat, while the action of the heart remained irregular and weakened; and this remedy they thought applicable, from whatever cause symptoms were produced, affecting the heart and organs of respiration, so as to threaten suffocation. They had not the most distant idea that ligatures thus applied might prove hurtful by obstructing the circulation of the blood, an hypothesis which it is very evident from

their writings, that they would not have admitted upon such proofs and arguments as Harvey has adduced in its favour; and the recent experiments of Parry, Cooper and others, shew in the most convincing manner what never had occurred to him, viz. that the principal arteries may be tied near the heart without occasioning immediate death, or materially injuring the health of the animal. I have quoted Aretæus as the first medical writer whose works have come down to our times, who has succinctly treated of this disease, but as has already been mentioned, Hippocrates more briefly, and less methodically, gives nearly the same description of the symptoms, and enumerates nearly the same remedies. Of succeeding writers, Galen, Oribasius, and Paulus Ægineta, with some variations, prescribe the like means of relief

on like principles ; and Ætius treats of the disease very fully, collecting all that appeared to him valuable in the writings of the most eminent physicians.

In describing the symptoms of this disease, he agrees in the opinions already given, that it proves fatal by calling into diseased action the vital parts, and not from the disease of the uterus immediately. The diaphragm, heart, and muscles of respiration become strongly affected, and blood is violently forced into the carotids, so as to render the countenance livid. The pulse becomes weak and irregular, intermitting, and sometimes altogether suspended, together with respiration. The stomach is oppressed, and saliva is often evacuated in great quantity, when the symptoms are in so far relieved ; *humiditas quædam ex locis*

muliebribus excurrens tactu percipitur, and a murmuring noise of the bowels is heard, the uterus is gradually relieved from spasm as the patient recovers her powers of perception. He describes the disease as arising from various causes in young women, also from abortion, or a sudden suppression of blood issuing from the uterus, whether during menstruation or in the puerperal state. With regard to cure, he recommends that the patient be placed in a reclining posture, the head and trunk raised as much as may be practicable, and the lower extremities hanging down. Tight ligatures are to be applied to the extremities, and the feet and legs are to be briskly rubbed; odorous substances are to be applied to the nostrils, as galbanum, castor or sagapenum, triturated with vinegar, and applied to the lining

membrane of the nose ; or the strongest vinegar in which pennyroyal, calamint, or thyme has been boiled. Sternutatories are also to be applied, and vomiting is by the readiest means to be effected. Fumigations of castor, bitumen, galbanum, or sulphur, are to be applied, or the smoke of a newly extinguished torch, of burnt feathers, or woollen cloths rubbed over with sulphur. The smell of fœtid urine, or that of rue strongly rubbed in the hands.

While these *graveolentiæ* are applied to the nostrils, the most bland and agreeably perfumed unguents are to be applied by the midwife *per vaginam*, and various pessaries are recommended as useful, composed of ingredients of a similar nature. With a view to rouse the patient from a state of insensibility it was recommended

to pull out hairs by the roots from various parts of the body, particularly the pudendum; loud vociferation, in order to excite the sense of hearing, and pinching the extremities, in order to bring on the feeling of pain.

Such was the practice in ancient times, in cases when spasm of the uterus threatened fatal consequences, and we have reason to believe that during, or immediately after delivery, when symptoms so alarming come on, the practice may be revived with hopes of success. It is well known that in the puerperal state, spasmodic affections are much relieved by the warm bath, in which many have been delivered without the slightest inconvenience to mother or child, and the remedies anciently in use, may, for the most part, be

applied while the patient is in the bath, the warmth of the water powerfully contributing to aid the remedies used to prevent the rapid diminution of heat.

In cases of this nature it ought to be borne in mind, that the suspension of the vital functions taking place without any observable organic lesion, resuscitation is in many cases practicable, and therefore the means in every case ought to be tried. Pliny tells us, that from such affections of the uterus, women have remained for several days apparently dead, and afterwards recovered ; and adds, that for that reason women seemingly dead of such complaints, were not to be buried until after three days*. Forestus mentions a case to which

* Ad tertium usque diem, fœminam ab eo malo (*i. e.* suffocatione uteri) non efferri, clamet omnis schola.

he was called, where a woman aged forty-two, after the delivery of a first child, while the midwife was employed in cleansing the child, was suddenly seized with this complaint, and appeared to die instantly. He pursued the ancient plan; applied assafoetida to the nostrils, and a plaster of galbanum to the umbilicus, by which remedies the woman recovered, to the great astonishment of those present. His words are

“ Uxor Petri Opmeri, quæ annum 42 age-
 “ bat cum illam duceret, (nam virgo annosa
 “ erat antequam matrimonium iniret) anno
 “ sequenti, mense Augusto primipara, cum
 “ noctu pareret, atque obstetrix infantem sus-
 “ cepisset, et valde intenta esset in puero
 “ mundando, ipsa interea in uteri suffoca-
 “ tionem incidens mox exanimis reperta est,
 “ et pro mortuâ habita. Ad quam et ipse
 “ accitus in nocte, assam foetidam pro odo-

“ratu naribus applicabam, et emplastrum
 “contra matricem, galbano obductum, um-
 “bilico apponi jussi: quibus duobus tantum
 “præsidiis ad se rediit, et illicò a paroxys-
 “mo excitata est, atque ab illâ molestia
 “etiam mox liberata, cum magnâ astan-
 “tium admiratione. Cum jam a paroxys-
 “mo excitata foret, imperavimus ut em-
 “plastrum amoveret, et cum bene purgare-
 “tur in partu, postea bellè se habuit.”

How long this patient remained appa-
 rently dead, Forestus does not inform us ;
 but Ambrose Parè relates the case of a lady
 of Spain, who seemed to expire under si-
 milar circumstances, and who recovered after
 the medical practitioner had made his first
 incisions in order to dissection, which pro-
 bably would not be attempted for at least
 twenty-four hours after the vital functions

had been suspended. Indeed, it appears probable, that animation may be restored at a more distant period, after apparent death from this affection of the uterus, than in cases of drowning, or suffocation by external violence, where we may suspect that organic lesion has taken place.

The theory upon which the practice of the older physicians proceeded, we may suppose to have been this. They believed that respiration is the immediate means of keeping up the heat of living animals. They believed that a portion of elemental fire is derived by the lungs from the atmosphere, and is the cause of the contraction of the heart, and pulse of the arteries, while heat is conveyed to all parts of the body. They believed a very small quantity of blood to be held in solu-

tion by this elementary fire, forming a fine vapour, highly elastic, and ever attempting to combine itself with the atmosphere from whence it was derived. The unequal diffusion of this vapour, by them called *vital spirits*, they believed to produce spasm, in the parts in which over accumulation had taken place, and that this spasm, unless immediately relieved, had a natural tendency to bring on a like action upon parts immediately connected with that already diseased. The principal means of relieving spasm, when affecting external parts, they believed to consist in affording the ready means of escape to the fluid in excess, by removing the non-conducting cuticle, by *Epispastics*, or by scarifications passing through the skin. What precise qualities or mode of operation, they attributed to the odours agreeable and disagreeable, we

do not exactly know ; but experience has confirmed the opinion, that odours very disagreeable applied to the nostrils, often relieve spasmodic affections of the uterus. They believed that when blood passed into the arteries, or the natural contents of arteries into veins, the vital functions must necessarily be disturbed, and an appearance not unusual in women who have died of this disease, viz. the heart and large vessels in its immediate vicinity, entirely empty of blood, an appearance which Dr. Denman calls altogether unaccountable, and really is so upon the Harveian hypothesis, they would on their principles have readily explained. They would have said, that the elastic fluid, naturally confined to the left ventricle and arteries, had, in consequence of violent diseased action, passed into the right ventricle and contiguous cava, forcing

a congestion of blood in other parts of the body, particularly the liver ; or throwing it into the carotids, and occasioning that livid countenance, which is for the most part observable in such patients. Whatever we may think of the ancient theory, one thing is very certain ; that when it was abandoned, the practice in regard to women dangerously affected by spasms of the uterus during the puerperal state, underwent a fatal change ; and patients are now said to die by the visitation of God, whose deaths in former times would have been charged against the medical practitioners as criminal neglect of duty, according to the rule, “ *Quem non servasti cum potuisses, eum occidisti.*” “ Whomsoever you have not preserved when it was in your power, him have you killed.” The cases are rare indeed, in which a medical practitioner

may with truth pronounce, that *nothing is to be done*, and the physician is fortunate indeed, who cannot call to mind cases, in which, from the want of knowledge, of which he afterwards became possessed, patients have been lost.

Let us then briefly recapitulate the remedies that have been found serviceable in spasmodic affections of the uterus, during the puerperal state, leaving it to the judgment of practitioners, whether at the present day they deserve a trial, and ought to be revived.

When the patient began to show much anxiety, with difficulty of respiration, and a livid countenance, the heat of the body undiminished, blood-letting was thought advisable; and we know that opening the

jugular vein has in modern practice been attended with the best effects. When from increased difficulty of respiration the pulse had become feeble, and the heat of the body sensibly diminished, they applied tight ligatures to the arms and thighs, so as to occasion numbness, "*ad torporem usque*," and to this remedy we cannot doubt that the warm bath would prove a powerful auxiliary. At the same time they applied strong and disagreeable odours to the nostrils, and those of a fragrant nature to the region of the uterus, or as liniments and pessaries *per vaginam*. To rouse the patient from a state of torpor, they used various means to excite the sensation of pain, or by strongly affecting the organs of hearing, to create an impression on that sense, and if possible fix the patient's attention. Sometimes by mechanical pres-

sure they attempted to bring the uterus into its natural situation, and by bandaging the abdomen tightly, to retain it there. They considered it as important to excite spasmodic affections of the stomach and diaphragm by vomiting or sneezing; and when by such means they had in so far succeeded, they considered a murmuring noise of the bowels, and "*humiditas quædam ex locis muliebribus excurrens*," as signs of a prosperous termination of the case. They then used proper means to promote the natural uterine discharge, and considered the patient as in a state of safety. Indeed, in such cases there is for the most part no great danger of relapse, because the uterus speedily regains its natural dimensions, and the inflammation necessarily produced by parturition soon subsides. The same mode of treatment they

pursued, when the disease occurred, as sometimes it does, in the unimpregnated state, and as has been already mentioned, they believed a patient apparently dead under such circumstances, to be capable of re-animation for a very considerable time. With a view to resuscitation after the patient has been for some time without respiration or pulse, perhaps no means would be better accommodated to the end in view than to place her in a warm bath not under the 99th degree of Fahrenheit's scale ; distending the thorax, as in other cases of suspended animation, by pure atmospheric air, which by a very simple apparatus may be conducted from without into the apartment.

Oxygen gas has, in cases of suspended animation, been thrown into the lungs by

means of a syringe, with great advantage, and slight shocks of electricity have produced the best effects. Whether galvanism may not also prove a successful remedy in such cases, remains to be ascertained ; but it appears probable, that by judicious management, it will become a powerful agent in restoring suspended animation.

Nothing can be more remote from the intentions of the writer of these observations, than to impute blame to practitioners, who having met with cases of the nature described, have not tried the means in former times found efficacious. A complete change of physiological theory, has in some instances essentially altered medical practice, and led to the total neglect of authors who held opinions different from those at present entertained. Facts, how-

ever, at all times deserve consideration ; and as it appears unquestionable, that the sudden death of females during the puerperal state was prevented, or resuscitation was effected, by means not now in use, that these means were in themselves simple, and could not possibly do harm if ineffectually applied, it will deserve the serious attention of practitioners, whether the ancient practice ought not to be again adopted.

Aberdeen, January 31, 1818.

FINIS.



