

## **Hyoscyamus and camphor in gonorrhoea / [Benjamin Bell].**

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21. *Hyoscyamus and Camphor in Gonorrhœa.*\* Mr. Bell is by no means satisfied with the plans which have been recommended for the cure of gonorrhœa, especially in its chronic stage. He thinks, and probably with reason, that "the disease, in most cases, would exhaust itself more rapidly, if not interfered with, than it is observed to do, when treated in the common method." Perhaps gonorrhœa is not the only disease to which this observation might apply—but this is delicate ground to tread on, now that the newspapers are becoming the vehicles for medical discussions. Gonorrhœa is, according to Mr. Bell, "a constitutional affection of the irritable class, and should therefore, from that circumstance, be treated throughout all its stages, on those principles which have for their object the allaying of irritability." We cannot help demurring to this sweeping position of Mr. Bell, that gonorrhœa is "a constitutional affection of the irritable class." The disease may indeed occur in constitutions of the irritable class, but it is a strange confusion of ideas to designate it, on that account, a constitutional affection. It is assuredly a local disease, capable, like almost all other local diseases, of producing constitutional disorders. This indeed is made out even by Mr. Bell himself.

"Every practitioner must be aware, that, even after the local acute inflammatory symptoms of a mucous membrane have been allayed, a degree of subacute irritation, attended with more or less turgescence of the vessels of the part, remain, which are also accompanied by general derangement in the functions of the digestive organs. On taking this view of the subject, the impropriety of employing those drugs, which tend either to disorder, by their general stimulating influence, or by their local specific effects, the functions of digestion, is apparent,—for it is well known, that a very intimate sympathy prevails among all the mucous surfaces." 76.

Our author, proceeding on this view of the case, considers it necessary, after the acute symptoms are subdued, to proceed on the plan of allaying irritation, both local and general. To this we have no objection, provided the means of allaying irritation will remove the gonorrhœa, for it is too late in the day to speculate on the nature of a disease without direct reference to the treatment. Mr. Bell thinks it is very difficult to determine when the inflammatory stage of gonorrhœa has subsided, since the absence of pain, ardor urinæ, and chordée does not afford sufficient proof. It frequently happens, he remarks, that after the disappearance of these symptoms, a degree of uneasiness remains, which is more difficult to remove than the primary symptoms of the complaint. This uneasiness is characterised by painful spasms after micturition, irritability of the erectile tissue of the penis and cervix vesicæ, and tenesmus, arising from irregular action of the sphincter and levator ani. Under such circumstances the impropriety of pursuing the stimulating plan he thinks is evident.

"In this state of the organs, a single dose of copaiba, cubeb pepper,

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\* Mr. Benj. Bell. Ed. Journ. Med. Science, No. I. Jan. 1826.



or tincture of cantharides, will bring on an attack of hernia humoralis, cystitis, inflammation of the prostate, or spasm of the neck of the bladder, so violent, as to occasion retention of urine. I have not drawn an exaggerated picture; such events are frequent, and will be so until the stimulating diuretics, and, indeed, diuretics of every description, are excluded from practice in the treatment of gonorrhœa. Even *simple diluents* do not appear to me to be salutary, at least in the quantity in which they are usually prescribed. They load and upset the stomach, fatigue the kidneys, and irritate the bladder, by calling it too frequently into action.

“ Although *diuretics* and the *stimulating balsams* should not, in my humble opinion, be resorted to in the treatment of gonorrhœa, or of that *numerous class* of diseases ranged under the general appellation of *gleet*: still I do think that, in some of the *sequelæ* of gonorrhœa, they may be employed with advantage. In that state of debility of the bladder, or of its cervix, which occasionally follows an inveterate or ill treated gonorrhœa, when the organs do not contract to a sufficient extent, or contract irregularly, they are frequently serviceable.

“ There is another state, also, in which they may be employed with some prospect of advantage, and that is, when there appears to exist a state of partial or total atony of the erectile tissue of the penis, accompanied by a thin, watery, mucous discharge.

“ This state is particularly annoying to the patient, not from the pain attending it, as that is generally very trifling, but from the impossibility of his procuring an erection:—he is, in truth, impotent. It is the impotency of the debauchee, which has affected him—an impotency, in some cases at least, incurable, as it seems to depend occasionally upon a varicose state of the veins which convey the blood from the cavernous and spongy structures of the urethra.” 78.

Our author divides gonorrhœa into four distinct periods—“ each differing *essentially* from the other,” and each requiring a different treatment. In all of these stages, however, he avers that there is a common feature—*constitutional* as well as local irritability. We shall give the author an opportunity of explaining his own doctrines and practice.

“ *First, or Acute Irritable Stage.*—During this period of gonorrhœa, when inflammation has not yet taken place, every effort should be made to lower the system; for it has been observed, that the severity of the inflammatory stage depends in some measure upon the degree of irritation which has previously existed.

“ In order to accomplish this object, the patient must be confined to a low diet, his bowels should be relaxed by means of mild purgatives, and the cuticular secretion promoted by the daily employment of the general warm bath. The purgatives which seem best suited for allaying mucous irritation, and more especially where the urinary organs are the parts principally concerned, are those of that class which promote free and watery alvine evacuations, without acting violently on the colon or rectum, or affecting the chemical composition of the urine,



Sulphur alone, or combined with magnesia, senna, castor-oil, blue pill combined with ipecacuan, or calomel in conjunction with antimony and opium, are peculiarly applicable, as they have a secondary effect upon the skin. Rhubarb, the gum-resins, and neutral salts, should never be prescribed.

“ *Second, or Inflammatory Stage.*—So soon as inflammatory action is fairly established in the mucous membrane of the urethra, recourse must be had to more active treatment. In plethoric habits, blood may be taken freely from the arm; and, in more delicate constitutions, cupping of the loins will be found advantageous. Leeches I am no friend to in gonorrhœa, as they irritate and annoy the patient, and in some cases give rise to troublesome erysipelas, or œdema; and, when applied to the perineum, are apt, from the irritation they produce, to occasion painful erections, and to interfere with the use of fomentations, which are in every instance valuable adjuncts. I am not sure how far the general warm-bath is useful in the acute inflammatory stage, as in several cases it has seemed to exacerbate the symptoms.

“ It is in this stage that ardor urinæ, nocturnal erections, and chordée, exist; and I have seen the agony attendant upon the latter symptom so severe, that the patient contemplated the hour of bed-time with a degree of horror, bordering on despair. In the case of a West Indian gentleman, the chordée was so dreadful, that, at his own hand, he nearly committed suicide, by taking an overdose of opium and digitalis.

“ Anxious to discover a remedy which might tend to alleviate the agonies of chordée, without disordering the digestive organs, as opium generally does, it occurred to me, that, as camphor is sometimes used with great benefit in irritable affections of the bladder, and aware of the experiments of Chrestien on the subject, I determined to give it a fair trial. My experiments with regard to this drug have been hitherto attended with success.

“ It must be observed, that camphor cannot be exhibited alone, as it is very apt to give rise to nausea. In combination with hyoscyamus, however, that objection is obviated, for the compound has never, so far as I have observed, given rise to any gastric uneasiness.

“ When combined, in the form of a pill, with hyoscyamus, camphor may be pushed to a very considerable extent; and in more than one instance, when severe chordée, attended with spasm of the cervix vesicæ existed, I have prescribed, in the course of twenty-four hours, one drachm of the latter, in combination with two scruples of the former. In general, half the above quantity will be found sufficient; and the rule to be observed in giving them is very simple, for, on the occurrence of the slightest symptoms of vertigo, their exhibition should be suspended.

“ Camphor and hyoscyamus possess several advantages over other narcotics; they appear to have a decided effect in diminishing the force of the circulation, and they allay irritation, and do not occasion costiveness, or a diminution of the secretion of mucus from the lining membrane of the intestines. In truth, they do not interfere with the exhibition of other medicines.



"Camphor may be employed with advantage in all the stages of gonorrhœa; and in those rare cases where it is found not to agree with the stomach, it may be used in the form of a liniment, rubbed five or six times a day upon the loins, perineum, or groins.

"*Third, or Chronic Inflammatory Stage.*—It is at this period of gonorrhœa, when all the acute symptoms have disappeared, that the sagacity of the practitioner has full scope. It is the stage of difficulty. Depleting remedies will be found to prove noxious, and stimulants dangerous. A purgative may induce a serious relapse; and one dose of copaiba, cubebs, tincture of cantharides, or a single astringent injection, give rise to hernia humoralis, cystitis, or catarrhus vesicæ.

"Quiescence will, in this stage, be found the most valuable remedy; the cold hip-bath may be used, and nauseous gruels and slops may be relinquished for animal food. A mild alterative course of the blue pill, with antimony, or ipecacuanha, will also, in many cases, be attended with advantages; and an occasional dose of magnesia, with colomba or gentian, will be of service.

"*Fourth, or Chronic Irritable Stage.*—We have now arrived at that stage when the lips of the urethra have assumed their natural appearance, when almost all discharge has ceased, and when the patient experiences merely an occasional slight uneasiness during micturition. This state of atonic irritability, if I may be allowed the expression, is sometimes very obstinate, and requires particular attention on the part of the surgeon. It will yield in many cases to local or general cold bathing and tonics; and in this state I have observed the sulphate of quinine to prove of great service." 80.

Our own experience on this complaint, which has not been very limited, inclines us to think that Mr. Bell leans too much to depletion, and is too much afraid of what he calls *stimulation*. But it is one thing to drink brandy, and another to take copaiba or cubebs. No man, who has attentively watched the effects of medicines in gonorrhœa, will confound the two latter medicines under the general head of stimulants. Their usual effects are diminution rather than increase of irritation in the urinary organs—and therefore we suspect that Mr. Bell draws a little on theory and overlooks some practical facts on the foregoing observations. Still there are some good remarks made, and some judicious rules laid down by the author, wherefore we recommend them to the attention of our readers.

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