

MEDICAL DIFFICULTIES.

BY WM. A. ALCOTT, M. D.

Medical men, like men of other professions, have their difficulties. They have not always smooth sailing, unembarrassed by winds, breakers or tides, which are unfavorable.

Here is a tobacco-chewing or smoking patient. Perhaps he has used his tobacco forty years, till he is fairly mithsidated by it.* Had you called on him a few days before he called on *you*, and after kindly inquiring about his health, had you suggested, with ever so much modesty and moderation, the necessity of a change in his habits, he would doubtless have told you sarcastically, "Oh, I have used the 'poisonous creature' half a life-time, and am not injured by it yet." And had you labored with him two hours, or even a whole day, to convince of him of his error, your labor might have been wholly in vain. But now he is sick; not merely a little sick, but severely so. His nervous system is prostrated, as well as his muscular powers. Does he know how much greater the prostration is for having benumbed his nervous system with a filthy narcotic, every day, for one hundred and fifty thousand successive days? There is great irritation and tenderness about the region of the liver; with seasons of nausea, and perhaps vomiting; does he know how much more severe his bilious affection is, in consequence of having narcotized his system daily for almost half a century? Constipation, alternated, perhaps, with occasional diarrhœa, is another troublesome symptom; does he know how much of this is owing to his long use of tobacco? In short, he has been using medicine daily—for if tobacco is not a medicine, pray what is it?—for forty years or more; and now does he expect other medicine, such as his physician may think it needful to prescribe, will have its wonted effect? Is there no danger of having his disease aggravated, rather than relieved, by the administration of new medicine? Does he not know that no physician in the world, however skilful he may be, can so apportion his doses to the case of an individual who has, for many long years, been dosing or drugging himself, till he has either become mithsidated, or has passed beyond the mount of mithsidation to the gulf of cachexy or general prostration and helplessness, which lies beyond it? And does he not know—for if not, his physician, if he is a man who is worthy of the name, knows it quite too well—that all active medicine is like a sword with two edges, which cannot be used in the vital domain without doing execution in some way? for if it does not cut in one direction, it does in another.

Here is a patient who has used alcohol all his life. Perhaps, indeed, that life is as yet but a short one. He is hardly thirty-five years of age; yet his constitution is as much impaired as that of many people

* For the benefit of the non-professional and non-classical reader, it may be needful to observe that Mithsidates, king of Pontus, is said to have taken poison from day to day, in small, but constantly increasing quantities, till he became so hardened against its influence as to be proof against that death from hemlock, which was then so customary in high life. We are not told, however, what were the remote effects on his system, or on those who came after him.