TREATMENT OF THE CHOLERA BY CHLOROFORM. - ON SPASM OF THE HEART.

TREATMENT OF THE CHOLERA BY CHLOROFORM AC. IN PECKHAM HOUSE (POOR) ASYLUM.

FROM THE TIMES, OCTOBER 9.

SIR,—You will oblige me by allowing me, through the medium of your columns, to bring under the notice of the profession a new method of treating this dire malady, and which has proved pre-eminently successful. I allude to the use of chloroform, which was first suggested by Mr. Francis Ferguson, the assistant-surgeon to this asylum, and has been employed by us conjointly in ten cases of malignant cholera with perfect success, and has likewise received the sanction of Dr. Clutterbuck, the visiting physician, and Mr. Fidler, the visiting surgeon of the establishment.

The disease first broke out here in a malignant form on the 19th inst. (one mild case having appeared two days before), when four cases occurred, two of which proved fatal, the one in seven and the other in eleven hours. On the following morning a new case occurred, in a very aggravated form, characterized by incessant vomiting and cramps, violent purging, universal coldness and blueness of skin, and general collapse.

SIR,—The absence of any remarks from yourself, as Editor of the LANCET, in reply to the letter of Mr. Ward, in the last number of your journal, on the subject of "Spasm of the Heart," has probably been occasioned by a want of interest in the matter in the hands of the members of our profession, who, as a general rule, will be competent to decide on the existence or non-existence of such a lesion. For my own part, I have been for some time labouring under the conviction that there is no such thing as spasm of the heart, and that the trouble of investigating the truth, but on whom the ispis dicta of an authority acts like a dose of chloroform; and being unwilling that an erroneous dogma should pass in silence, I take the liberty of making a few remarks on Mr. Ward's communication. I have paid some attention to what has been said and written on the subject, and I willingly bear testimony to the fact, that if Mr. Ward's professional neighbours have not the advantage of being aware of it, he himself would not be quite so sure of his judgment as he appears to be, in assailing his skill or knowledge, he has no one to blame but himself for not having at once accepted the courteous invitation which was given to him, to explain his views on the subject matter of my communication.

This, however, is going from the point. Is there, or is there not, such a thing as "spasm of the heart?" Mr. Ward answers, "Yes.

First, on the ground of authority. "The disease is as old as the hills." Not quite; yet granting that it may be supposed to be so, it (the supposition) is none the more likely to be true for its antiquity. The knowledge of heart disease is of very recent date. Old authorities are of little or no value in the present case. Let us come to the modern writers, "Cruveilhier, Budd, Williams." Cruveilhier describes the concentric hypertrophy, which Dr. Williams quotes as an example of spasm, as nothing more than a state of constancy of systolic pressure, but which immediately tranquillized, the vomiting and cramps ceasing, the purging being checked, and the heat of the body returning.

This success encouraged us to persevere; and we have now employed it in ten cases of malignant cholera with complete success, six having perfectly recovered, and four being convalescent.

In two of the fatal cases it was also used, but in them the patients were both smoking before the remedy was thought of. In the asylum we have had in all seventeen cases of malignant cholera; of whom five have died, eight have recovered, and four are still under treatment, but are now convalescent.

The following is our usual mode of treatment:—Place the patient in bed in warm blankets; give a glass of brandy in hot water, with sugar, and spice; apply friction to the body for complete histories of the cases on which the opinion is founded.

In both instances a very light dose of chloroform was employed; but it is not necessary that the patient should sleep for twenty minutes or half an hour—in fact, for several hours; and on awakening, he will again experience a return of the vomiting and cramps, when the chloroform must again be resorted to, and the patient kept in a great measure under its influence till these symptoms abate. One of our cases was attended upon by two of the assistant-surgeons, who, by its means such an expression of public opinion will be elicited as will render it impossible for the executive of the navy to retain the junior medical officers of the service in the same spirit with those on distant stations, and to those of the public in the United States, who are not characterized by as much benevolence and good sense as the people of this country.