

powdered hydrochlorate of morphia was sprinkled over a blistered surface, the influence of the narcotic was felt in the head in less than a minute. He might here enumerate the symptoms which indicated the general influence of the narcotic, thus applied, upon the cerebro-spinal centres; but he preferred leaving these to the details of the cases, illustrative of the practice, which he had selected to lay before the students. He might, however, mention, that when the nerves were topically affected, as in neuralgia, the general symptoms scarcely ever displayed themselves.

Such was the physiological action of narcotics applied to the denuded surface of the body, which had hitherto been recorded; but there was another action produced by at least one of these, namely, hydrochlorate of morphia, which had not, to his knowledge, been previously observed, and to which much of the advantages derived from its application, in a therapeutical point of view, was to be attributed. He referred to the production of a papular eruption, terminating in pustules, which spread from the immediate vicinity of the part in which the hydrochlorate was applied, all over the body; and it was more or less attended with oedema. In some instances the swelling, when the blistered surface was in the vicinity of the head, had been so considerable as to close the eyes, in a manner similar to that which occurs in erysipelas of the head. It had also been attended with some degree of fever; and in a few instances delirium had displayed itself when the eruption had reached its acme. It seemed to operate as a most powerful and efficient counter-irritant, without, apparently, interfering with the narcotic influence of the hydrochlorate. The eruption was a pustular one, and he had observed that the relief was most obvious as soon as the pustules were fairly formed; indeed, so striking had been the beneficial influence of this eruption, that he was inclined to accord with the remark of Dr. Jenner, that "every pimple with a vesiculated head had an errand to perform for the benefit of the constitution."

He had selected the preceding cases from a great number. The first three were intended to illustrate the local influence of the endermic application of the salts of morphia; the other two, their general influence. His object in bringing forward these cases was, to direct attention to the endermic practice which promised many advantages; and which only required to be investigated to gain the support of British practitioners.

POWER OF DILATING THE
MOUTH OF THE WOMB
POSSESSED BY THE
ERGOT OF RYE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—Should you deem the accompanying remarks on the use of the ergot of rye worthy of a place in your widely-circulated Journal, your insertion of them will oblige, Sir, yours respectfully,

T. H. WARDLEWORTH.

Rochdale, March 4, 1839.

The cases which I have published, and which are now before the public, tend to show, in a remarkable manner, the powerful effects of the ergot of rye; for, in Mrs. R.'s case,* after all other means had failed, the ergot at once produced pains of a more truly uterine character than had previously existed, evidenced by a further protrusion of the membranes, the os uteri becoming shorter, and gradually dilating, all of which went on progressively until the process of labour was completed; showing, in this case, the effects of the ergot in producing dilatation of the mouth of the womb, a property imputed to it by Chevreuil, who has reported sixteen cases, in which the ergot seemed to soften and dilate the os uteri. The following case, which I was called upon to attend, on the 4th of July, 1838, at four, A.M., is one in which the ergot had a most decided effect upon the os uteri.

Mrs. K—, æt. 28, a stout and healthy woman, in labour of her second child; on examination I found the os uteri dilated to the size of a crown-piece, thick, and unyielding; on inquiry I found that my patient had had pains for more than two days, and which had returned at irregular intervals during that time. Her pulse being full and strong, I bled her to $\frac{3}{4}$ xx., which was followed by considerable relief. After waiting some time, and the pain not returning, I left her, and desired to be sent for on the least return of pain. About six, P.M., same day, I was again sent for; on examination I found the membranes protruding beyond the os uteri, which was much in the same state as described at my last visit, from the restless condition of my patient, and her friends, who, in fact, desired me to give her some "coffee."† From a knowledge of its efficiency in similar cases, I at once acceded to their solicitations, and I accordingly gave Mrs. K— \mathcal{O} j. of the ergot, and in ten minutes the pains became more frequent, the mouth of the womb softer, and more dilated; for, in half-an-

* Vide LANCET, No. 8, vol. i., 1838-9.

† As the ergot is called in this neighbourhood.

hour after the ergot was taken, she was relieved of all her sufferings, by being delivered of a fine son; they both did well.

In this case might not the ergot have been given when first called in? for what advantage was there derived from the bleeding? only a few hours relief from pain; when the woman, from the timely administration of the ergot, might have had her anxiety removed,—her sufferings mitigated, by its being given.

There are a great number of practitioners who are of opinion* that the ergot, instead of causing a softened condition of the os uteri, produces a rigid and unyielding condition of these parts, thereby producing a prolongation of the parturient process. I could enumerate several cases more to prove the efficiency of the *secale cornutum* in producing dilatation of the mouth of the womb; and I have no hesitation in stating that the ergot, if good, may be administered when the os uteri is only dilated to the disc of a shilling, its edges thick and unyielding, provided the ergot is given in doses of 15 grains, and repeated according to the effect produced.

I have found the ergot, when given under the above condition of parts, to be twenty minutes before its action has been manifested; and I have invariably observed the action of the ergot, when fully produced, to continue until the os uteri has been adequately dilated, when in most cases an arrest of the foetal head is experienced in the lower aperture of the pelvis, caused, probably, by the uterus being exhausted from its continued action. Under such circumstances 15 grains of the ergot will not be sufficient to excite the uterus again into a state of contraction, so strong as to effect delivery of the child; therefore, it would require at least ʒij. to ʒj. of the ergot to produce an action of the uterus sufficiently powerful to expel its contents. For, since the first introduction of the ergot to the notice of the obstetrician, there has been, even up to the present time, such a discrepancy in the results given by different practitioners of celebrity, that it would (viewing all the circumstances together) cause any one about to embrace the advantages that are to be derived from its use, to pause ere he attempted to give so powerful a remedy to a parturient patient, for fear of producing some of those direful phenomena which are represented to follow its administration, viz., rupture of the uterus, hour-glass contraction, and often fatal effects on the child, as remarked by Dr. Hosack, an American writer, when saying that the ergot is the "*pulvis ad mortem.*" "For I believe," says he, "that its operation, when sufficient

to expel the child, in cases where Nature is alone unequal to the task, is to produce so violent a contraction of the womb, and consequent convulsion and compression of the uterine vessels, as very much to impede, if not totally to interrupt, the circulation between the mother and child." Were this statement corroborated by other writers on its parturifacient effects (so denominated by Mr. Pereira), it would then be an excellent agent in the hands of the votaries of that detestable scheme, the author of which has thought very proper to hide himself from public derision and contempt, under the name of "Marcus." Then might the advocates of that most abominable system take advantage to thin the population by destroying "in utero" the innocent victims of their wicked designs, by the silent and unseen use of the ergot.

However, I agree with Drs. Chapman, Dewees, and James, all of whom are American practitioners of eminence, that the ergot has no deleterious effect upon the child, for in 1500 cases wherein I have had occasion to have recourse to the ergot, only twenty out of that number were stillborn, and the epidermis of all these could be easily removed by the gentlest possible friction with the finger, showing that they were rapidly advancing towards decomposition.

Such are the principal objections that are brought forward against the administration of the ergot, and which I am sure could only have arisen from too superficial an acquaintance with its action; for, in the practice of those who have used the ergot extensively, they have extolled it as a boon to the philanthropic inquirer, and one which has for its object the alleviation of that painful process—labour; for every practitioner is, or should be, glad to avail himself of such sanctioned improvements as may have a tendency to relieve the sufferings of humanity, and shorten that process, "labour," with safety, which is at times attended with so much anxiety.

I wish not to be understood, from the foregoing observations, to deprecate that which every practitioner in midwifery ought above all things to possess—"patience;" but when we see a woman's physical and mental powers depressed, from hours, nay, even days, of suffering—when anodyne after anodyne has been given without any alleviation of pain, I say, under such circumstances as these, if the os uteri be at all dilated, pelvis well formed, and the practitioner in attendance does not avail himself of that which he has in its power to administer, he is not worthy of the name of a medical man. I am not lauding the use of this important therapeutic remedy beyond its merits, as it is deserving of the most serious attention of the faculty.

The following is my practice when called to a woman in labour:—When, on examina-

* Vide a paper published by Mr. Keane, in the "Medical Gazette," for Jan. 26th, 1839.

tion, I find the os uteri at all dilated, and the woman has had pains, the osseous structure normal (*i. e.*, the pelvis), the pain returning at long intervals, &c., after duly observing the temperament of my patient, colour, and solubility of the infusion of ergot, I at once give her accordingly 15 grains of the ergot in $\frac{3}{4}$ ss. of tepid water, and, as I have before mentioned, its action is not so soon perceived as in a more advanced state of labour, generally occurring in about twenty minutes after its administration, manifested by a continual pain* referred to the pubic and iliac regions, accompanied with a continual desire to evacuate the contents of the rectum and bladder; this state of things continues until the mouth of the womb is dilated, when the membranes invariably rupture of themselves. Should the second stage of labour be protracted by an arrest of the foetal head, in the lower aperture of the pelvis, the ergot may be repeated, as mentioned at the commencement of this paper.

I wish not to be understood, from the foregoing remarks, to advocate the administration of the ergot in all cases of labour; for instance, in distortion of the pelvis, "whether that may have arisen from molli-tes ossium or rachitis," at the full period of utero-gestation. *In placenta-presentation*, if the presence of the hand in utero is not sufficient to excite the uterus to contraction, when, after securing the breach at the os externum, pain does not come on, the administration of 3j. of the ergot may be productive of considerable benefit. All I wish to impress upon the minds of my professional brethren is, that the ergot is a most valuable acquisition, when properly given, in aiding the parturient process, for I am confirmed in my previous suggestions by practical observation and not by any hypothetical notions I have formed respecting its utility. A zealous practitioner, however, will not adopt the opinion of any one without scrupulous examination, but he will endeavour, by study and reflection, to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of any therapeutic agent, in order that he may be able to form a rational conviction of its utility. "Every man," says Gibbon, "who rises above the common level, has received two educations, the first from his teachers, the second from himself;" and, as medicine is not one of the exact sciences, no one really anxious for its improvement ought to conceive it a degradation to retract any erroneous opinions which he may have formerly advocated.

I have lately had under my care a severe case of chronic bronchitis, attended by copious expectoration of a diaphanous tenacious phlegm; on applying the stethoscope under each clavicle, the mucous râle, almost

amounting to "gargouillement," was audible, which symptoms rapidly yielded to the following formula:—

Tincture of ergot of rye, two drachms;
Syrup of poppies, half an ounce;
Water, one ounce and a half.—One drachm to be taken every second hour, or when the cough is troublesome.

ACTION OF THE ERGOT OF RYE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—I beg to transmit to you the few following facts regarding the *secale cornutum*, hoping that they may not be altogether unworthy of a corner in the columns of your widely-circulating periodical. I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

RICHARD COLLIER,
 Senior Surgeon to the Impl. B.M.A.,
 Gongosoco, Brazil.

Nov. 20, 1837.

If we reflect for a few moments on the very early age at which, in this country, females find themselves called on by desire or duty to assume maternal functions, and if we bear in mind that solitary sort of life to which the softer sex are here drearily doomed, even without taking into account the enfeebled frames entailed on many of them from hereditary disease, it surely cannot create surprise should females of fourteen or fifteen years suffer severely in their first confinements. Yet, I must candidly confess, so far as my humble experience extends, those childbirth cases calling for surgical aid have been "few and far between;" so that now, after a residence here of four years, only three such came before me, to two of which I shall briefly allude, as illustrating the very valuable aid accruing from a due administration of the ergot of rye in those tedious, lingering labours, which make such rapid inroads on an already delicate and feeble female, and to such *secale cornutum* can, in my mind, be given with the pleasing prospect of the most satisfactory success.

Well aware, too, that many a pregnant patient here falls a victim to ignorance and timidity, and strongly sensible of their undiminished dread of instruments, I am the more willing to give any additional proof of the now acknowledged efficacy of the *secale cornutum*, completely convinced, as I am, that in the proper administration of this valuable medicine, the anxious accoucheur shall frequently find a silent, satisfactory substitute for the much-feared forceps.

The few trifling throes attendant on labour in the generality of negro women, compared with those of more civilised life, are too familiar for comment; hence it is that this extensive establishment has afforded me

* Yet, in some cases, the pain occurs in a few seconds, with an evident intermission.