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9

ON THE CURE OF
EPILEPSY BY THE COTYLEDON UMBILICUS,

By **THOMAS SALTER, Esq., F.L.S., F.R.C.S.**

Fellow of the Royal Medical and Chirurgical Society.

[From the "LONDON MEDICAL GAZETTE," March 2nd, 1849.]

FOR a disease so obscure and intractable, and hitherto so little amenable to treatment, as epilepsy, no apology is required for suggesting a new remedy, even though that remedy may not be sustained by any great weight of testimony to recommend its employment. I never thought it an illusion to suppose that an agent might some day be discovered, to whose influence this distressing malady might yield.

The pathology of the disease, so far as it is understood, may be said to encourage the hope that this will be the case. Independently of those occasional attacks of sympathetic epilepsy, universally allowed to be functional, there are reasons for believing that many of the more serious cases, which end in incurable disease, are in their commencement functional also, but arising from some peculiar temporary condition of the nervous centres, and belong to that division of the nervous disorder which has aptly been called centric.

If epilepsy is ever to be successfully combated it is reasonable to suppose that the greatest chance of success will be afforded, ere repeated attacks, arising from the peculiar state of the nervous centres alluded to, have produced those organic changes so commonly the result of a long continuance of the malady. For epilepsy, associated with some of these organic lesions, it would be chimerical to imagine that a remedy will ever be found; and it is with no overweening confidence that I venture to direct the attention of the profession to the one employed in the case I am now about to relate, but which is confidently believed by a patient and relative of my own, to have been the means of her restoration to health. This remedy is the expressed juice of the Cotyledon umbilicus.

Should your numerous readers think it worth while to make a trial of it, they may be assured that it will do their patients no harm, and the mere possibility of good accruing from its employment in a malady for the most part hitherto so hopeless, will, I have no doubt, with many, be a sufficient incentive to induce them to put it to the test of experiment.

Miss G——, the lady whose case is here referred to, is now 28 years of age. She was attacked with epilepsy, when on a visit to a relative in town, about fourteen years since. Her parents were both healthy persons, and it is not known that any member of either family suffered from the disease. She is of middle stature, fair complexion, somewhat stoutly made, and previous to her illness was of a lively and cheerful disposition, and in the uniform enjoyment of good health.



The relative with whom she was staying being an eminent metropolitan surgeon, she had every advantage that medical skill and experience could afford her. Then, and subsequently, physicians of the highest character have been consulted on her case, and various modes of treatment have at different times been put in force, but all alike failing to produce any good result. The paroxysms continued to return at intervals, varying but little, from a month to six weeks, (but they occasionally occurred at the intervals of a week or fortnight) for a period of twelve years. At the end of this time she was strongly urged to try as a remedy the *Cotyledon umbilicus*, by a person who stated that it had proved a cure in several similar instances of disease. Accordingly, two teaspoonfuls of the expressed juice were taken two or three times in the day, and this treatment has been persevered in up to the present time, during those seasons of the year in which the plant could be procured, from early in the spring till late in the autumn. From the time the patient commenced the use of this remedy she has had no return of the disease, (though up to that time it had continued with undiminished violence), not a single paroxysm having since taken place; and with the loss of the fits every vestige of disease, both physical and moral, has disappeared. If this remarkable effect can fairly be ascribed to the means employed, it would be impossible to find stronger testimony for the use of any medicine whatever. There are no reasons for supposing that the happy change in the patient's circumstances was brought about by any other agency; her habits and mode of living were previously fixed, and no change was made in them at this time; they were always remarkably regular and uniform, and have gone on to the present moment without any interruption or variety. No medicine of any sort has been taken since the juice of the *Cotyledon* was first resorted to. To suppose that the termination of the disease on taking the *Cotyledon* was a mere coincidence, is a supposition beyond the ordinary course of probabilities, more especially as this was just one of those cases not likely to cease spontaneously, or to be cured by the unassisted operations of nature. It had existed twelve years, and might therefore, be thought to have established itself by habit; but there were strong grounds for believing that it had gone further than this, for it had produced some of these effects which we are wont to consider as the offspring of organic change. Her complexion, from having been fair and ruddy, had become sallow and opaque; she had also lost much flesh; the memory had become very defective, and she often expressed herself with incoherence; the temper, also, from having been remarkably amiable, was irresistible and uncertain.

The *Cotyledon umbilicus* is stated by Withering to be a rare plant: its common habitation would appear to be that of old walls and rocks, but it grows abundantly in this neighbourhood on dry sandy banks. For the information of those unacquainted with the plant. I would add that in the Linnæan arrangement it belongs to the class Decandria, and order Pentagynia, but in the natural classification it will be found under the order Crassulaceæ. It is

about six inches high : the leaves are succulent, fleshy, and peltate* : it flowers in June and July, in a long spike of blossoms, accumulated on one perpendicular flower stalk ; the corolla is bell-shaped, and of a pale yellow color ; the stem or flower stalk is somewhat purplish, with a few small leaves at its lower part. At the time of flowering the leaves become thin and shrivelled, from yielding their juice to the stem and flowers.

The plant may be used as long as the leaves remain green and succulent, and every part of it be employed for the expression of the juice, with which the leaves, however, are the most abundantly supplied.

The cotyledon is closely allied to the sempervivum and sedums, which also belong to the order Carssulaceæ, and though now forgotten or obsolete as medicines, all three had at one period some reputation both as internal and external remedies.

The above paper was written about four years since, with the intention of publication, but it was thought proper to defer it for a time, with the view of collecting further testimony to the utility of the plant in the disease in question.

The harrassing and anxious duties of an extensive country practice have prevented my paying that attention to the subject I would have desired, however, I have great pleasure in being now able to communicate some additional evidence to support the character of the Cotyledon umbilicus, as a remedy for epilepsy, which Miss G—'s case is so calculated to establish. Three other case of cure have since come to my knowledge, one of which was communicated by my much esteemed and lamented friend, the late John Morgan, Esq., of Guy's Hospital.

I have also been made acquainted with several other cases which have been much benefitted by it, and in a shape admitting no doubt as to their correctness. My friend Dr. Bullar, of Southampton, who was informed by my son of Miss G—'s case, tells me that he has tried it pretty extensively, with great success.

The lady who recommended the Cotyledon umbilicus to Miss G—, first became acquainted with the remedy by reading an article in an old number of the American Magazine, said to be written by the Rev. John Wesley. This person was in the habit of advising the use of the cotyledon, and also of relating several cases much benefitted by its employment, especially that of a female in the workhouse of Midsummer—Norton, who used to have epilepsy very badly, and who dislocated her shoulder every time she had a fit, was so much restored as to be able to leave the establishment and go to service. Miss G—, the lady whose case originated this

* In collecting the leaves of the Cotyledon umbilicus care should be taken not to confound it with an umbelliferous plant, the Marsh Pennywort (HYDROCOTYLE VULGARIS), which it somewhat resembles ; I have known the mistake occur more than once. A view of the entire plant, and a knowledge of the locality in which it grows—the Cotyledon always being found in very dry, and the Hydrocotyle in moist places—will be conclusive.

communication, continues to the present time in good health, and has had no return of her complaint.*

Poole, February 10th, 1849.

THE USE OF THE COTYLEDON UMBILICUS IN EPILEPSY.

May 14th, 1849.

SIR,—As you did me the favour to publish my short paper on the “Cure of Epilepsy by the Cotyledon Umbilicus;” and having had numerous applications from medical men and others in different parts of the country, making inquiries where the plant or juice can be obtained, I thought you might not object to do me the additional favour of inserting this note in the next number of your journal, informing the profession that a fluid extract of the plant, prepared in every way to my satisfaction, may be obtained of Mr. Hooper,† the operative chemist, which, as far as I can judge, appears to possess all the properties of the fresh juice in a concentrated form; and I should imagine that its medicinal qualities remain the same.

I am informed by Mr. Hooper, that six pounds of the plant yielded two pints and a quarter of the fresh juice, and this was reduced by the process of inspissation to two ounces and six drachms. Now it will be found by calculation, that the dose of the fresh juice, which is one ounce—for I now give more than I did at first—is equalled by a little more than twenty-seven minims of this prepared extract. The doses may be therefore thus stated:—

Fresh juice, one ounce twice daily.

Hooper's inspissated juice, half a drachm.

I avail myself of the present opportunity to state that this is the best time to collect the plant, as it is shortly about to flower, and the juices are richest.

For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with the cotyledon, I would state that a good figure of it, as it appears in June and July when in flower, has been published in the number of the *Pharmaceutical Journal* for this month.—I am, sir,

Your obedient servant,

Poole, May 2, 1849.

THOMAS SALTER.

* My son, Mr. James Salter (at present House Surgeon to King's College Hospital,) made, some time since, an analysis of the plant, and he found that it contained, besides LIGNINE, CELLULOSE, FECULA, and WATER, the latter in very large quantity, TANNIC and GALLIC ACIDS, the former most abundant in the root and the latter in the stem; the expressed juice has an acid reaction, probably from FREE MALIC ACID, which is abundant in all the Crassulaceæ; it also contains a good deal of BASSORIN. The ashes consist of ALKALINE CHLORIDES and CARBONATES, and much CARBONATE OF LIME, which latter exists probably as a malate previous to incineration.

But the most interesting substance disclosed by this analysis, was a body which functioned as an organic base, probably an ALKALOID, though its reaction on turmeric paper was not clearly shewn; it saturated acids, which dissolved it, and it was thrown down by alkalies; in combination with acids it gave indication of crystalline structure. This substance was never obtained in a state of purity, and when calcined, it always yielded an ash of lime—about 7 per cent. This body requires further examination.

† MR. HOOPER'S address is 7, PALL MALL EAST, LONDON.

[From the "LONDON MEDICAL GAZETTE," June 14, 1850.]

A considerable time has now elapsed since you did me the favor to publish my paper on the employment of the juice of the Cotyledon Umbilicus for the cure of epilepsy.

From enquiries that have been addressed to me on the subject by professional men in different parts of the country, I have reason to believe that it is pretty extensively used; and, in the opinion of some of my professional friends who have employed it, it is thought to possess decided anti-epileptic virtues.

In venturing to introduce this new remedy to the attention of the profession, I was desirous to speak of it modestly, and as a medicine yet to be tried. Still, my own experience of it, at that time was such as strongly to impress on my own mind the opinion that it was likely to prove a remedy of considerable value. At any rate, I felt justified in recommending a trial of it to my professional brethren.

Notwithstanding the present advanced state of anatomical, physiological, and pathological science, epilepsy is still an obscure and occult disease; as indeed, are most of the affections of the nervous centres. We know, indeed, many of its subordinate and exciting causes, some of which are widely different in their nature, but we are yet unacquainted with its primary or essential cause: hence our treatment remains to a considerable extent empirical. In these difficult circumstances it would be unreasonable as well as unphilosophical to expect always to succeed in its cure: a moderate amount of success must be considered a great boon. Many cases, I have no doubt, will prove, from their nature, incurable,—such as, from long continuance or severity of the disease, have led to much organic change, or such as arise from the continued operation of an exciting cause in itself incapable of being removed.

I have much pleasure, however, in being able to add that I have received accounts of its usefulness from others, and it affords me still greater pleasure to forward to you the two accompanying successful cases, as having occurred in my own practice since my last communication to you. With respect to cotyledon itself, I am still in the habit of recommending the fresh expressed juice where it can be obtained; but as this is out of the reach of many persons, and of all for at least six months in the year, I avail myself of this opportunity to say, that I believe the liquid concentrated extract prepared by Mr. Hooper is of equal value.

In concluding this communication, I think it right to observe that I have uniformly recommended that great attention should be paid to the general health; and I have been in the habit of laying down a system of dietetics and exercise in accordance with the physical condition of the patient. With few exceptions, I have thought it right to recommend the disuse of fermented liquors, and I have advised my patients to employ tepid sponging during the winter months, and cold sponging, or the shower bath, in the summer.

From the advantage that might be expected from sustaining a proper temperature upon the surface of the body, and preventing

congestion of the vital organs, more especially of the brain, I have also deemed it important to attend to the subject of clothing: my patients have therefore been desired to wear flannel next to the skin. I have reason to believe that the patient whose case is the second here narrated paid great attention to these regulations, but I have not the same reasons for thinking that in the case of Lamport they were much observed. I have therefore concluded that the advantage obtained by him may be considered as due to the cotyledon alone.

CASE I.—Joseph Lamport applied to me on the 25th of October, 1849, for the cure of epilepsy. He is a stout, well-made young man, of a florid complexion, 22 years of age, five feet ten inches high, by occupation a gardener. He has been the subject of epilepsy for the last five years: his fits are of frequent occurrence: they sometimes take place as often as twice in the day: a month appears to have been the longest interval that he has experienced between the attacks, but of late they have been more frequent than formerly. He states that they come on without any warning; he is insensible from ten minutes to half an hour: on recovering, he is sometimes sick and vomits, and suffers from weakness and headache, but in a few hours he feels quite well again. His appetite is good, bowels regular, and pulse natural. He was directed to take one drachm of Hooper's fluid extract of Cotyledon in water twice a day, and an occasional dose of compound rhubarb pill if the bowels required it. He has continued the medicine pretty regularly up to the present time (May 7th). The benefit he experienced was strikingly marked from his first taking it. He has had no fit for the last three months, and is in every respect at the present time quite well.

CASE II.—On the 21st of October, 1849, I was consulted by a gentleman of about 20 years of age, who had been for some time the subject of epilepsy; but, from the fits hitherto occurring in the night, it was not known precisely how long he might have laboured under the disease. However, about six months since, previous to my seeing him, from the attacks occasionally occurring in the day-time, the complaint was detected. His parents had, however, for a long while suspected that something was the matter, from his sometimes not rising at the usual hour in the morning, and afterwards from his appearing dull and stupid during the day. Moreover, he had often been heard to make strange noises in the night; but, as he had been known to suffer from what is called nightmare, the circumstance did not give rise to the suspicion that he was affected with any serious disorder. This being once ascertained, his bed-room was changed, so that he might be within hearing of his mother.

The intervals between the attacks after this period varied from two to three or four weeks. Occasionally he had only one fit: at other times he would have four or five in succession in the course of one night. I now found on enquiry that he generally knew when the attacks were about to come on, from a peculiar feeling in his left arm and hand which took place the day previous.

This was an uneasiness, scarcely amounting to pain, yet clearly allied to it: there was a feeling of stiffness, and an awkward inconvenience when it was moved; a crampy feeling, with occasional twitches of the muscles, and contraction of the fingers, together with some numbness; but he was not aware of any *aura* before the attack. The patient was of small stature, of a nervous and irritable temperament, and considered to be weakly rather than otherwise, but had, notwithstanding, enjoyed good health. The appetite was good; the bowels disposed to constipation. Before he was put upon a regular course of medicine for the relief of the epilepsy, I thought it right, in the first place, to clear the bowels, and to observe if any common source of irritation existed that might be thought directly or indirectly to have occasioned the fits. He was ordered to take a sufficient quantity of compound rhubarb pill to keep up a full action on the bowels, and to leave off suppers, of which he was accustomed to partake largely. But as the fits continued, and it was suggested that he might possibly have worms, he took at intervals of two or three days several doses of turpentine at night, followed by castor oil in the morning, and on one occasion a large lumbricus was passed. But this treatment had no effect in diminishing the paroxysms; on the contrary, they were thought to be decidedly more violent, particularly on one occasion,—the day following the use of the turpentine. On April 21st he was put upon the use of the cotyledon, and ordered to take a fluid ounce of the recent expressed juice of the plant twice daily. In the month of June, from the scarcity of the plant, he commenced the concentrated extract, as prepared by Mr. Hooper, which he continued up to September the 9th, about which time the fits left him, and have not since occurred, having previously gradually declined in frequency and severity. He continues now in good health; but, by his own desire, he still takes the cotyledon as a prophylactic.

Poole, May 18, 1850.

Mr. Hooper has much pleasure in stating that he can now supply orders generally for the inspissated juice of *Cotyledon Umbilicus*, as prepared by him for Mr. Salter.

The many satisfactory accounts he has received of it has induced him to pay great attention to its collection and preparation. He cautions medical men and others against the use of worthless preparations passed off for his, and prepared for Mr. Salter, &c. Mr. Hooper has instructions to state, that Mr. Salter never used any but what he has obtained from him, and which he finds to possess the properties of the fresh juice.

H O O P E R, *Operative Chemist,*

7, Pall Mall East, and 55, Grosvenor Street, London.

This was an unusual remedy, and it was not
likely to be: there was a feeling of tightness, and an upward in-
crease when it was moved; a strong feeling, with occasional
twinges of the muscles, and contraction of the fingers, together
with some numbness; but he was not aware of any other
the attack. The patient was of small stature of a nervous and
irritable temper, and considered to be weakly rather than
otherwise, but had notwithstanding enjoyed good health. The
operation was good; the bowels disposed to constipation. There
was no more a regular course of medicine for the relief of the
operation, though it might, in the first place, to clear the bowels,
and to observe if any common source of irritation existed that
might be likely to begeth or to begeth to have occasioned the fit.
He was ordered to take a solid quantity of a purgative
to keep up a full action on the bowels, and to have of
the fit occasional, and it was suggested that he might possibly
have worse, he took at intervals of two or three days several
doses of purgative at night, followed by castor oil in the morn-
ing, and on one occasion a large quantity was used. But this
treatment had no effect in diminishing the paroxysms; on the
contrary, they were thought to be decidedly more violent, and
occasionally on one occasion—the day following the use of the
purgative. On April 21st he was put on the use of the colicid,
and ordered to take a fluid ounce of the tincture expressed juice of
the plant twice daily. In the month of June, from the scarcity
of the plant, he commenced the concentrated extract, as prepared
by Mr. Hooper, which he continued up to September the 6th,
about which time the fit left him, and has not since occurred,
having previously gradually declined in its frequency and severity.
He remains now in good health; but, by his own desire, he still
takes the colicid as a prophylactic.

London, May 18, 1820.

Mr. Hooper has much pleasure in stating that he can now sup-
ply the medicine generally for the medicinal juice of *Corydalis Utricu-*
lata, as prepared by him & Mr. Satter.
The many satisfactory accounts he has received of its beneficial
effect, have drawn his attention to its collection and preparation. He
cautions medical men and others against the use of worthless pre-
parations passed off for his, and prepared for Mr. Satter, for Mr.
Hooper has instructions to state that Mr. Satter never used any
but what he has obtained from him, and which he had to possess
the properties of the fresh juice.

H O O P E R, Operative Chemist,

7, Pall Mall East, and 55, Grosvenor Street, London.