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Selections: Medicine.

TREATMENT OF DELIRIUM TREMENS.

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GENTLEMEN,—Having now had, in the ordinary course of our clinical rotation, for some little time under my care Ward 10, into which are admitted all maniacal and noisy cases, as well as those suffering from the effects of drink, and as the results obtained during that short time have been somewhat remarkable, I wish to make you acquainted with them; and also to guard you against a dangerous fallacy, which, to my astonishment, I have found to be still somewhat prevalent.

You are aware that the drink cases admitted into Ward 10, and usually classified under the heading of "delirium tremens," include every variety of alcoholic poisoning, from the excited, agitated, and prostrate condition popularly known as "the horrors," up to the very worst type of delirium tremens, often ushered in by severe and repeated epileptic attacks, forming a true *status epilepticus precursor*. You all know, I dare say, that, up to a comparatively recent date, the production of sleep was, very properly, as I think, regarded as the most important part of the treatment of this disease, and that this was sought to be induced by the most unjustifiable doses of narcotic poisons. Subsequently, chiefly owing to the writings of Ware, of Boston, delirium tremens came to be regarded as not in itself so dangerous as the means employed to cure it—to be looked upon, in fact, as a disease, which might safely be left to itself, and which terminated naturally

in from sixty to seventy-two hours. More recently still, modern chemical research having supplied us with safer and more active nervine sedatives, the production of sleep has again been recognized, not as a *sin quid non* in the sense of the former dogma that the patient must sleep or die, but as a very important and most efficacious means of cutting short the attack,—so safe and efficacious, indeed, that it seems almost a premium upon vice to promulgate it, though it is neither safe nor efficacious unless it is properly employed; this, however, has relation to the causation of the disease, of which I shall presently speak.

Twenty (now thirty) years ago the formula in use for delirium tremens cases in Ward 10 was, tincture of opium one drachm, tincture of hyoscyamus two drachms, common spirit (whisky) one to two ounces, given in a sufficient quantity to produce sleep. It seems impossible to account for the manner in which this most dangerous treatment was adhered to for years, except on the supposition that it was made to be less dangerous than it seems by that antagonism between opium and hyoscyamus which had been shown to exist by Mr. Benjamin Bell and others (more recently by Dr. Chevers and Professor Frazer). Be that as it may, there can be no reason to doubt that this treatment must have been most positively injurious in all but the most wary hands, too often substituting opium for alcoholic poisoning, and that it only maintained its ground because it was less fatal than the indiscriminate bloodletting which, as a treatment, immediately preceded it. And amid the many attempts every now and then made to revive the practice of bloodletting in inflammatory affections, it may serve to