

**Observations on the use of the argentum nitratum in chorea Sancti Viti,  
and epilepsy / communicated to Dr Duncan, in a letter from Thomas Hull.**

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quent to the time I sent you the case, seem to have been in no way violent in regard to her own feelings, notwithstanding her strict perseverance in its use, to a very considerable extent. I cannot discover, that either her stomach or bowels have been in any degree materially affected. The urinary organs, which at first seemed to be considerably stimulated by this remedy, in a short time became totally insensible to its action. Sickness, and a sense of languor, which prevailed at the commencement, have never since been induced by its operation, so long as the proportion of the remedy was not increased. In some cases, however, it must be observed, in order to suppress so violent a spasm, larger doses of the nitrate of silver may be found necessary, than what are here employed: even in the present case, the quantity to be given cannot exactly be defined, but must, in a great measure, depend upon the effects it produces. It was well known, that powerful remedies administered punctually, and in small quantities at a time, are oftentimes much more effectual than when administered in larger doses. The present complaint, (as far as I have witnessed),

is an evident example. On the contrary, in the treatment of the various species of tetanus, musk, opium, and others of a truly antispasmodic nature, are required to be administered in very considerable doses, as smaller ones have but too often been found ineffectual; yet, in the generality of spasmodic complaints, I think it ought to be observed, that such excessive quantities ought never to be ventured on, until smaller doses are found not to avail. I have only had *two cases*, where I have found it necessary to increase the quantity of the argentum nitratum beyond gr.  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in the course of the day, and where a less proportion seemed ineffectual. To shew that some constitutions can bear much larger proportions of this remedy, than others, the following is a striking example: In the autumn of 1798, I had under my care two female patients, (whose names I am not authorised to mention), affected with epilepsy to a very considerable degree, both married women, nearly of the same age, both stout, and inclined to corpulency, and in both of whom the severity as well as frequency of attack seemed nearly equal: one, however, had the advantage of a free country  
air

air, while the other, from her birth, had been accustomed to a town residence; yet both seemed equally comfortable in their respective situations in life. In both these cases, I began by prescribing precisely the same quantity of the remedy, gr.  $\frac{1}{4}$  *per diem*. In the course of eight or ten days, the medicine seemed evidently to have good effects in one instance, while in the other I could not observe any alteration, or sensible relief from it whatever. This induced me to increase the quantity to gr.  $\frac{1}{2}$  *per diem* in the latter case, while, in the former, I continued the proportion as before. After a perseverance in this increased quantity for several weeks, a manifest relief was obtained. Such a material alteration was so suddenly produced, that her husband, (a man of great sagacity and judgment), was pleased to think, that, by a due observance in the proper application of diet and exercise, we should be able entirely to defeat this formidable disease. Through a want, however, of perseverance in these too particulars, the fits again returned, at which time I increased the quantity to  $\frac{3}{4}$  gr. *per diem*, and, notwithstanding the great disproportion in these two doses

doses of the medicine employed, I cannot say  
I was able to discover any difference in the  
power of its effects: though the proportion  
was widely different, the effects produced  
seemed equal in force.—I am aware I have  
already trespassed too much upon your time  
but, allow me to add, that, when the dose, in  
the first instance, was increased to gr.  $\frac{1}{2}$  *p*  
*diem*, the excessive sickness and nausea, the  
load and oppression at the stomach, the vertigo  
terminating in partial blindness, were  
great, as to compel us to reduce the propor-  
tion to its old standard.