

Both, indeed, appeal to experience to prove the justice of their principles, and seem entirely to forget that while the propriety of their practice as applied to particular cases remains unimpeached, the very nature of the diseases themselves may have been changed. A summary view of the character assumed by diseases, during the last twenty years, both in England and in other countries, will perhaps afford a solution of this question. About the end of the last, and during the first three or four years of the present century, the proportion of nervous fevers to other diseases, was as one to eighteen in Plymouth. (Woolcomlie), as one to sixteen in London, (Willan), as one to ten in Newcastle, (Clark), and in Liverpool, one to five, (Currie). Nor was this scourge of mankind less severely felt on the Continent, where typhus, and the diseases closely allied to it, committed extensive devastations, particularly during the epidemics of Erlangen, Jena, Kiel, Ratisbon, and Vienna; Cadiz and Seville were at the same time depopulated by yellow fever, and Europe in general suffered much from repeated visitations of the influenza. An inclination to a sudden sinking of the vital powers, unpreceded by violent reaction, and unaccompanied by any marked symptoms of a gastric or inflammatory nature, constituted at that period the characteristic form of acute diseases, which were always preceded and attended by an unaccountable degree of debility. Stimulating and tonic medicines obtained, therefore, much celebrity; and every physician who practised during that period, attests the injurious or even fatal effects which were produced by venesection and other depletory measures. What is still more remarkable, an epidemic typhoid pneumonia, prevailed in many parts of Germany during the years 1800-1, 2, in which the speedy production of an inflammatory state by means of bark and ether, was the only method which afforded a chance of recovery. These facts must impress every impartial mind with the conviction, that the constitution of diseases has undergone much alteration since that period, and explain why physicians did not then employ copious venesections, but were obliged to content themselves with ordinary cold affusions, acids and mercury.

The reign of typhus appears to have ceased with the influenza of 1804, when a new constitution began—at first more remarkable for the disappearance of nervous fevers and other contagious disorders, than for any peculiar character of its own. Catarrhal and rheumatic complaints, partly attributable to the weather, prevailed for some time, and fevers of an intermitting type became more frequent, forming an evident transition from the purely typhus constitution to that of the vascular excitement of the following years. Some remnant of the typhus constitution was indeed still perceptible in the pectoral complaints which prevailed in London during the winter of 1804-5, and were attended with remarkable debility, requiring the greatest prudence in the use of the lancet; venesection was indeed often entirely contra-indicated, and Bateman says, that it sometimes even proved fatal. The constitution, however, soon developed itself more decidedly, becoming more universally diffused, and obliged physicians

to relinquish their former plan of treatment, and adopt other measures. Derangement of the alimentary canal became its prominent feature in the summer and autumn of 1804, and diarrhœa, terminating in dysentery, was often met with.

This constitution suffered, indeed, a check from the cold of 1805, but it increased again during the following years, and afterwards became still more prevalent, manifesting itself by headache, a bitter taste of the mouth, a loaded yellow tongue, irregularity of the bowels, nausea, and anorexia. The utility of purgatives became now so obvious, that Hamilton's doctrines soon obtained as much celebrity as had been before engaged by the stimulating system. The nervous fever in Nottingham in 1807, the dysentery in London in 1808, the scarlatina in Edinburgh in 1805, and the measles in the same place in 1808, all required the purgative plan of treatment, and calomel became the favourite cathartic. The advantage thus derived from the purgative plan of treatment is abundantly testified by the writers of that period. This gastric constitution appeared on the continent, but its progress was less rapid there than in England, where the inhabitants live in a manner calculated to augment or even to produce a tendency to gastric diseases. There were likewise other circumstances which impeded the formation of this constitution on the continent. Thus in Germany, the purely nervous constitution had scarcely yielded to catarrhal and rheumatic affections, when it was again revived in that unhappy country by the political occurrences of 1805-6-7,—typhus seldom, however, assumed the character of exquisite, for the rheumatic and catarrhal affections with which it was mixed partook somewhat of a gastric nature, as was proved by the great benefit derived from emetics and calomel. This appears in accordance with the fact that the gastric constitution was more fully developed where the ravages of war had not extended, although it required less attention in the treatment than rheumatic symptoms, then likewise prevalent. Thus the agues which were common at Tubingen, about the end of 1806, commenced, in general, with pain in the belly, vomiting, and irregularity of the bowels, a yellow furred tongue, headache, and tumors of the parotids were of frequent occurrence, and, in general, gastric symptoms were by no means rare. These symptoms gradually gained ground, and the reputation of ipecacuanha and cathartics increased in the same proportion. At Ratisbon the constitution was remarkably gastric in the autumn of 1809; and a nervous fever prevailed at Weimar, in 1809-10, which was accompanied by a bitter taste in the mouth, diarrhœa, nausea, and vertigo. Acute catharsis was injurious in this epidemic, but much benefit resulted from the exhibition of castor oil. The advantages, derived about the same time in Berlin from the treatment of fevers by emetics and cooling purgatives, proved that they were there also complicated with gastric derangement,

To be continued.