

A probationary essay on the use and effects of mercury in the treatment of syphilis : submitted ... to the examination of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh ... / by David Johnston ... October 1823.

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A
PROBATIONARY
ESSAY
ON THE
USE AND EFFECTS OF MERCURY
IN THE
TREATMENT OF SYPHILIS;

SUBMITTED,
BY AUTHORITY OF THE PRESIDENT AND HIS COUNCIL,
TO THE EXAMINATION OF THE
Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh,
WHEN CANDIDATE
FOR ADMISSION INTO THEIR BODY,
IN CONFORMITY TO THEIR REGULATIONS RESPECTING THE
ADMISSION OF ORDINARY FELLOWS.

BY
DAVID JOHNSTON, M. D.
EXTRAORDINARY MEMBER OF THE ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY.

OCTOBER 1823.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED BY P. NEILL.

1823.

TO
A. A. ROYER, Esq.
OF THE JARDIN DU ROI, PARIS,

THIS ESSAY IS DEDICATED,

AS
A SLIGHT MARK OF RESPECT FOR HIS WORTH,

AND

GRATITUDE FOR HIS KINDNESS,

BY
HIS MOST OBLIGED AND ATTACHED FRIEND

DAVID JOHNSTON.

TO
A. A. ROYER, Esq.

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perhaps, know these diseases only by name. If we look into the works of Celsus, we shall find him detailing, with clearness and accuracy, the symptoms of local affections of the genitalia; which, from situation, appearance, frequency, and other circumstances, have been considered by many as of a

USE AND EFFECTS OF MERCURY

IN THE

TREATMENT OF SYPHILIS.

TO trace the origin of Lues Venerea in Europe is now more a matter of historical curiosity than of any real utility, although this was long a subject of controversy, and much had been written in attempting to shew that its existence was of much higher antiquity than had generally been allowed.

When the writings of the ancients are consulted, it is found, that several diseases of a very malignant nature, and believed to have been produced by impure sexual intercourse, were very frequent amongst the Greeks and Asiatics. At the present day, we,

perhaps, know these diseases only by name. If we look into the works of CELSUS, we shall find him detailing, with clearness and accuracy, the symptoms of local affections of the genitals ; which, from situation, appearance, frequent malignity, and other circumstances, have been considered by many as of a nature truly syphilitic. But the experience and observations of many modern practitioners have clearly shewn that the existence of such affections is by no means rare in our own times ; that sores very similar to chancre are not uncommon ; that these, in their nature, are often malignant, and of difficult cure ; that they are even frequently followed by constitutional symptoms, bearing a strong resemblance to those of true Syphilis, with which, there is reason to believe, they have been often confounded, but that these, when carefully attended to, are found to differ most essentially : thus, according to Mr ABERNETHY, they are found distinctly to originate where the suspicion of true Syphilis could not reasonably exist ; and are cured by means which, in his opinion, are inadequate to the removal of that disease ;—they do not require the use of mercury, which was even found to be injurious, especially when used with any freedom.

In a practical point of view, this subject acquires additional interest from the recent doctrines respect-

ing the treatment of Lues venerea. Old prejudices have been revived against the employment of mercury, and the only remedy which the experience of centuries has proved to be able to control and remove this disease, has been declared, upon no slight authority, to be at least unnecessary in the cure of the local symptoms of this sad malady ; that its effects are even often injurious, and the necessity for its employment during the progress of the constitutional symptoms very doubtful. Such doctrines may attract by their novelty, but the surgeon of experience in this branch of practice, will perhaps be little inclined to trust the cure of a true syphilitic chancre to simple ablution, or of a suppurating venereal bubo to simple dressings and decoctions of sarsaparilla. The long and extensive experience of Mr ABERNETHY in these disorders should be allowed to have great weight in this matter. We find him stating, that he considers the true Syphilis unchangeable in its characters, regularly and progressively getting worse when no mercury is employed, stationary when opposed by that medicine, and permanently cured by an adequate mercurial affection of the constitution. No modern author has so forcibly and clearly pointed out the injurious effects of an improper employment of mercury as Mr MATTHIAS ; yet he says, the result of all our inquiries

has been to establish a clearer and stronger conviction, that mercury is the only remedy to which we can trust in the cure of Lues venerea.

It has long been almost universally admitted, that the true Syphilis was first noticed in Europe towards the close of the 15th century, and that it was brought from the newly discovered Continent or Islands of America by the followers of COLUMBUS. It seems to have first excited alarm in the French army besieging the City of Naples; and from this period it spread with such rapidity, that in a few years it had reached the remotest countries of Europe. The disease thus became the terror and scourge of every country; those infected were driven from society by rigid laws, and the general vote of their fellow men; the physicians of the day fled from the treatment of it in great dismay, thus confessing their ignorance of any means of cure, and proving, from their inability to check the disease, its recent origin. At last, however, the more learned of the profession were roused from their stupor, and began to labour in what one of them called the vast and stormy sea of this disease, in order to discover some method of practice by which it might be cured, or its symptoms alleviated. It would be unnecessary to specify the various inadequate means at first employed for these purposes; the

work of death and mutilation continued to spread with unrestrained violence.

The use of Mercury, as a medicine, was not unknown to the ancients ; it had been beneficially applied to the cure of Elephantiasis, Lepra, and other formidable disorders of a similar kind, by the Greek, Roman, and Arabian physicians, and, from analogy, was happily adopted in the treatment of Lues venerea. For a long time, however, its employment was far from being general; an unaccountable and unfounded prejudice was entertained against it. It seems at first to have been confined entirely to the hands of those who were considered the empirics of the day, who appear to have employed it much to their own profit, and the great annoyance of the regular part of the profession. Yet it was impossible for men of any observation to shut their eyes against the evidently beneficial effects of it, even when rudely and unskilfully employed ; and the more enlightened part of the profession, influenced, we may presume, by the inefficacy of any other means then proposed to produce a cure, betook themselves to the exhibition of this specific. JOANNES BENEDICTUS, one of the most enlightened in following this course, seems to dread lest he may incur the censure of his brethren for departing from the beaten path ; “ but let them clamour,” he continues, “ so

“ long as he has reason and experience on his side.” Influenced, perhaps, by the same feeling of prejudice as others, on account of the supposed deleterious effects of this mineral, he adds, that “ it is necessary to meet a formidable disease with a powerful though formidable remedy.”—“Is not this,” he exclaims, “ a formidable disease, and one to be dreaded, which sometimes destroys the nose, sometimes the eyes, and entirely sweeps off the organs of generation, rendering life so miserable, that persons infected with it desire rather to die than live in such a state of misery?”

Thus, notwithstanding strong prejudice, the reputation of mercury by degrees became established as a certain remedy both for controlling and curing this severe disease. But when the activity of its powers is considered, when daily experience shews, that, in the hands of the most prudent and skilful surgeons, there exist certain conditions of the constitution where its employment is attended with very formidable consequences; when in Syphilis itself it frequently ceases to do good, and, if persisted in, as there is reason to believe is too often the case, induces a state of sores and other symptoms to appearance much more malignant and uncontrollable than the original disease, it may be readily imagined what were the consequencss of the bold

and unskilful employment of mercury by rude and ignorant professors. At this time, the practice very generally inculcated was to exhibit as large a quantity of the medicine in as short a period of time as possible, so as to produce an excessive and speedy salivation ; making use at the same time of various means to excite powerfully all the other excretions, particularly that by the skin ; accordingly, it rarely happened that these ends were not all obtained in the course of a few days. In consequence of so rude and violent a mode of exhibition, many expired under the direct effects of such treatment, exhausted by excessive evacuations. Those who recovered, through strength of constitution, were left in a state of very impaired health : nor was this the worst consequence,—the cure was not always perfect, and, at no great distance of time, the same practice again came to be necessary ; and such was the horror and dread inspired by these terrible effects of mercury, that many preferred the risk of death under any other treatment, rather than submit to such a method of cure.

The picture drawn of these malignant effects is perhaps not exaggerated ; but it must be observed, that it was the practice of the irregular part of the profession, the greater number of regular practitioners retaining their fears and prejudices against the

remedy, and, although driven to the use of it, from finding every other means inadequate to cure so malignant a disease, employed it with such timid caution, and in such minute quantities, that it was found quite incapable of producing a perfect cure. Hence they gained neither credit, nor did experience gain them confidence, and the treatment of venereal complaints fell chiefly to the 'share of the less regularly bred, but bolder brethren. Many of the more enlightened physicians, however, convinced of the value of this specific, began more carefully to observe its effects, and to apply it with more method and skill, and with corresponding good results. The great object certainly still was to excite salivation, for thus it was thought the morbid poison was carried off; but they produced this effect slowly, cautiously, and with judgment, and the practice they pursued did not differ very widely from that of the present day. Thus we find the use of mercurial frictions directed to be continued during a period of three, four, or five weeks, using purgatives occasionally to prevent the salivation from taking place too rapidly. In this way, it may be presumed, they generally succeeded in radically curing the disease.

Ever since the practice followed in the administration of mercury has become regulated on sound principles, we find that its valuable properties, in

the cure of this disease, have been owned on all hands; those dreadful cases that arose from an unskilful, misunderstood, and indiscriminate employment of this powerful mineral, gradually became less frequent; men had justly taken alarm; the empiric found that he had been abusing the weapon placed in his hands; and the regular, thinking, and more cautious practitioner began to take up the arms he had been forced in too many cases to lay down. The management of this remedy now coming into better hands, sufferers under this disease allowed themselves to venture on a remedy they had too often hitherto found more dangerous than the malady for the cure of which it was used.

In the works of the most eminent masters of the Healing Art, we now find most unequivocal sentiments expressed as to how far this remedy is efficacious; and no one can read these accounts without feeling convinced, that however it might have been once abused, and however it may yet be used with a rash and ignorant hand, it still merits a praise and confidence that unhappily we cannot grant to many remedies. But, again, when, in the present day, a case is met with where mercury, instead of fulfilling our expectations in bringing about a cure, on the contrary, seems to increase the complaint, to aggravate every symptom, to produce dis-

eases in almost every tissue of the body; in such cases is the blame at once to be laid on the medicine employed, is it at once to be banished from future practice? Under too many circumstances this seems to have been done; in too many cases, warped by prejudice, or jaundiced from want of success, the practitioner has allowed himself to be biassed, and, without sufficient proof, has discarded this most valuable remedy. Are there no other circumstances to be taken into consideration in such unfortunate results? Are the patient's constitution, mode of life, or habits, not to be considered? Is dissipation not the great, the exciting cause of the mischief? Is a feeble constitution not the agent, and, in fine, has there been no mismanagement in the administration of the medicine? All these circumstances must be taken into consideration, and this consideration must not be limited to a few facts, but must be extended into a much wider circle of observation.

Thus, notwithstanding general prejudice and apprehension, this valuable remedy gradually made its way to general employment, and, during the last 300 years, has been found the only real and certain specific, to which the cure of Syphilis could be trusted. It cannot indeed be denied, as already said, that, for the greater part of this time, it continued to be

used too often unskilfully, and to be applied with unnecessary severity, and thence was frequently productive of deplorable consequences, especially when the saline preparations of so active a remedy came into use ; but every practitioner of the present day knows, that a complete and efficient course of mercury, in its mild preparations, conducted with prudence and judgment, very rarely occasions either great trouble or inconvenience. There appears, therefore, little wisdom in endeavouring to substitute other less efficient means of cure in its place. " Time," says LAGNEAU, " has reduced to their just value all other remedies. We have so mastered the effects of mercury on the economy, as to obtain from its use the best effects, without having to fear the troublesome accidents with which it was reproached, with some reason, during the 16th century."

Let it not be understood that other remedies, which may have appeared beneficial, or have been employed under that impression, are deprecated,—far otherwise. Let every nerve be strained to find other remedies ; but, at the same time, let not the only remedy we certainly possess at present, be discarded, till another is found to take its place with more advantage. The late Mr HUNTER says, " Nothing can shew more the ungrateful and unset-

“ tled mind of man, than his treatment of this me-
 “ dicine. If there be such a thing as a specific, mer-
 “ cury is one for the venereal disease ; yet man-
 “ kind are in pursuit of other specifics for this dis-
 “ ease, as if specifics were more common than dis-
 “ eases.”—“ The public,” he continues, “ have a
 “ dread in their minds of this medicine, arising
 “ from the want of knowledge of our predecessors
 “ in its administration, and many of the present
 “ age, who are equally ignorant, take advantage of
 “ this weakness. Mercury in the constitution acts
 “ on all parts of the machine, cures those that are
 “ diseased, affecting but little those that are sound.”

To this we may add the opinion of JOHN DE
 VIGO, an intelligent writer of the 16th century,
 who remarks, that he is ignorant for what reason
 physicians should so condemn the use of mercurial
 preparations in the cure of a disease so cruel, when,
 in the removal of many diseases of a more easy
 treatment, the ancients found no danger in their
 employment. It has been remarked by one author,
 speaking of the objectors to the employment of mer-
 cury, that, by giving only a partial view of one of
 the most important practical questions in the whole
 circle of physic, they have persuaded all those who
 are not competent judges, and these are not few,
 that a process, which in skilful hands is totally devoid

of danger ; and which is in general not only the most certain, but the most steady method of curing the worst and most inveterate stages of the disease, should be decried in every instance whatever ; for it has been said, with a great deal more boldness than truth, to be never necessary. This doctrine has gained ground amazingly, from that natural bias the human mind ever will have to avoid what in speculation seems, and what in fact sometimes is, a painful remedy. This practice has crept into our schools of physic, and there are many well disposed persons who believe, that it rather retards than promotes the cure of the disease. Mercury, then, appears to be the only effectual remedy which is known at the present day in Europe for true Syphilis, and very little reliance is to be placed on other remedies. These, Mr MATHIAS says, when given alone in cases purely venereal, produce not the smallest effect in removing or correcting the poison, although administered in the largest doses, and continued with the greatest care and preseverance, and that they are never given for a recent lues, where no mercury has been administered, from the full conviction that they cannot cure the disease in that state.

When we peruse the accounts of the early writers, and compare the malignant rapidity of the dis-

case, with what we observe at the present day of true Syphilis, which in general may be considered a chronic affection, and of slow progress ; and when we duely consider the history of those diseases which bear so striking a resemblance to Syphilis, both in primary and constitutional symptoms, and which have only begun to be known from the able and enlightened investigations of Dr ADAMS, Mr ABERNETHY, and others, and in which mercury is often found to be in the highest degree hurtful ; we have much reason for believing, that all these conditions were confounded by the practitioners of the 15th and 16th centuries, and even later, and we cannot therefore be surprised at the melancholy effects so often resulting from the rude and harsh application of this mineral.

From the extensive observations of Mr CAR-MICHAEL of Dublin, he was led to believe, that four out of five of those cases which commonly are reckoned venereal, and treated as such, are in fact not cases of true Syphilis, and not to be cured by mercury, but by the efforts of the constitution, aided perhaps by means of comparative simplicity ; hence, by believing in the frequent existence of these affections confounded with the true Syphilis, we may account for the high reputation so early acquired by Guaiacum and Sarsaparilla, medicines cer-

tainly and confessedly inadequate to its cure in the present day.

In order to gain a full and accurate idea of the advantages of mercury in the cure of Syphilis, we ought to possess a complete knowledge of the nature of the poison for which we are seeking an antidote. Is there but one venereal poison, or does the difference of symptoms, primary as well as secondary, depend upon a diversity of poisons? Before the discovery of America, we certainly know there existed a variety of infectious diseases of a venereal nature, and at the present time in every-day practice, we undoubtedly see a great and even marked difference in the symptoms of different cases of venereal sores:—Are these to be all referred to the same poison, or to a variety? We have our advocates for both opinions, but on both sides there seems to exist much want of proof. But certainly, without an accurate discrimination, a close and unwearied investigation of every thing connected with the disease, and with its history, in reference to climate, habit, constitution and other circumstances, we must ever be at a loss under what point of view to consider this subject. Towards the close of the 18th century, when the advanced state of every branch of medical science is considered, it might be supposed that nothing new remained to be sug-

gested, either respecting the true nature of Lues venerea, or the most proper method of curing it; yet of late years circumstances of the most interesting nature have been clearly pointed out, which tend much to change materially the views of medical men, respecting many cases which formerly were implicitly believed to be syphilitic, and were treated accordingly. The observations of the late Mr HUNTER paved the way to this important investigation, and the path he pointed out has been followed by others, but by none more successfully than Dr ADAMS and Mr ABERNETHY, in whose valuable works will be found the most ample consideration of this curious, and we may say novel subject. From the extensive experience of these eminent men, confirming the previous ideas of Mr HUNTER, we are led to believe, that the human frame is subject to a train of morbid symptoms in every respect, scarcely to be distinguished from true Syphilis in all its stages, from local ulceration on the penis to the deepest affection of the bones. Nor, do these symptoms always appear to be the effect of direct sexual intercourse, as some of the most striking and melancholy cases on record have originated from women suckling children that were supposed to be diseased, or from the transplanting of teeth, a practice at one time so preva-

lent, and which was brought into deserved disrepute by the very occurrence alluded to ; and yet in these cases, as will afterwards be mentioned, there was often no cause for suspecting the existence of a venereal taint. Since the attention of medical men has been directed to this interesting subject, by the observations of these able practitioners, confirmed by those of others, cases are daily met with tending to establish the truth of what they have asserted respecting these morbid appearances, so much so indeed, as to lead to a strong impression, that such affections are becoming much more common. No person has of late years paid more attention to this subject than Dr CARMICHAEL of Dublin ; his observations are founded upon experience and extensive Hospital practice ; and therefore merit much deference. He most deservedly finds fault with the nomenclature adopted for this interesting and abstruse subject, and which is so adapted for rendering confusion still darker. From a full investigation of the difference existing in the appearance and progress of certain symptoms, he was led to presume there existed a plurality of venereal poisons. After much consideration he was induced to divide the general expression of Venereal Disease into four varieties, viz.

1st, Papular Venereal Disease, in which he used astringent washes, venesection, antimonials, sarsaparilla, &c. ; but no mercury, except when the symptoms of iritis had disappeared, and then he found it useful in alterative doses.

2d, Pustular Venereal Disease; treatment much the same as in the last.

3d, Phagedenic Venereal Disease ; fomentations, depletion, cicuta, sarsaparilla, guaiacum, &c. ; no mercury till the ulcers in the fauces appear.

4th, Scaly Venereal Disease; full courses of mercury.

The three first varieties, then, he considers curable without the use of mercury ; the last he conceives to be the true venereal disease, requiring the use of that medicine for its cure, but which he afterwards says may be cured without its exhibition at all.

This division is not to be altogether subscribed to, and it does not appear that the difference subsisting between the three first varieties is sufficient to warrant or prove a distinction between them in nature ; all things considered, the following division into two varieties of the four of Dr CARMICHAEL seems preferable.

1st, True Syphilis, of which the first symptom is the callous ulcer, and which is cured in every case by the exhibition of mercury.—Not known in Europe till the discovery of America.

2d, What Mr ABERNETHY terms Pseudo-syphilis, and comprising the three varieties of Dr CARMICHAEL, which variety depends on the violence of the complaint, and constitution of the patient; First symptom, ulcer without indurated edges, and cured without the exhibition of mercury, but often benefited by its use in alterative doses.—Probably known before the discovery of America, and to the ancient physicians.

But Dr CARMICHAEL says, that we have no grounds for supposing that the state of the constitution can so modify morbid poisons, as to cause the same virus to produce in one person the chronic scaly Lepra, and Psoriasis, and to assume in another the decided pustular form, each pustule spreading rapidly into a deep ulcer. As facts at present stand, it does not appear that he is warranted in drawing this conclusion; and when we see the wonderful effect of constitution in diversifying disease, in all

its forms and symptoms, we are at least as much entitled, in the absence of sufficient proof, to grant as to deny the constitution this power of changing the appearance of these eruptions.

Dr ADAMS does not believe that any symptom of the true Syphilis existed in Europe before the close of the fifteenth century; but he strongly infers, that the various affections so particularly described by CELSUS as attacking the genitals (and which circumstance has led many to conclude that Syphilis actually did exist before the period mentioned) were in their nature analogous to those cases which he and others have met with and described. Dr ADAMS thinks it is not to be doubted that the apparently healthy secretions of one animal may, when applied under certain circumstances, prove poisonous to another; and he concludes, that the human frame is thus capable of generating various poisons, which, when so applied, from one individual to various parts of the body of another, as to the prepuce and glans *in coitu*,—to the nipples in suckling,—to the gums in the transplanting of teeth,—will produce foul sloughing, and phagedenic sores, which are frequently found not only to be very untractable, and difficult of cure, but to possess the power of contaminating the system, and of exciting a constitutional disease

in every respect bearing the strongest resemblance to Syphilis, exhibiting eruptions and blotches of the skin, ulcerated throat, and deep affections of the bones; and so exactly similar are all the circumstances betwixt the state of disease arising from the action of these morbid poisons upon the constitution and the true Syphilis, as to leave it beyond a doubt that they are often mistaken for each other, and that this especially happened till Dr ADAMS and Mr ABERNETHY turned the attention of medical men to the subject.

In discussing a point of so much importance, Dr ADAMS seems to lay it down as a law of the economy almost infallible, that the secondary stages of true Syphilis can only follow the true chancre, the characteristic marks of which he considers to be the thickened or hard edge and base; but he concludes, that the contamination of the system that follows the sloughing or phagedenic sores, where there exists no thickened or circumscribed edge, is not of a true syphilitic nature, however much the resemblance of symptoms might lead to such a conclusion.

Amongst the local ulcerations affecting the organs of generation, which he thinks were known to the ancients, he notices particularly an affection, which has generally been considered as venereal,

and treated accordingly,—a phagedenic or sloughing sore, attacking the inner part of the prepuce, seemingly the Malignant or Phagedenic Chancre of HOWARD and others. Of this affection, he notices different cases that got well without the use of mercury: in one of them, the symptoms were much exasperated by this remedy, and the sore only healed on discontinuing it; yet in this last case, exostosis afterwards appeared on the bones of the head and tibia, but which was also cured without the use of mercury. The whole of Dr ADAMS's experience and observations lead him decidedly to conclude, that the secondary symptoms of true Syphilis, as already stated, never follow this kind of sloughing sore, although he has found it productive of every circumstance of the most inveterate and deplorable kind, and bearing an exact resemblance to the true Syphilis, yet not to be cured by mercury. Of this he gives one very remarkable and melancholy case: The primary affection was a sloughing sore on the prepuce, attacking under circumstances very free from suspicion of syphilitic taint, which extended considerably under the full effects of mercury, and seemed only to heal upon laying that medicine aside, although the cure was particularly obstinate and tedious. The patient was soon seized with ulceration in the throat, blotches of the skin, and swelling of

the tibia, and was again subjected to a course of mercury. The symptoms at first were benefited by it, but so soon as the system was fully under its influence, every symptom became exasperated ; this continued, the bones of the nose exfoliated, as also the tibia, and finally the disease terminated in mental derangement and death. Dr ADAMS seems to think, that, from the very commencement, this was not a case of true Syphilis; that, if so, it would have yielded certainly and permanently to an adequate use of mercury ; yet, on the contrary, all the symptoms were invariably exasperated by the use of mercury, when it came to exert its full influence on the system, and only shewed a disposition to amendment on laying the remedy aside.

With respect to cases of disease from a suckled child, or transplanted tooth, many puzzling circumstances occur. In the former case, it has been on some occasions cured with mercury, and in others without it. Was the disease thus imparted from the child to the nurse in no case syphilitic? In many cases it could not be ; but still we have much reason to think that in others it was so. The true Syphilis is still to be considered as incurable without the use of mercury. Those other complaints that arise without suspicion of venereal taint, and which are so often accompanied by such a dreadful

train of symptoms, are to be considered as arising from another poison, in its nature quite different from the true syphilitic, and are curable without the administration of mercury. In the instance of the suckled child, then, those cases that were cured by its use were syphilitic, the others were not, but were of the nature of that disease so ably treated of by ABERNETHY and ADAMS.

We often meet with striking instances of the want of caution in giving an opinion, without duly weighing every circumstance, and from not paying attention to this variety of complaint; and these more than any thing tend to impress us with the value of the observations of the gentlemen just named. Those dreadful symptoms incident on the transplanting of a tooth, are, however, much more unaccountable; for we have from this cause seen all the symptoms of the true venereal disease cured by the use of mercury, where the age of the person from whom the tooth was drawn precluded, and, it may be said, rendered any chance of contamination impossible. What is to be thought of such a case? Must we suppose, that the person from whom the tooth was taken had imbibed a venereal taint from his parents, and that this taint had remained so many years concealed in the system, without manifesting itself, till transferred in part to a constitu-

tion more adapted for its ravages? This, certainly, is a subject meriting much consideration.

The opinions of Dr ADAMS have been powerfully supported by the experience of others; and the observations of Mr ABERNETHY are particularly valuable. He also considers that true Syphilis was unknown in Europe before the close of the fifteenth century; but he appears equally satisfied, that, long before this, many sores, as described by CELSUS, frequently occurred on the genitals, arising from sexual intercourse, and some of them infecting the constitution, producing secondary symptoms strikingly resembling those of true Syphilis, yet differing in their progress and means of cure. Such affections he denominates Pseudo-syphilitic. He speaks of the local affections giving rise to these as by no means unfrequent, occurring both in males and females, from the irritation of gonorrhœa, from diseases of the urethra, &c.; that they generally heal without the use of mercury, frequently without inducing any constitutional disease; and that when they do infect the constitution, the disease is not Syphilis. In confirmation of this, he relates cases, to shew that such sores took place on the glans and prepuce, but without the syphilitic character. In these, the system was liable to be contaminated by absorption from the ulcers. An in-

stance is related, where the sore was followed by bubo, sore throat, and eruptions, which were indistinguishable from similar symptoms of Syphilis, but all of which got spontaneously well. Having shewn that such sores occur now as in the time of CELSUS, he thinks it also probable, that these continuing to break out after the appearance of true lues, were confounded with the sores induced by that disease, and this, he supposes, may account for the opinions of old authors, of Syphilis getting well spontaneously, or by the administration of medicines of acknowledged inefficacy. Syphilis, he says, is unchangeable in its characters; it regularly and progressively gets worse, when no mercury is employed, is stationary during its employment, and permanently cured by an adequate affection of the system. In prosecuting his observations, he takes an opportunity of relating a very remarkable case of a student, where a local affection, from wounding the finger in opening a bubo, was followed by a sore, but without thickened edges, or other characteristics of venereal chancre. In a few weeks there appeared deep ulcers in the tonsils, and elevation in the frontal bone, such as might have been called a Corona Veneris. Mr ABERNETHY, considering this case not syphilitic, did not prescribe mercury; and the young man having gone to the

country, all the symptoms of his complaint disappeared.

In his observations upon such cases, he coincides with Dr ADAMS in thinking, that the primary sores had not the characteristic marks of the syphilitic chancre, notwithstanding the secondary symptoms often strongly resembled those of that disease; that the former are, in the greater number of cases, distinguishable from true Syphilis; the latter, from their striking resemblance, are not to be distinguished by sight, though, in general, they may be so by their progress. Thus, ulcers may appear on the velum pendulum palati, on the tonsils, edges of the tongue, inside of the lips and cheeks, and copper coloured spots over the body; by waiting and watching the progress of these, it will be found, that some of the ulcers mend spontaneously in one part, as they break out in others. In such cases, a change of air, or of other circumstances, will be found to remove all the symptoms soon without the aid of mercury.

What has just been said of the valuable remarks of these gentlemen tends strongly to prove the justice of the division above made; they agree in almost every point; they agree in thinking there is one disease curable without mercury, and another always requiring that mineral for its cure. Every

practitioner now allows, that one species of venereal disease is cured without the use of mercury. Is there an equal coincidence of opinion as to the other case, that there is another species *absolutely requiring* mercury for its cure? There is certainly not; and many men of great experience, and most deserved celebrity, hold a totally opposite opinion.

Of late years, we have seen many publications, teaching us, that every form of venereal disease is to be successfully treated without mercury. Mr ROSE, in his excellent paper on the Treatment of Syphilis without mercury, inserted in the 8th volume of the Medico-Chirurgical Transactions, is most decided upon this point; and, in support of his opinion, cites several cases of distinct primary callos ulcers, possessing all the characters of true chancre, that were cured without mercury. In the same volume, we read the following paragraph from a paper of Mr GUTHRIE:—"Every kind of ulcer
 " in the genitals, of whatever form or appearance, is
 " curable without mercury. This I consider to be
 " established as a fact, from the observation of more
 " than 500 cases which I am acquainted with, exclusive of those treated in the different regiments
 " of Guards, and which occurred in consequence of
 " promiscuous intercourse." The opinions and observations of Dr THOMSON and Mr HENNER are

also of great weight in proving that chancres are curable without mercury. In many parts of the south of Europe this medicine is never given for primary ulcers, as they are said to heal without it, and as it is not supposed to prevent, in any degree, the constitutional symptoms. With such a mass of authority one is certainly staggered; but again, in opposition to such authorities, we can produce equally powerful names. But even granting that primary ulcers were curable without mercury, the advocates of this doctrine, in some cases, recommend that medicine to ensure the system from the secondary symptoms of Syphilis. Mr GUTHRIE, with his usual candour, tells us, that the proportion of those patients treated without mercury, who were afterwards affected with constitutional symptoms, was under 1 in 10; but according to regimental returns of those cured by mercury, about 1 only in 75 was affected with secondary symptoms. A stronger circumstance has been mentioned by a friend, who was rather an advocate of the antimercurial treatment. He found, from his own experience, in a variety of cases, that the number of persons affected with secondary symptoms after the use of mercury, was to the number, where no mercury had been used, as 1 to 9; certainly an overwhelming majority. Much evidence has been produced to shew, that

many medicines besides mercury are antivenereal, such are different acids, oxymuriate of potass, guaiacum, sarsaparilla, &c. That these may have a certain influence over the syphilitic virus, we, perhaps, have not sufficient reason to deny, but then, in what manner do they possess this influence? merely in an indirect way. Mr PEARSON allows that he has seen some effect produced by these medicines, but he did not find that they eradicated the disease, they merely served as auxiliaries; and how these acids and bark do so, seems pretty evident, without ascribing to them any antivenereal qualities.

In considering the method of administering mercury, even the most strenuous advocates for its exhibition, in every stage of the venereal disease, are now convinced that certain conditions of the system frequently occur, which demand the greatest care and circumspection in entering on a free course of so active a remedy; and this condition may be accidental and temporary, not depending on scrofula, or any other defect of constitution; for it has been found, that, in the same person, and under the same state of the disease, mercury has proved, at one time, highly noxious, and at another time salutary. The condition that renders the constitution unfit for the salutary exhibition of mercury seems to be that arising from a state of considerable inflammatory

excitement ; and if this prevail, we have little chance of curing Syphilis, and run great risk of inducing very distressing symptoms, by persisting in the employment of the medicine, unless we first subdue the increased action of the system. From the imprudent employment of mercury, during any state of greatly increased action, brought on by cold or other causes, may be traced that distressing train of symptoms so fully treated of by Mr MATHIAS, where the mercury ceases to act as a remedy, and produces a specific action, differing from all its other operations, having in itself the power of suppressing, but not curing the venereal disease ; regular and uniform in its progress and termination, according to Mr MATHIAS, dissimilar to other morbid irritations, but at the commencement very like the venereal disease. This author, who has detailed so fully the malignant effects of mercury, under certain circumstances, asserts, that there is no antidote for the venereal disease but mercury, and that it is the only remedy to be depended on for a cure.

The action of mercury, upon the system, is evidently that of a powerful stimulant ; it increases and accelerates the action of the heart and arteries ; promotes all the secretions, and produces all the other circumstances that mark general excitement. It is chiefly in long continued and large courses of mer-

cury, for the cure of Lues venerea, that this state of morbid action arises in the system denominated by Mr MATHIAS the Mercurial Disease : he remarks, that it generally commences during the course. The exciting causes of this very distressing state of morbid action of the system, according to him, are a faulty manner of conducting a mercurial course ; the frequent use of the saline preparations of mercury ; the topical use of stimulating applications to venereal sores ; the failure of its proper action on the mouth and salivary glands ; the exposure to cold and wet during the use of mercury. If mercury, injudiciously employed in the treatment of venereal complaints, so readily and frequently excites such morbid action in the system, it may serve to explain certain circumstances connected with the history of the disease. A belief by no means unfrequent prevails, that Syphilis has been gradually becoming a milder disease, and one of easier cure. It is certain, that those severe cases of Phagedenic Bubo, and other malignant sores, with inveterate affections of the bones arising from the infection, are not so often met with now as formerly ; but possibly this arises from a more correct knowledge of the effects of mercury, and consequently a more skilful and judicious application of it. Those severe and protracted salivations considered necessary by many sur-

geons, so late as the time of Mr HOWARD, are rarely, if ever, supposed to be necessary, even in the severest attacks, which are found to be readily cured by more gentle, and we may almost say alterative courses.

Mr GUTHRIE says, that all the symptoms of the secondary disease in his cases were mild, and that in only two instances were the bones affected ; and Mr ROSE says it is now generally admitted, that the majority, and certainly by far the most serious diseases of the bones, as well as many other most distressing symptoms which are met with in all these diseases, are to be attributed to the injurious or excessive use of that remedy. How many shocking cases have been brought forward, as arising from the administration of this powerful mineral, how often have we heard of mercurial poison causing excruciating pains, swelling and destruction of the bones ; but will it not strike one as very singular, that similar symptoms do not arise from that medicine, when most profusely exhibited in liver diseases, and other complaints ? It is not, however, to be denied, that mercury will produce very urgent and painful symptoms ; but when it does so, it is under peculiar circumstances, and which, perhaps, would never occur, if the medicine were properly and carefully administered. It is a fact well ascertained,

that, in general, hospital patients recover sooner from venereal complaints than private patients, where the treatment had been the same; the explanation is evident,—the difference depends on the state of rest, equality of temperature, temperance of living, and other circumstances. In private practice, how often have we to find fault with patients for living intemperately, and braving all the inclemencies of the seasons of this changeful clime? Such a manner of life must undoubtedly have a bad effect on the disease itself, and most undoubtedly a great one on the benefit to be derived from a mercurial course. Dr CARMICHAEL seems deeply impressed with the probability of this being the case; and he gives his opinion pretty strongly in the following passage: “ If, however, it should be deemed
 “ advisable to direct mercury for this or any other
 “ form of the venereal disease, confinement ought
 “ to be insisted on as a *sine qua non*; and if the
 “ patient refuse to comply with our injunctions in
 “ this particular, it is far better, in my judgment,
 “ to interdict the exhibition of that medicine altogether; and this prohibition I would almost be
 “ inclined to extend to Syphilis itself, although, so
 “ far as I have yet been able to judge, incurable
 “ without mercury.”

There is a particular affection connected with Syphilis, which has been much argued on ; it is that peculiar state of inflammation in the eye, named from the part it attacks Iritis. Mr TRAVERS observes, that the occurrence of this disease, during the use of mercury, is so well established, and familiar a fact among persons who see much of ophthalmic diseases, that their first inquiry of a patient labouring under inflammation of the iris, is not whether he has recently contracted Syphilis, but whether he has been taking mercury. “ It appears to “ me impossible,” he says, “ to pronounce whether “ the iritis, so frequently presented, after sores on the “ genitals, and accompanied by eruptions, is the effect of a morbid poison, or of the mercurial poison ; or, thirdly, The casual effects of exposure to “ an exciting cause in a state of predisposition from “ the mercurial impregnation of the system.” Many men of great name believe this disease to be mercurial, but the evidence in favour of its not being so is very strong. Thus, in the first place, mercury seems capable of curing iritis from whatever cause it arises, though not absolutely necessary to its cure, as would appear from several cases narrated by Dr THOMSON, in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, No. 53. Secondly, Dr FARRE says, in his letter to Mr TRAVERS, “ I have always regarded the

“mercurial action as one of the most effectual means
 “of arresting the disorganising process of adhesive
 “inflammation, whether of the iris, or any other
 “texture of the body.” Thirdly, Iritis does not
 arise from a long exhibition of mercury for a disease
 not venereal; and lastly, and decisively, we know
 that this disease has been frequently observed in
 cases where no mercury had ever been used.