

**A singular variety of chorea sanct. Vit. considerably relived by the use of the argentum nitratum / by Thomas Hall.**

**Contributors**

Hall, Thomas.  
Royal College of Surgeons of England

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Wellcome Collection  
183 Euston Road  
London NW1 2BE UK  
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722  
E [library@wellcomecollection.org](mailto:library@wellcomecollection.org)  
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be handled, or even wounded, without pain ; that the whole of it may be cut off, without injury ; and that, in case of inversion, attended with severe flooding, if the womb cannot be returned, the hæmorrhage may be prevented, by tying a ligature round the neck of the uterus.

Some months after this case happened, I gave the uterus to Dr Jeffray, of Glasgow, who, I believe, still has it.

## VIII.

*A singular variety of Chorea Sanct. Vit., considerably relieved by the use of the Argentum Nitratum. By Dr Thomas Hall, Physician, East Retford, Nottinghamshire.*

THE following Case was not drawn up with a view to exalt above the rest of its kind, any one particular article in the Materia Medica, (though, in the sequel, I think, it will be found, that the most considerable advantages have been gained by the use of one medicine in particular), but more on account of the attendant singularities, in its mode of attack principally, in its progress, and in the various phenomena exhibited during the whole course of the disease.

By adding my mite to the general flock of medical information, I hope I am going no farther than doing a duty; which, at the same time, while instructive to myself, I trust, will be no less useful to the generality of medical readers.

The



The relation of cases, when drawn up with accuracy ; when faithfully and truly related ; not exaggerated, with a view to increase the author's professional merit ; nor rendered too much defective, with regard to the leading points, so as to make them totally uninteresting ; must be acknowledged by every candid practitioner, to be by far the easiest and truest way of arriving at sound medical knowledge ; teaching us, by the varieties, difficulties, and singularities, which they exhibit, how far we can have any hopes whereon to build a future practice, in cases of a similar nature ; and how far we may be able to form proper distinctions, amidst the vast varieties of disease, so prevalent in our climates. The following case, which I have stated as only having been relieved by the use of the nitrate of silver, (even though more than three months have elapsed since the last attack), there is great reason to fear, from the permanence of the cause, can never undergo a radical cure. How, therefore, or in what manner, this remedy can be said to have been so very beneficial, I could wish to be excused from giving any opinion.



Mrs W——, about thirty-six years of age, of a full, sanguine, and very much inclined to a melancholic temperament, was suddenly affected, in the year 1794, with convulsions of a most singular nature. They first commenced with a violent involuntary motion of the head, which, in the course of two or three minutes, removed to the right arm, and from thence to the right leg; again returning to the right arm, and concluding in the head, which was generally the part first affected.

These convulsions generally occupied about half an hour at each attack; returning sometimes in the course of a fortnight, at other times in about three weeks.

At this period, which seems to have been the first that any symptoms of this long and obstinate complaint made their appearance, she was attended by an ingenious physician of this town, since dead; who prescribed a course of medicines, which seemed evidently to have had the effect of removing the complaint for near half a year; at which time, she was ordered to discontinue all medicines whatever. No long time afterwards, however, they returned with increased violence, continuing



continuing for a much longer time, and very sensibly increased in degree.

This increased violence of the disease was, soon afterwards, succeeded by an extensive rash, spreading over various parts of the body, significantly expressed by her father, "as if caused by the lashes of thongs;" during which time (nearly half a year) every appearance of her former complaint seemed to have vanished. This suspension, however, of the primary disease, was but transitory. No sooner had the eruption disappeared, than the convulsions again returned, to a still greater degree of violence, occurring at that time, not seldomer than six or seven times in the course of the week.

In the space of a few months, she was suddenly affected with a swelling in her legs, attended with considerable inflammation; which also had the effect of producing a pleasant, though but temporary relief. This swelling having, through the assistance of a surgeon in the neighbourhood, greatly subsided; her convulsions again returned, at much shorter shorter intervals, and to a much greater extent,



tent, having not less than two or three attacks in the course of the day.

She remained in this situation, a martyr to the most alarming complaints, for a considerable length of time, until the 27th of November 1798; at which period she became a patient of mine, when I found the state of her disease to be as follows.

Her right hand and arm were suddenly seized with an involuntary convulsive action; moving principally, though not altogether, in the direction of backwards and forwards, and slightly upwards and downwards. After this had continued for about two or three minutes, (I here speak only of that attack which happened in my presence, at the time I first saw her), the head was suddenly affected in a similar manner; which could not, by all the resistance she could make use of, be kept in any degree steady. After this had remained its usual time, the left hand and arm became convulsed, moving in the same direction, and continuing about the same space of time, as in the right hand and arm. The head then became a second time affected; and,  
lastly



lastly, the right hand and arm, the part in which the convulsions first commenced.

This mode of attack, however, was by no means universal. Sometimes the head was the part first affected, proceeding from thence to the right arm and hand ; from thence to the right leg ; returning again to the right arm and hand ; and, lastly, to the head, the part first convulsed.

Again, sometimes it proceeded in the following manner: From the right arm and hand, the convulsions removed to the head ; from thence to the left arm and hand ; from thence to the left leg ; returning by the same way to the part first affected.

These three modes of attack were such as most generally took place. But what appears the most singular, whatever was the part affected, and whatever the direction, the convulsions always terminated in that part from whence they originated, if we except the two following deviations, which seem to be only exceptions to the general progress of aggression.

Once she was seized in the following manner : From the right arm and hand, the convulsions



vulsions moved to the right leg ; then returned to the same hand and arm ; and removed from thence to the left arm ; from thence to the left leg ; and returned again to the left arm and hand, where they terminated. And, at another time, every part of the body, from head to foot, seemed to be attacked at the same instant.

An universal observation, during the whole course of her complaint, has been, that for a few minutes previous to the accession of the fit, the part first seized (for, as it has been observed, it was not always the head) was affected with a shooting pain of no considerable degree of violence, nor extending beyond that part. And this seemed to be the only indication of the approach of the paroxysm ; if we may except the puffy swelling of a tumor, the result of a previous rheumatic affection, situated above the right wrist. But this of course only happened when the right arm and hand became the part first affected.

Immediately upon the cessation of the paroxysm, she complained (as she expressed it) " of a soreness in her flesh," and a considerable degree



degree of drowsiness, never terminating in sleep.

This singular affection was very uncertain as to the time of its attack. Sometimes it came on early in the morning; sometimes in the evening; scarcely ever upon her awakening from sleep, but generally about mid-day.

Neither a full meal, nor the eating of fruits, nor of sweets, seemed to have any effect in producing the fit \*. She has naturally been much occupied in the house, but very seldom suffers from fatigue. Changes of season, even the most sudden vicissitudes from cold to heat, or the contrary, do not seem to have any share in inducing the fit.

Her appetite, in general, is not good. Is rather inclined to costiveness. Has been a married woman since the year 1790; and is the mother of two children.

#### Previous

\* In many, and perhaps we may say in the generality of epileptic cases, we often find the eating of confectionaries, or other sweets, to be a very powerful exciting cause of the fits. Nay, I have a person now before me, the daughter of a respectable surgeon in this neighbourhood, who has been, for a long time, troubled with this complaint, and in whom the accession of the fit can frequently not be imputed to any other cause than eating sweets.



Before her marriage, she was of a rather delicate constitution, and generally irregular as to her menstrual discharge. Catamenia occur, most commonly, about every third week. Her pulse is perfectly natural, from 65 to 70 in a minute.

Previous to my making any inquiries with regard to the causes or origin of this singular affection, I had recourse, in my own mind, to all those which are most commonly set down, as producing such complaints. Sometimes we discover worms to be the origin of such diseases. Oftentimes a deficiency, or total obstruction of the menses, is productive of the complaint; and, almost universally, obstinate costiveness, a distended stomach, and loaded bowels, appear to be strong disposing causes to such a disorder.

None of these, however, applied to the present case. In the course of a few days afterwards, I was willing to hope I had discovered one, which might account for all the melancholy appearances attendant upon so dreadful a disease; and which, so far as I can learn, had not before been suspected.

The origin of this complaint is dated from  
some



some few months after her marriage, at which time she began to experience the worst usage from her cruel husband; who, in the overbountiful distribution of his blows, by the stroke of a poker, produced a considerable depression in the back-part of the cranium, evident to the eye, as well as the touch.

This I conjecture to be the original cause of the complaint; first, because, before this period, she never had experienced the least symptom of the complaint; and 2dly, as we are well aware that such causes are capable of producing such effects. If we, therefore, consider the length of time, the habitual return of the paroxysms, and the permanence of the cause, there is but too great reason to fear that the disease will remain incurable to the last. But, how we are to account for the singular relief, and that so suddenly too, produced by a medicine, the knowledge of whose effects is but yet in its infancy; and, at the same time considering, that the cause is still remaining equal at all times, most probably, in its pressure upon the brain, seems to me a matter of great doubt, and perhaps totally inexplicable.

On



On the 28th of November, the time I first saw her, the convulsions occurred three or four times in the course of the day; and much more violent in degree than usual. My first endeavours to subdue this disease were directed by the best information I could collect from such as had treated fully upon the subject. I found that the medicines she had already taken, were such as come under the name of *nervous medicines*; and, on account of the irregularity with which this course had been pursued, I was determined to follow up the plan to the utmost extent.

I therefore began, by prescribing a mixture, composed of valerian, sulphuric ether, and tincture of castor; which, after the perseverance of about two months, seemed to have considerable effect.

For some reason or other, I ordered the tincture of asafœtida in place of the castor; and the convulsions, instead of recurring three or four times a-day, returned not oftener than once or twice in the course of a fortnight: Some few months afterwards, however, they began again to return more frequently; but, on account of the distance, I could not observe  
the



the progress of the complaint so narrowly as I could have wished.

On this second return, (May 13th), I ordered all her former medicines to be discontinued, and prescribed her pills, composed of argentum nitratum, with crumbs of bread; beginning with one sixth of a grain, and gradually increasing it to two grains, in the course of a day.

After having taken some few of the second box of pills, containing a quarter grain in each pill, she complained of a disagreeable stuffing in the upper part of the nostrils, which continued about three days; when she discharged from thence, (to use her father's own words), "a considerable quantity of matter, resembling, to all appearance, brain, mixed with clots of blood."

I was very anxious to have seen and examined this matter; but, on account of other engagements, I could not make it convenient to see her at that time.

On Monday, June 3d, she was seized with a swimming in the head, at two different times; which, for a short time, absolutely deprived



her of sight, but she has had nothing of the kind since.

On the 18th July, I received a letter from Mrs W.'s father, in which he mentions her having "complained much of being seized with a load, pain, and sickness at the stomach, about the third hour after having taken the pills; which continue upon her until the time she takes them again." She has, however, had no return of the fits; and as I conjectured that those effects complained of might be produced by too large a dose of *argentum nitratum*, I ordered that she should diminish the dose, and take the pills, with only one and a quarter grain in each. Since then, I have heard of no return.

In many cases, (and I think we may say, in this kind of case in particular), a proper plan of diet is oftentimes much more productive of benefit than all the medicines the *Materia Medica* affords; but the great misfortune is, our patients, after a strict and steady perseverance in the plan directed, for a few weeks, are but too apt to fall again into their former habits, and suffer from their own neglect. A patient generally considers *diet* as of no more effect



effect than merely supporting strength, and has but very little notion that it can be made subservient to the cure of disease. When, however, we have the good fortune to meet with patients so tractable in this respect, that they are anxious to obey the rules laid down to them, through fear of counteracting their prescriber's intentions by their own neglect; we then have a more effectual opportunity of giving a sufficient trial to our medicines, and with much greater hopes of success.

With regard to this part of the treatment, I have not had the least occasion to doubt, but that every thing was conducted according to prescription.

I particularly desired, that all kinds of food which had a tendency either to create flatulence, or produce a plethoric disposition in the system, should be carefully guarded against: That suppers should, if possible, be totally avoided; and at dinner, not only that she should choose that kind of food most easy of digestion, but that she should eat even that with moderation.

I hope I may be excused for trespassing so long on your patience. But I could here wish



to introduce an observation of Dr Fothergill; which may be found in a paper of his, communicated to the Medical Society of London, in the year 1776, ["Remarks on the cure of Epilepsy."]; and which idea had struck me long previous to my having seen this paper. In speaking of valerian, castor, foetid gums, and empyreumatic oils, and a little afterwards of the flores cardaminis, as remedies made use of in cases of epilepsy, he properly asks the question, "May not both these kinds of medicines, and most of those made use of as specifics, from ancient authority, now and then confirmed with instances of benefit, derive the greatest part of their consequence from their quantity, or their disgusting qualities; which, by lessening the appetite, allow Nature to recover herself, and shake off a disease which indulgence principally produced?"

IX.