

throughout the length and breadth of the empire. With great satisfaction, then, they anticipate the "motion" regarding the position of the assistant-surgeons of the royal navy, which Mr. Wakley is said to be about to bring forward for the consideration of the House of Commons in the ensuing session of parliament; for they are sanguine in their hope that 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 their present undignified and deteriorating position.

The assistant-surgeons of the Mediterranean, united in sentiment with those on distant stations, subscribe this address, with a hearty desire that Thomas Wakley, Esq. (whom they have the honour to acknowledge as a medical man) will be successful in the noble enterprise he is about to undertake, "to vindicate in parliament the rights of a widely-scattered, but not undeserving branch of the medical profession."

Signed by request of twenty-eight assistant surgeons of the Mediterranean Fleet.

FRED. JAMES BROWN, M.D. Lond. et Edin.,
Assistant-Surgeon R.N., H.M.S. "Howe."

To Thomas Wakley, Esq., M.P.

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

(FROM "THE TIMES" OF OCTOBER 30.)

To the Editor of the Times.

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.

Seeing that the most approved methods of treatment were of no avail, either in this case or in those attacked the previous day, (another of whom was fast sinking,) and that this patient must likewise assuredly sink ere long, unless relief were obtained, Mr. Ferguson suggested the employment of chloroform by inhalation, under the influence of which she was then placed, (in one hour after being attacked,) with the abatement of every bad symptom; the nervous system being 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 sinking 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 remain 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 by means of warm flannels; and an embrocation composed of liniment. saponis comp., liniment camphoræ comp., tinct. opii, and extract. belladonnæ; apply to the whole surface of the body bags filled with heated bran; place the patient under the influence of chloroform by inhalation, and keep him gently under its effect as long as the bad symptoms recur, (which they frequently do on its effect ceasing and his regaining consciousness.) Give in the intervals small quantities of brandy-and-water, and thin arrowroot or milk for nourishment, along with milk-and-water, or soda-water with a little brandy for drink. Avoid everything else in the shape of medicine, and trust to the efforts of Nature in rallying from the poison of the disease.

Of course great caution is necessary in administering the chloroform, and in not pushing it too far. In some instances

the patient will sleep for twenty minutes or half an hour—in others, for several hours; and on awaking will again be seized with 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 required its use at intervals for twenty-four hours. Again, the reaction after its use may be so great as to require gentle bloodletting; which occurred in two of our cases, both being persons of full habit of body and sanguine temperament, the one a nurse, and the other a male farm servant.

Should the simple apparatus commonly used in the hospitals for administering it not be at hand, a small teaspoonful may be poured upon a towel, and will answer very well.

That which we use is of great purity, and procured chiefly from Messrs. Gifford and Linden, chemists, 104, Strand.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,
JAMES HILL, M.D., Resident Surgeon.

Peckham-house Asylum, Oct. 25."

ON SPASM OF THE HEART.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

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 the consequence of a wish to leave 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, believing that there are those who will not take the trouble of investigating the truth, but on whom the *ipse dixit* 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 taken advantage of what has been said in THE LANCET, to assail 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 in question.

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 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 the natural state of contraction of the heart, death having taken place at the moment of this action. He observed it in the bodies of individuals who had been executed, or who had died a violent and sudden death.* Dr. Budd is quoted by Dr. Joy, as stating his belief that this same concentric hypertrophy is merely "a passing condition, originating at or after death."† Dr. Williams refers to this contracted state of heart, and says, "that it was long mistaken for concentric hypertrophy, until Cruveilhier and Dr. G. Budd pointed out its true nature."‡ Is there anything in the statements of the two last-named gentlemen to justify their being quoted as authorities in support of the opinion which has been assigned to them in connexion with spasm of the heart? And though there is no one to whose opinion I should more willingly submit than Dr. Williams, I must on this occasion ask for complete histories of the cases on which the opinion is founded.

Secondly. Mr. Ward, adducing the fact that spasm occurs in other muscles, asks—"Why not in the heart?" For this reason, that the heart is not subjected, like the glottis, to the action of "foreign bodies;" or the muscles of the alimentary canal, to that of acrid secretion or articles of food; or the bladder, to that of unhealthy, irritating urine. Neither, like the muscles of the calf, is it influenced by various "twists or turns," by irregular pressure on its nerves, and so on. Fortunately not! Though Mr. Ward does not appear to think so, when he asks, "Are not its muscles" [those of the heart] equally voluntary

* Dict. de Méd. et de Chirurg. Pratiques, tom. x. p. 223.

† Library of Medicine, vol. iii. p. 343.

‡ Principles of Medicine, 2nd edition, p. 454.