

GENTLEMEN,

INCLOSED is an account of a Case of Puerperal Convulsion, with remarks on this affection, for insertion in the Medical Journal, should it appear worthy of your attention. I am,

GENTLEMEN,

With the greatest respect,
Your's, &c.

Deal, April, 10, 1800.

J. CHRISTIE.

Having lately seen puerperal convulsion, under unhappy circumstances, terminate favourably, I have been induced to make out for the Medical Journal, the following account of this unfrequent, though most formidable symptom, as it appeared in the wife of a serjeant of the 27th regiment of foot.

M. Y. aged about 36, stout, well made, corpulent, of a ruddy, healthful complexion, is the mother of five children. All her labours, except the one which is the subject of the following description, were perfectly regular. The fourth child she had about three years previous to the last; during which interval

she had not any sign of miscarriage, although living constantly in the married state.

In the beginning of last ~~June~~^{May}, having for some time before felt herself impregnated, she wished, as was her custom, to lose some blood, and ten or twelve ounces were taken from her arm. During the period of utero-gestation, she enjoyed good health, although exposed to considerable fatigue, wet and cold, during marches both in England and Holland. About the end of last November, she was attacked with the symptoms of a slight cold, accompanied with a sense of weight and oppression about the præcordia. On the 1st or 2d of December, she also complained of a heaviness and pain of her eyes, with an intolerable giddiness.

She then told her husband, "she was never this way before;" and thinking that her complaints were connected with her labour, which she expected every day, she reported herself to the medical person on duty at the regimental hospital. She was advised to be bled; but not assenting readily, and this not being insisted upon, a dose of salts was given to her, which, by the bye, she never took. Between the 2d and 4th of December, she shewed more than common signs of anxiety, repeating she was never in this way before: she complained, particularly, of a dizziness and defect of vision, and thought particles were floating before her eyes. On the morning of the 4th, her former medical attendant was called to see her, who took some blood from her arm, and I believe ordered her feet to be bathed in warm water. Her husband now began to think her conduct was becoming extremely silly and inconsistent: in the night of the 4th he was convinced of it; for then, without assigning any reason, she suddenly started up and laid herself down, with her head towards the foot of the bed. Surprised at such conduct, he got a light, and observed her to stare wildly, talking at the same time incoherently, and sometimes moaning. About this time a tremor extended all over her body, and soon after she became permanently senseless. Early on the morning of the 5th of December she had a general convulsive fit; another returned in little more than an hour with increased violence; and with an interval nearly of this period, the fits recurred, more or less severe, during the forenoon of the 5th. About two in the afternoon I was asked to see her; I found the poor woman lying perfectly comatose, insensible to the stimuli of light, sound, or drink; her breathing slow and laborious, pulse small and interrupted. I was informed, that the woman who acts as midwife in the regiment, had been desired to give her a clyster, and, I believe, to apply a blister somewhere; but so little suspicion had there been,

even at this period, of the symptoms being connected with labour, that there was not even an attendant ordered, nor was any examination suggested or attempted. Should this statement be suspected, for a moment, to arise from any other motive than that of *humanity*, let those concerned take a posture of defence; let the advance be upright; honestly shall I combat; impartiality, truth, and the world being umpires.

On examination, I found the os tincæ dilated, and abundant relaxation of the contiguous parts; the head of the child could be felt. I had been but a few minutes in the room, when the attendants told me, from the wreathing of her body and signs of uneasiness, that she would soon have another fit: soon after, a fit of general convulsion, with distorted and blackened countenance, foaming of the mouth, lasting I suppose for more than a minute, supervened; the same obstinate stupor continuing after the fit was over. I ordered the nurse merely to watch the advancing labour, while I took away twelve or fourteen ounces of blood from her arm; from this, I could perceive no other apparent change than a lessening of the redness in the countenance. The fits, for some time previous, had come on every half hour, and sometimes even in less time; it was evident they were connected with the action of the uterus. The delivery of a stout, full grown, healthy looking child, was accomplished with astonishing rapidity, and without artificial aid, within an hour of my first seeing her; a second pain expelled the placenta, which was large and natural, and there was no alarming hæmorrhage. A most profuse sweat followed the fit in which the child was born; and now there appeared to be some remission in the general tumult of the system: she remained quiet, but perfectly comatose. From the occasional wreathing of her body, and pressing downwards of her hands, I began to suspect something was wrong, or something more was coming. An hour after delivery she had another fit, equal in severity to any of the former; I repeated the blood-letting, and now took the blood from the temporal artery, which flowed abundantly. On a second examination, I found the os tincæ very much dilated, and I felt somewhat that made me believe there was either a polypous tumour, a false conception, or a partial inversion of the uterus; it felt like the head of a child surrounded with some gelatinous matter or clotted blood. The swelling and motion of the abdomen too, were not of that equable kind which follows a common labour. I was extremely anxious: I was not even certain but there was a second child; and being not much conversant in this branch of practice, I desired another gentleman to be sent for; and Mr. Mackeson, surgeon in Deal, came in

about three hours after the delivery; when she had another fit of convulsion, though not equal in severity to any of the former ones. The tumour we felt still pressing upon the cervix uteri, but it had become less distinct, and the roundness of the abdomen assumed a more regular and diminished appearance; he satisfied me there was no second child. A clyster had been given shortly before this, and immediately after the last fit, which appeared to excite several pains, but those were either of the nature of after-pains, or in consequence, probably, of some convulsive action in the uterus itself; which I think, in this case, had suffered a *partial inversion*, forming the tumour mentioned.

As her pulse now rose both in frequency and fullness, as her countenance still appeared much flushed, and as she still continued to lie in an apoplectic state, we agreed to take away more blood, should the fits return. About ten o'clock in the evening, she lay in the same profound stupor, but without any return of the convulsion. Saw her on the morning of the 6th, about nine o'clock; she had one fit in the course of the night, and it was in less violence than any of the preceding. Stupor remains—breathing hurried—pulse about 110—skin hot and moist—face flushed. Ten ounces more of blood were taken from the arm; she retracted her arm as in pain, on the introduction of the lancet. At 8, P. M. oppression in breathing lessened surprisingly, as well as the frequency of her pulse and redness of her countenance—stupor continues—her head is shaved, and a blister applied.

7th December, mid-day. Blister has been dressed—has had no return of the fit—stupor seems to wear off—she looks up occasionally on being spoken to, but immediately afterwards shuts her eyes, as if desirous of remaining undisturbed—pulse upwards of an hundred, and feeble—skin moist and less hot than yesterday. The lochia, of a natural appearance, have been in less than ordinary quantity; is now ordered to take a tonic mixture, in which there is aromatic confection and vitriolic æther, along with a gill of mulled wine, three times a day.

Nine o'clock in the evening. Skin still agreeably moist with little heat—pulse still upwards of an hundred in the minute. On rousing her, she immediately seems desirous, as before, of remaining undisturbed; is observed to sigh frequently and deeply, as if from a sudden surprise; she also is seen often to stretch forth and draw up her limbs, as if she felt ease from this sort of motion. Her pulse seems to have a curious peculiarity in it: for thirty or forty strokes, sometimes for half a minute, it beats small and weak; and afterwards, for a similar time, it rises fuller and stronger, resembling—as it were, the ebb-

ing and flowing of the waves of the ocean. In other cases, where the powers of the constitution had been previously much exhausted and deranged, and where they appeared to be gradually recruiting, I think I have more than once observed this waving sort of feel in the pulse: sometimes, indeed, unequal pressure of the finger may give one this sensation; but in this case, having felt both arms with attention, it was certainly distinct, and that without any evident intermission.

Morning of the 8th of December. Stupor continues wearing off—pulse less frequent, still feeble—skin moist—bowels open; on desiring her to shew her tongue, she attempted it by opening her mouth. Her countenance now shews intelligence combined with anxiety; when counting the pulsations at her wrist, she was observed to look stedfastly, first at the watch, then at me, and then at the by-standers, communicating a sensation peculiarly agreeable, and easier to be felt than described. The people around her now observe, that she seems anxious to say something, but has not yet uttered a word more than the monsyllables yes and no. Injunctions given to keep her very quiet; and especially, when she asks any question respecting her situation, to inform her of it in as cautious, gradual a manner as possible, to guard the mind against any sudden exertion or shock. Ordered to continue the tonic remedies.

Morning of the 9th of December; pulse still feeble and frequent, skin moist, heat natural, tongue clean; now understands perfectly what is said to her, to which she gives distinct answers, but seemingly with reluctance; can now swallow drink readily, and can even take a little light food. From this period she gradually recovered both the functions of the mind and the strength of the body. The secretion of the milk was for some days nearly gone. She complains of pains through her body, particularly in her limbs, and compares them to those pains felt after any long continued violent exercise.

13th of December; found her continuing in a state of convalescence, but very weakly; and complaining still of the pains in her limbs; has yet no recollection of any thing that happened during her illness.

22d of December; she continues gaining strength; is not yet entirely free from the pains of the limbs: she came to recollect being reported to the medical person who first saw her, but beyond this period knows nothing of what happened in her illness. The secretion of the milk returned abundantly with her strength. She is now, at the time I am writing, in perfect health and spirits, and very thankful; for she rose again, although three days of her life have been buried in the darkness of death.

I hope the history of the foregoing case will not be without its use; it is indeed a matter of regret that we know nothing at all of the state of the os internum at the time of the approach of the fits; and the propriety of assisting *promiscuously*, by direct means, the wished-for dilatation, is a subject well known to have the most able advocates; while others, of no less respectability, have doubted the propriety of the practice here spoken of.* It is quite foreign to my intentions, and indeed altogether beyond my present sphere, to attempt any decision on the question, What cases of labour, accompanied with convulsion, require direct artificial assistance; especially after the ample and satisfactory directions given in books on Midwifery: all I now aim at, is to inculcate the propriety of the evacuating plan, and particularly blood-letting, as I think I have, in more cases than one, prevented puerperal convulsion supervening, by the timely, - free use of the lancet, where the approach of this dreadful symptom was not indistinctly marked, and in habits too where the propriety of blood-letting might have been much questioned. Most writers recommend an early attention to bleeding and purging, as the means most likely to prevent puerperal convulsion. The unfrequency of the symptom has probably prevented their recommendation from being sufficiently attended to, and I have reason to suspect it has been too often entirely overlooked. In the case before us, I was so much convinced of the utility of blood-letting, even after the fits had commenced, and after the delivery was accomplished, that I have no hesitation in believing, the fits would either have been altogether prevented, or at least highly modified, had the lancet been largely used when the woman first reported herself; as I consider that was the period the constitution received the warning of the impending danger; that the symptoms of oppression, the difficulty of breathing, the pain of the eyes and head were the true fore-runners of the convulsions; that this was the most proper period for bleeding, and which should therefore put us on our guard in similar cases. With regard to the appearance of the blood in the present instance, if that is to be considered as an infallible guide, it was even in our favour, there being on the blood a slight buffy coat, except the blood drawn from the artery, which shewed a florid smooth mass, more homogeneous in its appearance than the venal blood. In pregnancy it has been generally observed, that the blood shews a morbid appearance; hence it has been supposed, a

* Among the former may be reckoned Dr. John Clarke, and with the latter I would class Dr. Thomas Denman.

process in some respects similar to inflammatory action takes place. From the appearances of blood drawn in inflammatory affections, I have been led to imagine, that there is less disposition in arterial than in venal blood to shew a buffy coat, and that when the buffy coat does appear on the surface of the arterial crassamentum, it assumes a leaden coloured shade, or the hue is darker than the venal buff. Will this appearance be produced by the lighter colour of the arterial crassamentum? or does the buffy coat of venal blood prevent the air acting upon the surface of its darker crassamentum? In this place I beg to observe, that within the last twelve months, and especially since last autumn, there has been an epidemic fever prevailing among the troops, and which has carried off inconceivable numbers. I understand, a disease of this kind has also been frightfully frequent in civil life; I have reasons for suspecting that the nature of this disease, (which I call "Typhus Pneumonoides") has not unfrequently been mistaken. Sometimes, from the insidious nature of the symptoms, it has been called, and treated, as a simple nervous fever, while probably the pulmonary affection killed; and again, that it has been supposed to be simple pneumonia, while a specific contagion of strongly debilitating powers had been the source of the disease and the cause of the modification of its symptoms. At present, I am employed in arranging for the press, materials for a little work on the nature and cure of this disease, together with appearances on dissection. In this, I hope I shall be able to shew the necessity of copious blood-letting, together with tonics and stimulants, and sometimes even to be employed at one and the same period, although the early use of the former will in most instances supersede that of the latter. No means, perhaps, have been so frequently and so variously treated of and disputed upon as blood-letting; but I believe all experienced practitioners, and men above "serving any theory" but that resulting from attentive observation, have agreed on its propriety, nay necessity, in certain diseases;—one of your correspondents, indeed, whose reasoning (fortunately perhaps for the community) will make but few converts, and which has, in my opinion, very justly drawn a reply from another gentleman, seems to fancy that bleeding may be entirely expelled from practice, for "he has no hesitation in asserting, that it is not necessary in any complaint with which we are acquainted." Another of your correspondents, in the same month's Journal, with an expediency equally his own, in curing the *bloody flux* by flannel rollers and sticking plasters, has frequently taken away forty, fifty, and sixty ounces of blood in a couple of hours, by which many valuable lives have been saved, and in a *disease too where all kinds of me-*

dicines do mischief! What a difference of opinion may exist between two *Licentiates* in *Physic*, on a *subject* apparently not quite *incomprehensible*. *The thing speaks for itself*. It is much to be lamented, that writers on medical matters are too apt to be intoxicated with those notions which have the *air* of originality. Sly vanity, or frantic ambition, comes stalking abroad in the dark under the veil of candour, becoming blind to every ray of light, to every shade of beauty, but those that fall on the little-conceited scenes. When those conceits are pent up in a corner, out of the way of harm, it may be rather cruel to pull them down; but when placed in a conspicuous situation, to dazzle like new tinsel at a distance, to disappoint, perhaps fatally to deceive; it then becomes high time the materials should be analyzed and compared with the solid structure of worth, of old industry, of extensive experience, of candid reasoning, of ripened talents: and in the cure of diseases, perhaps those who affect *most* to overlook the powers inherent in Nature, stand *most* in want of her assistance!