

getic a poison as the prussic acid; and that ammonia or the sesquicarbonate applied to the nostrils, acts usefully by stimulating the nervous system, and the heart's action, until the poison has exhausted its violence, and not as an antidote. Secondly, attending on vomiting, and the stomach pump was doubly useless, inasmuch, as had they evacuated the stomach, they would have been no nearer saving their patient, and they thereby lost precious time which might have been employed in using more efficacious means. As an antidote, a solution of the sulphate of iron, or a dilution of the Tr. Fer. Mur. would have been as effectual as an antidote can be in a case of poisoning by this acid. The application of chlorine water or sesquicarb. ammonia to the nostrils, and cold affusion to the spine, would have comprised all that is known to be of value in the treatment of such unfortunate cases.

My patient had been for a long time hypochondriacal, and had frequently threatened to destroy himself. During the day of the fatal event, he repeatedly told his relations that he would be dead by nine that night; but, as he had frequently said the same thing, no attention was paid to it. At six in the evening, he purchased an ounce phial of Prussic acid, Scheele's strength, and, on his road home, shewed it to several persons, saying that he would soon be dead, and invited them to his funeral. At seven in the evening, he took leave of his friends in a gay, smiling manner, and going up to his room, sent for Mrs. ———, shewed her the poison, and said that he would be dead in two minutes. She snatched at the phial, but he drew it playfully away, turned her out of the room, and locked the door. She, thinking that he was jesting, as he had frequently done the same thing before, went to her own house, next door, which communicated through the yards. About a minute after, he unlocked the door and cried out, "Come to me quick, I am dying." A relative, very much alarmed, called to the servant man in the yard, who ran up stairs and found him lying on his back on the sofa with his legs crossed, insensible, and snoring. In a few moments, Mrs. ——— arrived and found him in the same state. I arrived there in twenty minutes. He was then dead, and presented the appearance of profound slumber; the legs crossed, the arms by his sides, and eyelids firmly closed. I applied Liq. Am. Fortissim. (a strength made for portability by manufacturing chemists) to the nostrils, and cold affusion to the occiput and spine. I considered him dead, but employed the remedies in the event of a possibility of there being some remaining sparks of life. The eyes were much more brilliant than during his life, and con-

tinued so the next day; the face was livid, and lips very blue; the muscles were all flaccid, and exhibited no tonic, except a little in the legs at the end of twenty hours. No sectio was permitted. The phial, containing a drachm of prussic acid, was on a table, ten feet from the sofa, with a wine glass upset and broken alongside, done by the deceased in the hurry of putting it on the table. After having employed my remedies, I applied my nose to the deceased's mouth, but could detect no smell of prussic acid. The remaining acid was thrown out by the servant, so that I could not ascertain its strength; but I feel certain that it was acid of the strength of over three per cent., which is the usual strength of medicinal acid imported into this country; and, since the use of ground glass stoppered phials to put it up in, it always reaches here unimpaired in quality. In the present case, seven drachms of medicinal acid, containing about twenty-one grains of pure acid, were swallowed. The friends think about a minute elapsed before he unlocked the door; but more must have passed, because Mrs. ——— had time to go to her own house and busy herself in household affairs before the alarm was given. It is probable that he did not give the alarm until he found the acid working on him; at any rate, he walked from the table to the door, and unlocked it after taking the poison, called for assistance, and, then walking to the sofa, stretched himself on it. *He had no convulsions.* Previous to the occurrence of the above cases, it has been held that, where prussic acid causes death slowly, convulsions come on after a notable interval, and, where it acts speedily, no convulsions ensue, but death follows with such rapidity as to allow of none but the *simplest* actions, and those performed with rapidity. From a review of the two cases extracted from the London Medical Gazette, we must allow the truth of the following inferences as to the action of hydrocyanic acid on the human body:—

1st, Hydrocyanic acid is modified in its operation on the human frame, both as to time and phenomena, by the idiosyncrasy of the individual.

2dly, That it *not unfrequently* is slow in manifesting its poisonous influence, allowing time for the performance of various complicated actions, and yet may destroy life without producing convulsions.

3dly, That Judith Burwell could have performed the various actions attributed to her after swallowing the prussic acid, and have been found in the position stated by the witnesses in the trial of Freeman.

Montreal, September, 1847.