

the brain are found to be flattened, the vessels of the cerebro-spinal axis and its investing membranes are gorged with black blood, and the capillaries of the brain give out on incision minute drops of the same fluid. A serous liquid is usually met with in the ventricles of the brain and under the cerebral face of the arachnoid membrane."

Thus both the symptoms and the post-mortem appearances resemble those of one form of apoplexy, and it is not therefore surprising that Opium has been found a most valuable remedy in even apparently hopeless cases of this affection.

It would seem that we should hope more from it when the apoplexy had not been preceded by chronic symptoms of lesion in the substance of the encephalon, such as would indicate a destructive process (softening, for example,) as going on for some time prior to the apoplectic stroke. In such cases we have undoubtedly a considerable coagulum in the brain-substance and the case would naturally be almost hopeless.

In several severe cases of cerebral apoplexy, with very profound coma, where Opium had entirely failed, Dr. J. Barker, of Brooklyn, has succeeded in affecting a cure with Apis. In his opinion, which is based on much experience with this remedy, Apis is a medicine of great importance in cerebral and spinal affections, whether they manifest themselves chiefly by coma or by spasms.

*Constipation.*—Opium produces a suspension of the secretion from the mucous surfaces of the digestive canal, e. g., the dry mouth and fauces. It probably, therefore, lessens the amount of excrement. It also paralyzes the intestine. These two actions combine to produce an obstinate constipation, an effect of Opium which is universally admitted, recognized and, by Allopaths, regretted. We are, however, enabled by it to cure certain analogous forms of severe constipation.

Most prominent among these is the constipation from paralysis of the intestine caused by Lead, and known as a concomitant of "painter's colic."

*Retention of Urine.*—It is doubtful whether Opium dimin-

ishes the *secretion of urine*, but it certainly does cause its retention in the bladder. This it does, perhaps, chiefly by blunting the sensibility of the lining membrane of the neck of the bladder, so that the fullness of the bladder is not recognized by the patient. It may also paralyze the longitudinal and circular muscular fibres of the bladder. Though the mass of the urine is retained and the bladder full, yet some urine may dribble away, unknown to the patient.

This whole condition is very different from that produced by Stramonium, which produces *suppression* of urine, causing the kidneys to suspend their function.

In retention of urine, Opium is our best remedy. It may occur in fever, in acute illnesses or, frequently, after *child-birth*.

Do we never use Opium as a palliative in acute and very painful affections for which we have not found a specific remedy? I have twice thought it necessary to do so. On each occasion I regretted it. It did mischief. The patients, after a temporary relief, got worse and then, after all, I found, by hard study, the proper remedy (as I ought to have done at first) and *cured* the cases, as I might and ought to have done in the beginning, without Opium, had I known enough.

In evidently incurable diseases when the patient is moribund, as in cancer, etc., Opium may perhaps be given, but even in such cases, though there be no hope of recovery, it should be sparingly used.



## OBSERVATIONS ON COLCHICUM.

BY CARROLL DUNHAM, M. D., NEW YORK.

The *Autumn Crocus* or *Meadow Saffron*, a beautiful flower, found in most parts of temperate Europe and especially abundant and beautiful near the site of the ancient Alba Longa, not far from Rome. The parts used are the root and the seeds, and various opinions have been expressed, by different authors, respecting the relative activity of these portions of the plant. The majority of the provings made by Homœopaths were made with a tincture of the freshly gathered root. Colchicum was well known to the ancients, as indeed its name implies (from the Island Colchos where it abounded), and very little has been added, even in our day, to the knowledge which the ancients possessed of its properties and uses. It was described by them as a violent emeto-cathartic, and on that account a dangerous remedy—as, however, a specific remedy for gout and rheumatism in which it gave magical relief. They considered its frequent and continued use in gout to be injurious, because of its action on the stomach and bowels, and Alexander of Tralles, in the fifth century, says that, although it does speedily relieve the pain and soreness of an attack of gout, it nevertheless favors the frequent recurrence of these attacks, an opinion which is repeated by Mr. Barwell, the most recent authority on “Diseases of the Joints” (London, 1860).

In general the effects ascribed to Colchicum are the following: in large doses it produces loss of muscular power, slow breathing, and slow and feeble pulse. The *sensorium* is but *little* disturbed.

Upon the digestive organs it acts with great energy, increasing and altering the secretion from some or all of their mucous surfaces. Sometimes profuse salivation results. More frequently, profuse secretion of urine. But most frequently of all, nausea, eructations and copious vomiting of mucus and bile with frequent and abundant alvine evacua-

tions, consisting of watery matters with white skinny flocculi, or of yellowish and bloody matter. There is much tenesmus. The flatulent distension of the abdomen is sometimes enormous; when this is the case the stools are not so frequent nor so copious.

This action upon the intestines is observed not merely when the Colchicum is taken into the stomach, but also when it is injected into a vein or rubbed upon the external skin of the abdomen.

In addition to the above symptoms, the nervous system has been observed to be affected as follows: “numbness of the hands and feet, with prickling as if they were asleep; painful flexure of the joints; pain in the shoulder and hip joints and in all the bones, with difficulty of moving the head and tongue” (Henderson). The general loss of power is as remarkable as the fact that even in cases of extreme poisoning, the *mind* remains *clear*. Death probably results from paralysis of the heart.

Colchicum is one of many examples of the great difference in both the degree and kind of action which drugs exert on the organism of different animals. In very small doses it is fatal to *dogs*, producing violent emetocathartic action. Hence the French call it Tue-chien. In *cows* it produces scanty urine, great distension of the abdomen but no profuse diarrhœa. In *rabbits* it produces enuresis, but hardly any serious symptoms. A *frog* will take with impunity a dose that would speedily kill a large *dog*. This example shows the fallacy of deducing from experiments on *animals* rules for the use of drugs in diseases of the *human* organism.

The following summary of the action of Colchicum upon the healthy human subject is derived from Stapf's proving, in the *Archives of the Homœopathic Art*, Vol. VI., and from records of provings which are abundant in medical literature and of which an excellent summary is given by Hartlaub, in the *Homœopathische Vierteljahrsschrift*, Vol. VIII. The provings are still very imperfect.

*Sphere of Action.*—Taking a general view of the action of



Colchicum, we find it to be exerted chiefly on the bones (or periosteum), on the synovial membranes of the joints, on the urinary and digestive organs and upon that part of the nervous system which presides over the function of voluntary motion. It acts also somewhat upon the respiratory organs. It therefore acts with about equal scope upon both the vital force and the organic substance.

It is a remarkable fact that although the action of Colchicum upon the regions and tissues already named is very energetic, the drug being a poison of a speedy and fatal action even in moderate doses, yet, upon the sensorium, it produces almost no effect, the *mind* remaining clear to the last.

*Sensations.*—The sensations which Colchicum produces are a shuddering and creeping in isolated parts of the body, such as are wont to be felt on getting cold from change of weather. Also a tearing tensive pain, in small portions of the body at a time, and quickly changing its location from one part to another. Also sudden *tearing* shocks or jerkings throughout one entire half of the body. Sometimes, sticking or jerking drawings, or weak drawing and tearing in various muscles. The most distressing pains are the *sticking shocks* or *jerkings*, which are felt deep in the soft parts and, as it were, upon the periosteum.

*Aggravation.*—They are worse at night and deprive the patient of sleep.

*Concomitants.*—They are attended by a symptom which is characteristic of Colchicum, viz., a feeling of muscular weakness or paralysis, and this feeling it is which interferes with the patient's locomotion. Finally there are sticking pains in the *joints*.

The *weakness* is very great—the whole body is sore and sensitive: there is a sensation of trembling felt throughout the body—all the muscles of voluntary motion, but especially those of the arms and legs are paralyzed. The knees strike together and the patient can hardly walk.

*Peculiarities.*—The pains are much aggravated at night—

becoming intolerable—and they are aggravated also by any mental exertion or by emotion. There is great sleepiness during the day with indisposition to exertion of any kind, and confusion and dullness of the head. At night, however, the sleep is disturbed or driven away by pains. If he sleep, the patient is wakened by frightful dreams.

As regards *fever*, we observe chilliness through the limbs or down the back—sometimes dry heat, especially at night. Sweat copious and sour. But in general the febrile symptoms are few and moderate in intensity.

The sensorium is no further affected than that it partakes, in some degree, of the general depressed condition. The memory is weakened and the ideas are not so clear as is customary with the patient.

Coming now to the special analysis, we find:

*Head.*—*Pressing* pains, above, in small spots or very severely in the substance of the cerebellum, and occurring on the slightest intellectual exertion, a pressing heaviness in the cerebellum, especially on moving or stooping forwards.

Tearing pains, sometimes in one-half of the head and sometimes in the occiput (the pains, as already stated, wander), sometimes in the temples, sometimes in the pericranium. A pressing tearing in the occiput, finally a very painful drawing tearing in one-half of the head, beginning at the ball of the eye and extending to the occiput. (This reminds us of Spigelia which has a similar symptom on the left side, and of Silicia and Belladonna on the right side.)

*Character.*—To recapitulate, the pains are tearing, drawing, and pressing. They are most frequent in the occiput, and are often semi-lateral. The characteristic symptom is the severe pressing pain deep in the substance of the cerebellum, occurring on the slightest intellectual exertion.

Some remarkable symptoms are recorded of the

*Eyes.*—Drawing digging pains deep in the orbit, resembling those of scleritis. Pressure and biting in the canthi with moderate lacrymation. Violent sharp tearing pains in the globe of the eye and around the orbit.



*Face.*—The expression of the face is that of a chronic patient. There are tearing and tensive pains in the facial muscles, moving from one location to another. Likewise drawing in the *bones* of the face and nose, a sensation as if they were being rent asunder.

The teeth are very sensitive when pressed together, as in biting. Tearing in the jaws and gums; the teeth feel too long. The pains in the teeth are aggravated when, immediately after taking something warm into the mouth, the patient takes something cold.

In the tongue, *tearing*, burning and sticking. Also a loss of sensibility in the tongue, the first symptom we encounter of the Colchicum paralysis.

In the throat, a tickling as if a coryza were setting in, which induces the patient to cough and to clear the throat. The mucus is thin and greenish and comes sometimes involuntary into the mouth. Externally, in the cervical muscles, sometimes a *pressing* pain sometimes a *tension*, felt even when swallowing. The throat is dry, and yet there is a flow of watery saliva, accompanied by nausea, fullness and discomfort in the abdomen.

In the digestive apparatus, we find, considerable thirst, but absence of appetite. Frequent and copious eructations of tasteless gas. Nausea with great restlessness and, on assuming the upright posture, a qualmishness in the stomach and inclination to vomit. Violent retching, followed by copious and forcible vomiting of food and then of bile. If the patient lie perfectly still, the disposition to vomit is less urgent. Every motion renews it. (This is characteristic also of *Tabacum* and *Veratrum*.)

The pit of the stomach becomes very sensitive to touch and pressure. Sometimes there is a burning sensation in the stomach, more frequently a feeling of icy coldness, accompanied by great pain and debility (I cannot forbear remarking here the similarity of this symptom to one form of "retro-cessed gout.")

Pressing tearing, cutting and stitching pains in the abdo-

men. Great distension of the abdomen with gas, feeling as though the patient had eaten too much. This condition affects particularly the upper part, under the short ribs.

Tearing and burning at the orifice of the rectum are frequent symptoms and prolapsus ani has been observed.

The symptoms of the stool present two characters depending on the magnitude of the dose, and the period that has elapsed since the drug was taken and also upon the extent to which other emunctories are affected. For, if there be copious salivation and copious secretion of urine, the stool will be scanty and attended by tenesmus and vice versa. Thus, then, if the intestinal canal be the seat of the most powerful action of Colchicum, and if the symptoms be observed *early*, we have copious, frequent watery or bilious stools, often without pain, sometimes accompanied by cutting colic.

On the other hand, we observe scanty and difficult evacuation of a stool consisting of bloody mucus and shreds, with pain in the anus, great straining and a spasmodic action of the sphincter and constant ineffectual effort to pass feces. (Colchicum, taking these symptoms in connection with its rheumatic and semi-typhoid symptoms will be, as it has proved itself, a valuable remedy in many cases of autumnal dysentery.)

Upon the urinary organs we have the same two-fold action. The secretion is sometimes very copious, watery and frequent. But, generally, in the *human* subject the secretion of urine is diminished; the urine is dark, turbid, and its evacuation is attended and followed by tenesmus of the bladder, and a burning pain in the urethra as if the urine were very warm.

*Respiration.*—On the respiratory organs the action of Colchicum is a subject of dispute among old school authorities. We find it produce a long lasting coryza, which is never watery—but is characterized by secretion of abundant tenacious mucus—tickling in the trachea and a little cough.

It produces frequent oppression of the chest, dyspnoea, a tensive feeling in the chest, sometimes high in the chest and



sometimes low down. These symptoms point to the efficacy of Colchicum in some forms of asthma, a subject on which old school doctors differ. Homœopaths have often used it very successfully in asthma.

In the posterior part of the thorax, dull stitches, as much in the back as in the ribs. It is characteristic of these stitches that they are chiefly felt during *expiration* and *not* during *inspiration*.

*Back.*—In the back, we note the various kinds of drawing, tensive and stitching pains remarked elsewhere. They occur or are much aggravated on motion. On the sacrum a spot as large as one's hand which feels sore, as if ulcerated and is very sensitive to the touch.

*Extremities.*—In the extremities, tearing pains in both muscles and joints, stitching pain in the joints. The pains wander from part to part. They are aggravated by motion and at night. They feel as if in the periosteum. Conjoined with the *pains*, is a very distressing paralytic feeling, together with an actual loss of muscular power approximating paralysis. The action of Colchicum is more marked on the *small* joints than on the *large*.

*APPLICATION.*—Colchicum was regarded by the ancient Greek and Arabian physicians as a specific for gout, but a somewhat dangerous remedy. It fell into disuse until Storck, in Vienna, in the eighteenth century, called attention to it. He proved it in a rude way, and vaunted it as a remedy for gout, rheumatism, asthma and dropsies. Its efficacy in asthma, affirmed by many physicians, has been denied by others, except the asthma depend on hydrothorax or hydropericardium, in which cases it is admitted Colchicum may relieve by removing the dropsical effusion. Storck's recommendation of Colchicum as a remedy in gout did not attract much attention until it was found that Colchicum was the chief ingredient of several famous nostrums for gout—as the Eau medicinale of Husson and the pills of Lartigue and others. At the present day its value is recognized and we all have opportunities to see the mischief inflicted by its improper uses.

Alexander of Tralles, in the fifth century, and Mr. Barwell, in 1860, affirm that it predisposes to *relapses*. In cases in which it does so it cannot be the true remedy.

It has been a subject of discussion whether it act specifically in gout or only by virtue of its hydragogue properties. The question is settled by the fact that other hydragogues do not relieve gout as Colchicum does. Also by the fact which I have myself seen, and which is attested by many physicians, that its action is manifest in relieving the gout *only*, or chiefly when means are taken to *prevent* its action on the bowels, as by combining Opium with it or by copious draughts of *rice-water*.

Having alluded to injurious effects upon the use of Colchicum, I will quote a few sentences from "Barwell on the Joints," p. 176 :

"Colchicum is a remedy whose value is undoubted, but its influences for evil are almost as certain; it is more powerful in gout than in rheumatism. It has a power in checking the pains, etc., of both rheumatic and gouty diseases, but it also has an effect in *procuring relapses*. Persons who have been treated with this remedy suffer from the return of the disease more rapidly than those treated by some other medicine."

Dr. Tod says, the relapses are apt to assume an *asthenic* character, p. 234 :

"Colchicum is a two-edged sword of considerable sharpness; there is no doubt of its great power in checking gouty and even rheumatic pains; but it is very questionable whether it does so in a beneficial manner. The late Dr. Tod believed that it changes the common acute form of gout into an *asthenic* condition which is less easy of management; and there is great reason to believe this idea correct. Any practical opinion which is the result of experience, not of mere *a priori* reasoning, deserves great attention; and we may be sure of this fact, that whatever the *modus operandi* of the drug may be, it hastens relapses, renders each one less amenable to treatment and requiring larger doses of the medicine (if treated with Colchicum) than its predecessors. Whether the



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remedy act simply as a purgative or as stimulating the liver, or as causing a larger excretion of lithic acid is not certain; but its use is permissible only when the constitution is *vigorous*, and it should not be given except when other means of procuring ease have failed."

I fancy that every one who has seen cases of gout or rheumatism treated by Colchicum will endorse the statements of Mr. Barwell and Dr. Tod. Yet they are wrong in banishing Colchicum from the list of remedies to be employed at the beginning of treatment. It has its place in the treatment of gout and rheumatism, and if properly employed in appropriate cases will do good, and *good only*. Allopathic authors are almost unanimous in recommending Colchicum as Mr. Barwell does, as suitable only in persons of vigorous constitution, and in whom the manifestations of the disease are *acute* and *active* or only *approaching* the subacute, and they caution us against using it in feeble cases and in asthenic conditions. Why? Because, as they tell us, its tendency is to produce an asthenic condition and none but vigorous patients can bear it. Others would be reduced too low. Here we have the old idea of antagonism between the action of the drug and that of the morbid organism, the latter not being regarded (as I think it should be) as engaged in a struggle against the morbid influence, of which struggle the symptoms are the phenomena and in which struggle, the drug should act in *co-operation* with the organism and in the *same direction* as the symptoms.

If we look at the symptoms produced by Colchicum, we find the rheumatic or gouty symptoms characterized by a debility, a paralytic weakness, very suggestive of an asthenic type of disease. The fact that Dr. Tod and Mr. Barwell have observed the tendency of Colchicum to turn the active into the asthenic form of gout, furnishes additional evidence of this mode of action of Colchicum. Now it is in precisely this form of asthenic subacute disease that Colchicum is truly indicated and does real service. But, what of the danger of reducing the patient? None whatever, provided we give

doses so small as not to produce the physiological effects, but only the specific effects, which are known to be produced when the symptom disappear. These doses, however, must be *very* small, and, noted as Homœopaths are for giving small doses, many of that school err in these cases in giving doses too large. I do not think it safe to give, in a well marked Colchicum case, a larger dose than the 15th potency.

Dr. Wurmb speaks of Colchicum in its relations to rheumatism as follows:

"This drug stands in close relation to the fibrous tissues; it produces, on the healthy, pains which are very similar to those of rheumatism; it excites a condition of irritation which is very closely allied to inflammation; redness, swelling, heat, etc.; like rheumatic inflammation, this does not tend to suppuration and it easily and quickly changes its location. In the Colchicum fever, as in the rheumatic the cold stage predominates, the sweat is very copious, etc., the urine and sweat smell and react acid."

"These features closely resemble those of a rheumatic attack. Yet if we look at the entire action of Colchicum, we shall perceive that it cannot play an exceedingly important role in the treatment of rheumatism. For it produces another series of symptoms which would often contra-indicate it in rheumatism. For example, the *muscular weakness*, the paralytic symptoms, the diminution of vital heat, the capillary congestions, all which symptoms which indicate a vital atony."

"Consequently we should rarely find Colchicum indicated in the beginning of rheumatic disease, rather only when feeble, debilitated persons have suffered from it a long time."

It appears especially suitable to cases in which we perceive, on the one hand, an active excitement in the local symptoms and, on the other, symptoms of torpor in the general condition of the patient.

Colch. was recommended in 1833 against Asiatic cholera in England and used successfully in eight cases. But, as Dr. Stille says, "notwithstanding its homœopathic appropriateness, it has not been used by others."