

Account of the Use of the Volatile Tincture of Guaiacum, in painful and obstructed Menstruation. By WM. P. DEWEES, M. D.

July 16th, 1806.

DEAR SIR,

AS few diseases to which the human female is subject, are more obstinate than painful menstruation, and an obstruction of that discharge, I have been tempted to send you a short account of the use of the volatile tincture of guaiacum in these diseases.

Painful menstruation is a disease but too frequent in our climate; whether this arises from any peculiarity of temperature, or from less regard being paid to this discharge, during its flow, by our incautious females, I will not pretend to determine; but such is its frequency and obstinacy, that, it merits the particular attention of every practitioner, and more especially of those, who have more immediately this class of sufferers under their care.

I shall not enter into a history of this disease, as it is sufficiently described by Cullen, and other systematic writers. I shall, however, advert to one symptom of this complaint, first noticed, I believe, by Dr. Denman, as it is an important one in its history; I mean the discharge of a kind of membrane during the period of the secretion of the menstrual discharge. The casting off of this coat is not, however, invariable with women who menstruate with difficulty; but where it has obtained in married women, my experience goes to confirm the remark of Dr. Denman, that they have been invariably barren. This symptom, if I may so term it, is, I think, more frequent in the country than in cities, and in that particular part of the country in which I first settled,* the women were particularly subject

* Abingdon, about 10 miles north of Philadelphia.

to it; consequently many in that neighbourhood were barren. I had tried a great variety of remedies for this complaint, without ever in a single instance removing it, until I employed the tinc. gum. guaiac. vol.—the only thing, that it appeared could be done, was to abate the violence of pain by bleeding, warm bath, laudanum or camphor.

After having been a long time baffled in this disease, I determined on the use of the medicine just mentioned. I was led to its employment, from supposing it a rheumatic affection which the uterus was labouring under; my reasoning on the subject was short, and perhaps fallacious, but the consequences of it were certainly favorable—I supposed the uterus a muscular part, performing certain specific actions important in the animal economy, and that during this period, it was but too frequently subjected to considerable variety of temperatures, the immediate effect of which for the most part was, either to suppress entirely, or very much diminish, the secretion of the menstrual blood, and that in consequence of this, the same condition was produced in the uterus, as in any other muscular part improperly exposed; that is, it became rheumatic. I will not pretend to point out in what this consists, as I believe we have not yet a sufficient number of observations on parts thus circumstanced, to enable us to offer any thing more than conjecture; I shall not, therefore, hazard one, more especially as the term rheumatic, if it does not ascertain the precise state of the parts, yet sufficiently instructs the practitioner as to the disease itself, and the nature of the remedy to be employed. With a view to obviate or overcome this condition of the uterus, I gave the guaiacum, and it has in almost every instance, answered my most sanguine expectation, nay, at first, went even beyond it; for I did not calculate upon any thing more than relieving the great pain of menstruation; but I found, that this was no sooner removed in married women who had hitherto been barren, than they conceived; of this I could give many remarkable in-

stances. In most of the cases of barren women, who were afflicted with painful menstruation, there was the casting off of more or less of the membranous substance just spoken of; when this would come away, pain would soon after abate, and presently cease altogether; but for the most part, there was no abatement in the distressing symptoms until this happened. The presence of this substance acts on the uterus like every other that becomes an extraneous one, by exciting it to violent and painful contractions until the offending cause is removed. The pains attending this complaint are periodical like those of labour, but more permanent in their continuance, and more violent in their degree; in some cases I have witnessed, four or five hundred drops of tinct. opii have been given, before the pain has been even mitigated: I have known it sometimes attended with convulsions, and at others, with most violent vomitings.

I have just observed, that every case of dysmenorrhagia is not attended with the discharge of this membranous-like substance; this ought to be admitted with some caution; and it would be more proper, perhaps, to say, it is not observed in all cases, for I am inclined to believe the same disposition exists in the uterus, only in a lesser degree, and to an extent, that in many instances does not entirely prevent conception; but the same remedy is equally proper in both cases.

Are there any cases in which this remedy is not eligible? hitherto I have met with no such cases; they may exist.

I begin the use of the tincture in the following manner: a tea-spoonful three times a-day, in a glass of Madeira, Sherry, or Lisbon wine; I generally direct it to be taken before each meal, and continue it in this way, unless it happen to offend the stomach when taken before breakfast; in this case, I order it an hour after. I commence its use at any period of the interval between each menstruation, but discontinue it during the dis-

charge, but so soon as this is over the tincture is again given. It sometimes requires a perseverance of three months to effect a cure, and during this time, the quantity is to be gradually augmented to three tea-spoonfuls at a dose. Should it prove purgative, a little laudanum must be added to restrain its effects on the bowels; should it not be sufficiently aperient, a little resin of jalap may be used with it, or the occasional use of the oleum ricini.

There are some women labouring under this complaint, who, during the menstrual period, will require blood-letting, and some even during the interval; it must therefore be remembered, that the pulse be kept sufficiently down during the exhibition of the tincture. To those who are plethoric, an abstemious diet is necessary, and the occasional use of the warm bath has been serviceable.

Flannel next the skin, and a strict attention to keeping the legs and feet warm, are particularly recommended.

During the flow, bleeding is sometimes necessary, after which, camphor given in the following manner, rarely fails to give immediate relief:

R. Gum. camph. \mathfrak{z} j.
— arab. \mathfrak{z} j.
Sacch. alb, q. s.
Aqua cinam. simp. \mathfrak{z} j. m.

one half to be given as soon as pain comes on, and if not relieved in two hours, the other half is to be given; which for the most part is sufficient. I have in some instances been obliged to give laudanum after the camphor, but not often.

I will not pretend to account for the operation of the camphor in this disease, but its effects are very remarkable, in not only relieving pain, but diminishing, and in some cases entirely preventing the discharge of the membrane. I was taught the use of this remedy by an old woman who had laboured under this complaint, and who in a fit of desperation, in one of its paroxysms, drank a wine-glass-full of camphorated spirit, which to her great surprise and joy instantly relieved her; since, it has been recommended in the above and more elegant form, by a gentleman in the Medical and Physical Journal.

In two cases where I failed with the tincture, hemlock was useful; and in one other, the tincture of cantharides gave effectual relief.

OF ITS USE IN OBSTRUCTED CATAMENIA.

I shall only notice in my account of the use of the tincture of guaiacum in obstructed menses, those cases which I think may strictly be considered as chronic, and idiopathic. It has been usual, more especially of late, to regard obstructions of this kind, as merely symptomatic; an error, I conceive, of some magnitude. When we reflect on the important and independent functions the uterus performs, we shall not hesitate in allowing it diseases peculiar to itself, among which we must regard the amenorrhagia. In this kind only would I recommend the guaiacum as a remedy. In diseases of the system at large, or of any particular viscus, with which the uterus may powerfully sympathize, this medicine is not to be depended on, or at least not until the original disease be removed; thus we find in phthisis pulmonalis, scirrhus liver, &c. that the uterus ceases many times to secrete the menstrual blood; in these instances it would be in vain to employ the tincture of guaiacum. But where the interruption to the secretion has had no other remote cause than

exposure to cold, just before or after the time for its discharge, or fevers without visceral obstructions, this remedy, I can with safety declare, from an experience of sixteen years, never in a single instance has failed with me: I look upon it more certain than bark in an intermittent. After the menses have failed two or three periods, they very rarely return again spontaneously; if neglected long after this period, they lay the foundation of various unpleasant symptoms, and sometimes of serious ill health. If then a bleeding, a brisk purge, warm teas and warm bath, do not restore them at the first or second accustomed period, we should immediately begin the use of the guaiacum. In some cases it is necessary to prepare the system as it were for its use; that is, with women who are robust and plethoric: for this purpose blood-letting, purging, and a vegetable diet should be premised a few days, or until the system will bear the stimulus of the tincture. When the system is thus fitted, it is to be given as above directed, for painful menstruation; and with the same precautions and exceptions. It sometimes relieves very quickly, at others it will require a perseverance of five or six weeks, but it rarely employs as much time as the disease just spoken of.

I have known this remedy in two instances restore this discharge, where it had ceased three years, and many where it had failed more than one.

As the tincture I prepare is something different from the tincture of the shops, I have subjoined my formula.

℞	Pulv. gum. guaiac.	℥ viij.
	Carbon. fod. vel potas.	℥ iij.
	Pulv. piment.	℥ ij.
	Alcohol. dilut.	℔ ij.
	Dig.	

VOL. III.

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The volatile spirit of fal ammoniac to be added, *pro re nata*, in the proportion of a drachm to every four ounces of the tincture: or less or more agreeably to the state of the system.

I am, dear sir,

Your's with esteem,

WILLIAM P. DEWEES.

DR. JOHN REDMAN COXE.

Extract of a Letter from DR. C. C. YATES, of Albany, to J. WOODHOUSE, M. D. Professor of Chemistry.

IF in the course of your *travels*, you should happen to meet with the editor of the Medical Museum, (I have not the pleasure of being acquainted with him) you may give him the following information, and if from experience he should find that I am correct, he may publish the result of his experiments. Being for the moment possessed with the idea of the good effects sometimes of the ung. precipit. alb. of the Edinburgh Dispensatory, on ulcers, I took the liberty of trying its effect in the next case of gonorrhoea that offered; I took a piece of a bougie, dipped the point well in the ointment, and introduced it about an inch up the urethra, and turned the ointment in; this I ordered to be repeated three or four times a-day after making water. In this case I succeeded with the assistance of a dose of salts. Several I have cured since, without any internal medicine whatever. This is certainly a convenient way of curing the disorder. I have likewise found that an injection made by putting ʒ iij. of the elixir vitriol. of the shops, into a four ounce