

## PRACTICE OF MEDICINE AND PATHOLOGY.

## A TREATMENT OF INSANITY AND NERVOUS EXCITEMENT.

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[Dr. J. Williams strongly recommends the use of narcotics and other remedies calculated to produce sleep, not only in order to put off, but even to cure an attack of mania. He observes that]—

Some of the mildest cases which occur, where there is preternatural excitement with vigilania, are those of persons having over-fatigued the mental powers by continued application, more especially if confined to one subject; and the ill-effects seem to be produced more frequently in those whose hopes and fears, are in addition adding to the excitement, as is often noticed in junior barristers and students at our universities.

Now, in such instances, if a young man apply early, the case is usually cured very rapidly, sometimes even within twenty-four hours; if passed over for a few days, recovery is retarded, and if totally neglected, phrenitis or mania by no means unfrequently ensues. In such cases there is a great action, which is but too frequently mistaken for power; the pulse is quick, perhaps 100, 120, or even more, tongue white, face flushed, throbbing and heat of the temples, rolling, sparkling, and injected eye, rapidity of speech; and everything showing great excitement; now this description is not sufficient to guide us as to the treatment, for all these symptoms may depend on excessive nervous irritation, but more attention must be given to the pulse for if the pulse, in addition to being quick, is also full, hard, and bounding, and if the skin is dry and hot, then the abstraction of blood, both general and local, will usually be necessary, and often within an hour or two after depletion, the skin becomes moist, and the patient falls asleep. But what I am the more anxious to particularize, is the opposite condition, where bleeding is unnecessary and unsafe. Supposing the pulse to be quick, soft, and fluttering, weak or intermittent, the skin moist and clammy, and yet the excitement just as decided as in the other case, to bleed here is most improper, and many cases of insanity have arisen from such practice. The judicious administration of a narcotic will frequently act as a charm, and we have often found the following prescription very useful:—

R. Tr. Hyoscyami m xxx.; Tr. Humuli ʒij; Camphora gr. v. ad. x. aut. xv.; Syr. Auranti ʒii; Mist. Camphora ʒvj.; M. et fiat hustus, h. s. s.

This has often caused calm and refreshing sleep; and the patient, who has previously passed two or three nights with great restlessness and watching, feels himself invigorated, and receives the medical attendant with the greatest gratitude.

[Amongst the remedies for procuring sleep, Dr. Williams notices bleeding. This should not be adopted, unless demanded by very urgent symptoms, lest the constitution should not be able to rally. He remarks here, that]—

A very efficient way of relieving head symptoms, when dependant on visceral congestion, more especially of the liver, is applying leeches to the rectum, and if considered necessary, subsequently placing the patient in a warm bath; a large quantity of blood may be lost in this way without producing much prostration. Many cases of insanity arise from extreme irritability, dependent on prostrated power; and to support this power by good nutritious food, and sometimes even with brandy and wine, at the same time soothing the system by procuring refreshing sleep at night by morphia; will speedily evidence the advantages of such treatment.

The great error originally was, allowing the powers to sink; it is of the greatest importance that these powers should be supported—the nervous excitation must be calm-

ed. In these cases, mistakes are but too frequently made; irritation is confounded with inflammation. The maxims so ably taught by Mr. Travers are forgotten; the object being to calm the action, not to diminish the power—this nervous power being much more easily depressed than raised. Should this advice be neglected, and bleeding be ordered, stupor, or coma, or confirmed mania may be the consequence. In many cases where there is the most ferocious delirium with great muscular power, yet where the pulse is very quick, weak, and fluttering, even the slightest depletion at once knocks down the powers; and even if the patient should again rally, there is great danger of his becoming idiotic. As Dr. Marshall Hall has so truly stated—under irritation, exhaustion is sooner produced than in health; while under inflammation, the system bears loss of blood, with less exhaustion than in health.

When a patient is in a highly excited state from loss of blood, a full dose of opium is the best medicine we can employ, and it is often successfully prescribed in that highly nervous state so closely resembling mania; and if, when that excessive restlessness occurs which precedes puerperal mania, a full dose of opium be given, such as 1 gr., 1½ gr., or 2 grs., this formidable disease may be often prevented, and as a prophylactic, opium may be considered invaluable. In some instances Dover's powder, or morphia, may be preferred; but generally the opium itself is more valuable in these cases of exhaustion. Anæmia of the brain, so strongly pointed out by Dr. G. Burrows, has been but too little regarded until lately. Many cases where there is great action, require stimulants and support; thus, in the case of a young man, æt. 44, [?] mentioned by Abercrombie, there was at first great depression, want of sleep, with incessant talking: reaction took place, excitement increased, pulse 160, continued talking, and obstinate vigilania; yet stimulants were here required, as after death no traces of inflammation could be found.

[Purgatives may procure sleep, by diminishing vascular action, where bleeding is inadmissible. Narcotics, when given in insanity to procure sleep, should be administered in full doses. Dr. Williams says on this point]—

It is impossible to limit the extent to which opium may be required; but in stating that a full dose is necessary, from two to five grains may be considered a large dose for most constitutions; where habit has impaired its effect, one and even two drachms of solid opium have been taken in a very limited period. Pinel knew 120 grains of opium given in one dose to a patient suffering with cancer of the uterus; and I have seen a wine-glassful of laudanum taken at a draught, and this has been repeated three times daily for months—such cases, however, necessarily form the exception.

Dr. Burrows has never ventured beyond five grains, and generally begins with three grains, repeats one grain every two or three hours, never allowing it to exceed twelve grains, when, if sleep has not resulted, he desists. This must be admitted as a far safer practice; than to give fifteen grains or two scruples for a dose, as advocated by some. If prescribing opium to a person not habituated to its influence, the second dose should be smaller than the first, by combining it with calomel or antimony, or James's powder, it does not so much disturb the usual secretions; there are cases where Dover's powder, and occasionally even the pulv. cretæ comp. c. opio may be necessary. It is well to remember that when opiates are indicated in cases of insanity, the dose must be large. Combining opium with camphor or henbane or digitalis, will often be very judicious. With tartar emetic, calomel and opium in large doses will often calm the system when there is great restlessness and fever, especially if the head be kept cool. Opium should never be omitted where insanity has succeeded constant intoxication; and in those cases where the countenance is exsanguined, with a cold clammy skin, it is especially in-