

The chief causes of the disease are intemperance in spirituous drink, strong wine, opium, and tobacco.

The pathology of Delirium tremens may still, I believe, be considered a *questio vexata*, the bulk of authors having confessed they did not understand it. It is generally considered a disease of exhausted nervous power, or asthenic irritability of the nervous system, produced by over stimulation. Post mortem examinations have not much elucidated the subject, because death is often the result of meningeal inflammation, in which the nervous disease merges; and in cases where the kidneys cease to act, and where coma and its fatal result arise from urea in the blood, much care and skill are necessary for its detection.

As the diarrhœa, which so often warns of malignant cholera, may be readily cured by proper medicine, and the dangerous attack averted, so, in the premonitory stage of this malady, a manly effort, aided by a little medicine, may save both the reason and the life. When the tipping of the sot, or the outright intemperance of the drunkard, are about to end in this disgraceful disease, the poor slave of evil habits will sometimes be induced to make a great effort, and break his chain; but at first he will feel himself most miserable: relaxation and debility have succeeded artificial tension and strength; whilst the stomach craves its customary stimulus, and some substitute must be found. According to my experience, Gentian, as below, is the best medicine under these circumstances.* If the patient can be persuaded to take it regularly for a week, his morbid craving for stimulating drink will be abated, the tone of his stomach improved, his moral dejection lessened, and he will feel himself a new man. Of course, this applies only to persons in whom organic mischief has not yet taken place.

Unfortunately, the medical man is seldom called in before the Delirium tremens has commenced, or even lasted some hours. Several authorities recommend a mild purgative as the first medicine, and that only when constipation is present. My practice, and that of my military medical friends, has been different. In common with authors of high repute,† we have preferred giving as a preliminary, in all cases where delirium has set in, some brisk and active purgative; croton oil, for instance. Some writers ascribe specific qualities to this oil in the disease. Without asserting this, I am persuaded that it is a most valuable medicine, when administered in an early stage. Much time is

* R—Infusi gentiani comp. ʒ xij.

Tincturæ ejusdem ʒ v.

Sulphat magnesiæ ʒ iij. vel. iv. M.

Signa.

“A common wine glassful the first thing in the morning, again at mid-day, and in the evening.”

†Dr. Abercrombie, Sir Charles Forbes, and others.