MEDICAL SKETCHES,

ON THE

Following Subjects:

I.—ON THE USE OF HELLEBORE, AS A REMEDY FOR INSANITY AND OTHER DISEASES.

II.—OF COLCHICUM AUTUMNALE, AND ITS USE IN MEDICINE.

III.—OBSERVATIONS ON THE SUDDEN DEATH OF WOMEN IN CHILD-BED.

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1818.
These Essays were written some time ago—that which appears last in order towards the close of last year, and the other two about the time that the composition of the Eau Medicinale D'Husson, was a subject of inquiry and discussion. The facts mentioned, from what the writer believes good authority, are certainly important—and as he has reason to think they are not generally known, he submits the Sketches to the Public; for, in whatever manner Theory, or more properly speaking, Hypothesis, may be altered, the results of experience will ever retain their just value.
ERRATA.

To be corrected with the Pen.

P. 10, l. 6, for ὅλικος read ὅ λικος.
1. 7, for ἔκασθησιν read ἔ κασθῆσιν.
1. 9, for σημείω read σημεῖοι.
1. 11, for Ἀλασων κρῆσθων read Ἀλασῶν κρῆσθων.
1. 12, for τίτικα καί ὑγιείας read τῇ τιτικα καὶ ὑγιείας.
11, l. 8, for νήσιν read νῆσιν.
1. 12, for εἰσο read εἰσο— for σημείω read σημεῖοι.
12, 2, from bottom, for Ἐλίου read Ἐλίου—idem p. 13, l. 10.
14, l. 6, for continued upon read ventured upon.
30, l. 6, for Lenis read Servis.
53, l. 4, from bottom, for Ἰτίο read Ἰτίο.
65, l. 12, for acid read acrid.
ON

THE USE OF HELLEBORE,

IN THE

CURE OF INSANITY,

AND

OTHER DISEASES.

ALTHOUGH it is unquestionably true that many improvements in the healing art have been made in modern times, it is equally true, that from the prevailing neglect of the writings of the ancient physicians, much valuable information is lost to the world, and many supposed discoveries and improvements, are merely revivals of ancient practice. It would be easy to
point out many instances, both in medicine and surgery, in which the approved and recently adopted practice of the present day exactly coincides with the ancient rules; but the purpose of this Essay is to draw the public attention to the use of one remedy, once most successfully used, but now fallen into disuse, and even considered as a poison; and that is, Hellebore, as applied for the cure of Insanity, and other diseases. Not only are we assured of the efficacy of this Medicine, by the most respectable medical writers of antiquity, but we find that efficacy proverbially noticed by the poets and historians of Greece and Rome, and notwithstanding the discontinuance of its use, allusions to its once highly-estimated virtues occur in the writings of the moderns. *O Caput hellebore dignum! and ad Corcyram!* were
familiar terms of reproach when the sentiments uttered appeared unreasonable, and were equivalent to the expression "the man is mad." Indeed, of all other remedies mentioned by the ancient physicians, Veratrum appears to have been the most generally used in their most obstinate cases of mania, melancholia, gout, and elephantiasis, and its manner of exhibition is presumed by Hippocrates to be so well known that he does not describe it; but shortly says, that in certain cases ελλευβετζων ἔχειν, "recourse must be had to a course of hellebore," the frequentative verb strictly implying the repeated use of the remedy.

At what particular period this medicine was introduced into practice, we do not find in the writings of Hippocrates, who lived in the time of Artaxerxes, in the
third century before the Christian era; but the Cnidian physician Ctesias, the co-
temporary of Plato and Xenophon, who wrote about a century earlier, expresses
himself very particularly on this subject, and warrants the supposition that the me-
dicine was introduced into general practice about four hundred years before Christ.
His words are, "In the time of my father " and grandfather, no medical practitioner
" administered hellebore, nor were its qua-
" lities, the manner of preparation, or
" proper dose known. But if any one
" gave hellebore, it was with this admoni-
" tion to the patient, that he must neces-
" sarily be in great danger; for of those
" who took this medicine, many were suf-
" fected, and few preserved; but it ap-
" pears to be now given with safety." From
the time of Ctesias the medicine was in
general use among the Greek, Roman and Eastern physicians for many centuries; yet, as in all ages medical men have in some things differed in opinion, we find Alexander Trallianus, who lived long before the time, representing it as dangerous, and recommending as a substitute in the cure of melancholy madness, the Lapis Armeniacus. The commentator on Dioscorides Matthiolus, who lived about the middle of the sixteenth century, briefly noticing the dangers apprehended from the use of this remedy, adds, "Cæterum albi "quoque Hellebori dilutum exhibuimus "quibusdam Melancholicis, magno sane "successu, nullo tamen aegrotantium in- " commodo, nullaque cum noxa." I may have been thus successful, he goes on to say, because the Hellebore growing in the neighbourhood of Trent, may be milder
than that raised in hotter climates; but I have no doubt, that by the proper admixture of other remedies, the very strongest Hellebore may be safely administered. Here it may be observed in passing, that we have the very idea of the "Eau Medicinale D'Husson," if it be really true, that this so much boasted remedy consists of three parts tincture of white Hellebore, and one of laudanum, as Mr. Moore thinks more than probable. It is unnecessary to trace very minutely the gradations by which this medicine disappeared in medical practice. Spigelius, certainly one of the most learned physicians of the earlier part of the seventeenth century, makes no mention of it, although he wrote a treatise on gout. Morgagni mentions a case in which he believes that death was occasioned by the exhibition of three grains of the
powder; and Chomel*, who wrote a short treatise on medical plants in the time of Louis XIV. says, that white Hellebore is used as a purgative for horses, but is too violent in its operation for internal use in medicine. He however adds, that an infusion in wine has been given with good effects in certain cases of mania. In our later dispensatories its external use in certain eruptions, is mentioned, but no formula is given, as far as I have observed, for its internal use.

If, then, we would know the manner of

* "Au rapport de Tragus l'Ellebore blanc infuse vingt-quatre heures dans le vin, ou dans l'oxymel, et seche ensuit, puis donne a demi dragme, dans un verre de vin blanc, peut-etre utile a Maniaques, et a ceux qui sont sujets aux vapours, hypochondriaques."
exhibition of this very powerful medicine, we must recur to the writers who assure us that they used it successfully; and these are the elder Greek physicians, for the Arabians are but their translators on this subject; and Celsus borrowed from them almost every thing valuable in his work, and would probably have given the same advice to medical students as Horace gives to young poets,—

——— Vos exemplaria Græca
Nocturna versate manû, versate diurna.

Hippocrates, as before mentioned, although he recommends the medicine, gives no particular directions for its exhibition; nor has Galen, his great successor, supplied the deficiency. Aretæus, of whom it may be justly said, that had not his book descended to us in a mutilated state, he
would have been the most valuable of all the Greek writers on medicine, describes the cases in which this remedy ought to be used, but descends not to the description of the manner of exhibition, as supposing it well known; and his book, as we have it, concludes with a beautiful eulogy on its virtues. He had before frequently mentioned this medicine as the remedy of all others the most to be depended upon in gout (καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ποδαγρικοῖς ἐλλεβοροῖς ΤΟ ΜΕΤΑ ΑΚΟΣ); and in several other formidable distempers; and he is finally describing the cure of elephantiasis, a disease, which in his time, as well as now, was with the greatest difficulty to be overcome; and after proposing many remedies, he at length comes, as to the most powerful of all, to the exhibition of Hellebore; recommending the
white as an emetic, the black as a purga-
tive. Lest it should be supposed, how-
ever, that he had recommended this medi-
cine merely as an emetic, producing no
other effect beyond the evacuation of the
stomach, he adds, καὶ εἰς ὀλέυκῳ (ἐλλεβορίῳ)
ὄνως ἐμετησίον μονον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔμπαυσιν ὁμοιό-
καθαρτισιων ὁ δυνατωτατος, ὡς πληθεί καὶ τὴ
σωκιλία

τῆς ἐκκρισίως τὸ ὑπὸ γὰρ καὶ χολεῖθ ὑπωμεν. ὧς ἐνα

σεσεῖ καὶ βιὰ της εἰς τοὺς ἐμέθοις: εἰς τὸ ὑπὸ γὰρ

ναύλη καὶ ἅλασσων ἄνθρο ποιεῖν ἀλλα δυναμὶ καὶ ωισιθη

νὶς φαυλὴ τεσπερ αἱ ὑγείας τῆς καμυλοιας ωὶς, καὶ

ἐν τῇ ὁλυγῆ τῇ καθαροῖ καὶ εἰς σμίκρῃ τῇ εὐλασί.

And white Hellebore is not to be con-
dered merely as an emetic; but also of all
other cathartics put together the most
powerful, not from the quantity or variety
of the matter evacuated, for this is effected
by cholera; nor by the violence of its
action in producing vomiting, for sea sick-
ness is excellent in that respect; but by its own power and excellent specific quality; for by that it restores health to the sick, and that with but little evacuation and slight retching.

Then follows the more emphatical part of the eloge in language highly poetical:

"But farther, of all inveterate chronic diseases, if other remedies have failed, this only is to be depended upon for cure. "For in power white Hellebore is like
“unto fire; and whatever the fire operates
by burning out, Hellebore, by pervading
every inward part, does still more effec-
tually, producing free respiration where
it was difficult, a healthy complexion for
paleness, and the healthy fulness of body
in place of emaciation.”

This passage, from the most learned me-
dical writer of antiquity, is given at length,
as the testimony of a man worthy of all
credit, that the remedy was of all others
known to him the most efficacious, and
that it had been in his time found success-
ful, when all other remedies had failed.

The writers who particularly mention
the mode in which it was administered by
the ancients, are Oribasius and Ælius, of
the third century, and Paulus Ægineta,
supposed to be of the seventh, when the medicine had been in common use for nearly a thousand years. Of these writers Oribasius gives the fullest account, and his work is not only valuable for what it contains describing his own practice, but as a collection containing the practice and formulæ of other distinguished physicians, whose writings have not come down to our times. From Oribasius, Ælius, Paulus Ægineta, and succeeding writers copy, and it is believed that until the medicine was discontinued in practice, no improvements or even alterations were made in the manner of exhibition which he so minutely describes.

He commences his treatise on the exhibition of Hellebore, with a description from Archigenes of the manner in which
the patient is to be prepared who is about to use a remedy so powerful; and this preparation consists in repeated evacuations by vomiting and purging after stated intervals, during twenty days, and then the use of Hellebore may be continued upon, provided the patient possesses sufficient strength of body, and firmness of mind,—that is supposing the medicine to be administered to a patient, not a maniac. Then follow many rules concerning the diet proper for those about to take Hellebore, and this ought to consist chiefly of vegetables of easy digestion, and having a tendency to move the bowels. Thereafter vomiting is to be excited by the acrid radish, as an immediate preparative for the most powerful medicine of all;—and this, says he, will teach what is to be expected from Hellebore—for radish "morsus excitat quandoque
"animi defectiones—quandoque etiam gutturis angustias parit." The dose he prescribes appears very formidable—not less than a **pound**, nor more than a **pound and a half**; and this to be taken after having taken a little food, and drank some water. There can be no doubt that such a dose of our acrid radish, in common use as a condiment, would excite the violent symptoms just mentioned; but there is some doubt with regard to the part of the plant to be used.

"A**cres autem raphanas et teneros esse opor**tet—sique dulci**ores sint, caulem capere oportebit, et cum eo etiam pars foliorum, quae tenerrima sint, et transversa." The intention evidently was to produce full and more violent vomiting by this acrid vegetable, as a preparative for the still more violent operation of Hellebore, and although there appears something indistinct in the
directions for its preparation and use; there can be no doubt that by cautious trials, the effect desired may be produced at the present day as successfully as in former times. From the writings of the same author Archigenes, rules are given for choosing the Hellebore proper for medical use. That from Mount Oeta is preferred—next that produced in Galatia, and if these cannot be obtained, the Sicilian is recommended.

The marks by which good Hellebore is to be distinguished, generally are a fair white colour, not approaching to livid, or having any dark spots, and when broken, no dust ought to appear, but a smooth and very white fracture. When taken into the mouth, it ought not to be immediately felt hot and acrid, but at first of a sweetish taste, thereafter gradually becoming more stimu-
lant, and provoking a great flow of saliva, and that frequently attended with vomiting.

The preparation of Hellebore for exhibition is thus described from Herodotus, who says, that it may be used without any considerable danger.—A pound of Hellebore is to be macerated for three days in six hemina of water, thereafter a decoction is to be made over a slow fire, till a third part of the water is evaporated, when the Hellebore is to be expressed; then we add two hemina of honey to the decoction, and again replace it over the fire, and continue the decoction until it does not adhere to whatever may be immersed—donec non inquinet. Of this preparation we give to those, who do not stand in need of the more violent operation of the medicine, cochlearia duo;
but to the robust the quantity of a quarter cyathus, *ad mystri magnitudinem.*

Here it is necessary to attend to the quantities ordered, and to reduce them as nearly as we can to the measures of the present day. The *libra* is certainly twelve ounces; the *hemina*, although frequently termed a pint, is in fact but three-fourths of the quantity, or nine ounces, or according to others *ten*; the *cochleare* is the twelfth part of the cyathus, which contained an ounce, five drachms, and two scruples; and the *mystrum* the fourth part of a cyathus, or ten scruples five grains.

Supposing then that we were at the present day to order a preparation of Hellebore, according to the above directions, the formula would stand nearly thus:
R Radicis veratri infrustulas scissi, lb i.
Aq. fontanæ — — lb v.
Macera per dies tres—deinde leni
igne imposito et decoque ad — lb iii. ʒ iv.
Veratrum deinde exprimendum—
et addendum decocto mellis
despumati — — — lb i. ʒ viii.
et iterum decoque—donec non inquinet:

Capiat æger—grana septemdecem—vel si
robustior sit, ad—ɔ ii. gr. xi.—Hellebore
in this form, says Herodotus, may be ex-
hibited with perfect safety.

Another prescription, nearly resembling
this, is given by Archigenes:
R Radicis veratri ramenta — — lb i.
Aq. fontan. sextarios tres — — lb v.
Triduo macerandum—tum co-
quendum donec tres sextarii — lb ii. ʒ iv.
relinquantur, postea diligenter expressas vergulas abjicere oportet. Tres deinde librae mellis reliquae addendae, et coquendum donec ad eclegmatis consistentiam redigatur, tum in vase vitreo aut argenteo reponendum, adhibita cura ne perspiretur.

The medicine however was frequently administered in substance; finely cut down, the same author says that two drachms may be given for the greatest dose; a middling dose ten oboli, or five scruples; and the smallest eight oboli, or four scruples.

Another formula is given by Antyllus:

R Ramentorum radicis veratri — — 3 v.
Madescant in aquae pluviae heminae
atticae semisse — — — — — — 3 v.
Cola deinde trajiciendum et in duplici vase
calefaciendum, et ita propinandum.—

What is meant by *vas duplex* I do not exactly know, and never having been able to procure a copy of this author (Oribasius) in the original, I cannot say what the Greek is.

In cases of insanity, when the patient could not be prevailed upon to take any of the forms of the medicine mentioned, we are informed by Dioscorides, that it was usual to powder it finely, and mix it in the bread which hunger compelled the patient to eat, and that even thus it often proved successful.

It must however be attended to, that the ancient physicians never expected a cure by means of Hellebore, until they had used it several times, and each time so as to pro-
duce violent symptoms. The author I quote has a chapter with this title, "Qui faciendum sit quum strangulatio occupat eos qui Elleborum sumpserunt." By "strangulatio" I conceive the author means that suspension of respiration which spasms of the stomach produce, which the Greeks termed νυξ; they also applied the same term to the suspension of respiration in violent cases of hysteria, νυξ ὑπεριζαν. The remedy in this case was the immediate evacuation of the stomach, by drinking, should the patient be at all able to swallow a weak infusion of bruised roots of Hellebore warmed. If the patient could no longer swallow, (and during completely suspended respiration, that is scarcely possible,) they irritated the fauces with feathers dipt in oil, and at the same time administered the most acrid glysters, which were said to alleviate
symptoms for a time, until other remedies might have effect.—Another chapter describes what is to be done, "ubi vox et sensus amittitur." In this case the teeth are to be forced asunder by small wedges, "cuneolis," that the fauces may be irritated as before-mentioned; the powder of Hellebore, or euphorbium, is to be blown into the nostrils; but if these remedies prove ineffectual, recourse is then to be had to an operation which I shall give in the author's own words, lest it might be supposed that I were describing the vulgar operation of tossing in a blanket. "Si vero et vocis et sensus privatio ita perseveret, vestimentum aliquod admodum firmum et robustum extendemus, et ex duobus partibus tenendum juvenibus robustis, et aliis qui contra se sese sint constituti, ac jubeamus ut ipsum vestimentum sublime à
"terra extendant, tum in eo reclinabimus"
"hominem qui Elleborum sumpsit, quan-
"doque vero in latus utrumque devolve-
"mus, aliis id latus quod properos sit
"attollentibus; aliis vero deprimentibus."

After describing thus particularly the man-
ner in which the patient is to be exercised,
he very coolly adds, "ac tunc quidem scire
"convenit; nisi homo his quassationibus
"et commotionibus à sensūs privatione
"non sublevetur, eum non esse postea sen-
"sum recuperaturum." A following chap-
ter treats of the singultus and convulsion,
which for the most part come on after a full
dose of Hellebore. If these prove moderate,
the physician is desired not to interfere, as
they prove useful by agitating the stomach,
and provoking a more perfect discharge of
its contents; but if they prove excessive,
a warm infusion of such plants as are grate-
ful to the stomach is prescribed, together with sternutatory. In still more urgent cases, tight ligatures are put upon the extremities, perhaps with the view of checking convulsive motion, as we sometimes do in cases of epilepsy, and the patient is to be put into the warm-bath. It is added, that strong passions of the mind are to be excited, "adhæc pavores quosdam machi-
" namur, et contumeliis incessimus et ut
" magnas inspirationes edant edicimus."—
Another effect of Hellebore, when the stomach is no longer in danger, is yet to be guarded against, and that is hypercatharsis.
" Nimias purgationes sistemus calidissi-
" mum potum propinando, et extrema
" ligando, et vehementi frictione, et vali-
" dis Cucurbitulis tum Hypochondrio tum
" verò dorso admotis, et vi etiam avulsis;" and if these prove unsuccessful, narcotics
are to be applied. It is to be observed, that the cupping here mentioned is what we term dry cupping; for when it was the intention to draw off blood, scarifications of considerable depth were used. A medicine so powerful, after the more violent effects were over, left the patient exceedingly languid, and profuse debilitating sweats are mentioned as frequently demanding the attention of the physician. These he is to moderate by ventilation, spunging the surface with cold water, or *posca*, a kind of oxycrate; and the patient is finally to be restored by light nourishing diet and wine.

From the above sketch we see, that however efficacious Hellebore may have been in the cure of many diseases, its exhibition must have been formidable to all concerned, the practitioner, as well as the patient
and his friends. The account given of the patient’s situation, when in danger of suffocation, is shocking. “Ingens vomendi “appetitus excitatur sed nihil excernitur, “facies intumesce, oculi exeruntur,—col-
“ligantur, et constipantur partes ad respi-
“rationem pertinentes, cum respirandi
“summâ difficultate—nonnulli linguam
“exerunt, & copioso sudore madescut, 
“alii dentes concutiant eisque mens
“tentatur.” Yet it appears that cau-
tiously used, Hellebore has been and may
still prove a very valuable remedy, without
producing the violent symptoms just de-
scribed, or endangering the life of the pa-
tient. In what variety of forms it was
administered has been mentioned, and the
doses are certainly large; yet Morgagni
says, that in a case that came under his ob-
servation, three grains of the powder proved

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C 2
fatal, by exciting inflammation of the stomach. I cannot help thinking that there must have been some misapprehension or mistake in this case, for in thousands of cases, far larger doses have produced not the slightest bad consequence. We all know with what timidity laudanum, calomel, and digitalis, were used not many years ago, and as they could not always cure, they were no doubt often unjustly accused of killing the patient.

When in the ancient prescriptions *ra-menta veratri* are mentioned, I rather think that scrapings of the fresh root may sometimes be meant, such as we use of radish as a condiment at table, at the same time, the directions given for choosing it good, already mentioned, prove that it was frequently used in the dry state. At the
same time it is reasonable to suppose, that like other bulbous roots, it would prove most active in its fresh state. It is however to be considered, that in many countries of Europe it is not indigenous, and must, in those countries where it does not grow, be used in the dried state, as we have it in our shops. It has been said that according to Aretæus, Hellebore was anciently used in many different chronic diseases; it was, however, more especially used in cases of insanity, and even the poets bear testimony to its efficacy as well as the moral writers and historians. Horace describes a case of partial insanity, if I may use the expression, where the patient's ideas were deranged on only one subject, and that case he says was cured by Hellebore.
Fuit haud ignobilis Argis
Qui se credebat miros audire Tragedos,
In vacuo lætus sessor—plausorque theatro
Cætera qui vitae servavit munera recto
More; bonus sane vicinus, amabilis hospes,
Comis in uxorem, posset qui ignoscere, Lenis,
Et signo læso non insanire Lagenæ,
Posset qui Rupem, et puteum vitare patentem.
Hic ubi cognatorum opibus, curisque refectus
Expulit helleboro morbum—bilemque Meraco,
Et reedit ad se: Pol me occidistiis amici,
Non servastiis ait; cui sic extorta Voluptas
Et demptus per vim mentis gratissimus Error:

A case something similar we have for many years witnessed in this place. A man, of the name of Morison, now I should suppose nearly eighty years of age, well informed for his rank in life, and in every other respect perfectly correct and sound in mind, has, for more than forty years, firmly
believed that a certain non-descript diabolical tormentor had and has power over him by means of a loadstone. He believes that this tormentor can stop him from the performance of the common actions of life, render it impossible for him to handle a knife, fork, or spoon, at table; arrest his progress in walking; stop his watch, or deprive his violin of all sound in a moment.

When I first knew him, he had about a thousand pounds, which he had acquired in the service of a gentleman abroad, but he would not trust it out at interest, nor in any bank, as he said he was sure the tormentor would abstract it. He kept it in a little iron chest, secured, as he thought, by crucifixes (for he is a Roman Catholic);
it consequently rapidly diminished, and he now subsists upon charity. Whether in a case such as this, Hellebore could have been serviceable, I do not know; but we have reason to think that in former times it was tried in cases not dissimilar.

Three parts of the tincture of white Hellebore and one part of laudanum, the tincture being prepared with white wine, was supposed by Mr. Moore to be the *Eau Medicinale D'Husson*, nearly resembling it in its sensible qualities and effects. On the other hand, as was mentioned formerly, Mr. Want believes the Colchicum Autumnale to furnish the active ingredient in that celebrated medicine. A spirituous tincture is kept in the shops, which I have often prescribed in gouty affections, and often
used myself for rheumatism, and always with some relief. The dose is from one to two drachms; but I cannot say that I have ever known it produce the strong effects ascribed to the Eau Medicinale, or any symptoms similar to those described by Oribasius. That both the Colchicum and Veratrum are most powerful remedies, is not to be questioned, and should they again come into general use, more convenient formulæ will no doubt be contrived.

The botanical description of plants not growing in this country, is not so interesting; but it may be proper to say, that the Veratrum is of the Class III. *Polygynia*, Order I. *Monoecia*. No calyx; corolla six petalled, stamina six, pistils *three*. 
capsules three, with many seeds. It is a native of Asia Minor, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria; flowers from June to August, and is found to be most powerful in warm climates.
OF

COLCHICUM AUTUMNALE,

AND ITS USE IN

MEDICINE.

At the present day, when Colchicum is again coming into use, as an approved remedy for gout, it may contribute towards its more general and ready reception, to shew that it was prescribed for this disease, and very successfully in former ages, and with many other valuable medicines, fell into disuse, as trifling novelties prevailed. Many of our most efficacious articles of the Materia Medica, indiscreetly used, are virulent poisons, and, indeed, of the vegetable kingdom, we have scarcely a simple that may be depended upon as a remedy,
that is not dangerous when improperly used.

That Colchicum was classed among poisonous plants by the ancient Greek and Roman physicians is certain—but Hellebore, hyoscyamus, and digitalis, with many others, of much efficacy, were placed in the same class; although, by attention to proper cautions, they were safely, and advantageously administered. The descriptions of antidotes, ordered when Colchicum had inadvertently been eaten in the field, are connected in the writings of the older medical authors, with an account of the symptoms produced by the poison, and these symptoms appear from the account given by Nicander, to have been violent in the highest degree; but yet this poison, by proper management, became a valuable and
effectual remedy, for one of the most distressing maladies to which the human body is liable. The effects of Colchicum are very particularly described by Paulus Ægineta and others; but about the year 1260, a small treatise was written in Greek, by Demetrius Papagomenus, at the command, as he informs us, of the Emperor Michael Paleologus, in which he recommends Hermodactylus (Colchicum) as the remedy to be relied upon in preference to all others, when we may suppose that experience had fully sanctioned its use, and established its reputation.

This little work appears to possess much merit in the practical part, and owing to some extraordinary causes, not well explained, has been unjustly neglected. In the year 1558, it was published, with the
author’s name; a very fair translation into Latin, being annexed by a physician of Paris, whose name is not given. The editor, who designs himself by the initials A. B., says, that the work was highly approved by the most eminent physicians—that he had it translated by one of the wisest and most learned men of the day—μετὰ τῶν σοφιλάτων καὶ λογικάτων ἄνδρων τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς διαφημωτῶν—and it was beautifully printed by Morelius. Yet, when nine years afterwards, Henry Stephens was about his great work, the "Artis Medicae principes, post Hippocratem et Galenum," a work in which he frequently amends the errors of the Greek editions, he indeed inserts the Tract as the work of an unknown author, but gives a miserable translation, by an ecclesiastic, Marcus Musurus, who apologizes for having translated a work of
He calls the author, "infans et elinguis, ut qui ne sciret si quid vel arte didicisset, vel usu compertum habuisset, " exprimere," and declares that he undertook the translation at the request of Lascari. That a priest should be very ill qualified, as a translator of Greek medical writers, may well be conceived; but it is surprising, that an accomplished scholar, such as Henry Stephens, should have given a place in his valuable work to a vile mis-translation, when the original, with a very good version, had been published in Paris only nine years before. The merit of the original appears, however, to have been estimated by this faulty translation; and Friend, while he admits that the author is not quite so contemptible as the translator would represent him, adds, that he is of very inferior merit, producing
nothing new, and copying for the most part from *Alexander*. The author does not pretend to bring forward novelties; at the same time I know of no author extant in Dr. Friend’s time, who gives the same account of the origin of the disease, the prophylaxis, or the cure. In one place he mentions Alexander; but his quotations are chiefly from Hippocrates and Galen, and with their writings he appears to have been so familiar, that in giving their words, he did not consult their books, for after a quotation from Hippocrates, he goes on, *καὶ πολὺν ὁ αὐτοῦ φησι*. "And again "*the same author says*"—and then gives the words not of Hippocrates but Galen, an error that will not lower him in the esteem of those who see that it is a mere oversight, and in fact a proof of his learning, for had he been less familiar with the
language and sentiments of these authors, he would not have ventured to quote from memory, which he has done very accurately, the mistake of the name excepted.

The medicine so much depended upon by Demetrius, he calls *Hermodactylus*, and a question has been agitated whether *Hermodactylus* and *Colchicum* be indeed the same plant—the same with the *meadow saffron* of England; Matthiolus and Murray say that they are altogether dissimilar, but the evidence that they are really the same, much predominates. In the first place, Dioscorides particularly describes *Colchicum*, giving the very same distinguishing marks as Withering does of English meadow saffron, which is without doubt the *Colchicum Autumnale*. Then Serapion describing *Hermodactylus*, gives the very
words in which Dioscoridés describes Colchicum, and among the Arabian physicians, the plant is generally called by that name. In England, till very lately, meadow saffron was known by the same appellation; and in an English translation of Wirtzung's Praxis Medicinae Universalis, printed in the time of Queen Elizabeth, we have the following passage: "Hermodactyles, in Greek Colchicum, in Latin Ephemerum deleterium. Bulbus agrestis—of the herb-"banists Canineca, panis Ciconiæ, and bul-"bus caninus. Our common Hermodactyles is the Hermodactyle root, and true Col-"chicum which Galen calleth Ephemerum deleterium: Avicenna, Serapio, and other "Arabian physicians do affirm the same, and "it availeth nought, that some will distinguish "the Colchicum of the Greeks from the Her-"modactylus of the Arabians: their false
and erroneous opinions are easily withstood, for you need but only compare the
Chapter of Hermodactyles of Serapio, with the Chapter of Colchicum of Dioscorides,
en then you shall evidently see that it is one and the same root." This passage occurs in the Index of the work, and it may be questioned whether it apply to England; but in one of our oldest English Herbals, under the head Saffron, several species of meadow saffron are mentioned, and applicable to the same plant, immediately follows. "Meadow saffron is hot and dry; the roots of Hermodactyls purge and helpe the goute, and hurt the stomach; stamped and mixed with the whites of eggs, barley meal, and crumbs of bread, and applied as a plaster, they help the gout and swelling aches of the joints. Hermodactyls of the shops, are corrected
"with the powder of ginger, long pepper, "anise or cummin seeds, and a little mas-
tick; those of the meadows with cowes "milk." This plant is said to be found in Cambridgeshire and other counties of Eng-
land, and as the description of meadow saffron given by Dr. Withering, exactly agrees with that of the Colchicum of Dios-
corides, and Hermodactylus of Serapion, and other writers, there appears no reason to believe that the descriptions do not apply to one and the same plant. What Paulus Ægineta says of the effects of Hermodactylus when prescribed for gout, agrees very exactly with the reported effects of the Eau Medicinale, of which Colchicum is thought to be the chief ingre-
dient. "Some," says he, "during the "paroxysms of gout, use Hermodactylus "as a cathartic; but it is to be attended
"to, that Hermodactylus injures the "stomach, creating anxiety and loss of "appetite. It should therefore be used by "those only who are engaged in business "that cannot be deferred, for it speedily, "and for the most part within two days, "removes the symptoms. I also knew a "man who prescribed Hermodactylus not "according to the usual forms, and in "substance, but he boiled the plant with "anise or parsley, and gave the decoction "to be drank; and it is astonishing how "the patients are relieved by the discharge "from the bowels."

DeLobel says, that *Colchicum strangulatum* is termed *wilde saffron*, or *meadow saffron*; and Clusius refers to his account of Colchicum for the description of Hermo-
dactylus*. From these authorities, it would seem probable, that the Hermodactylus of Paulus and Demetrius, is really the Colchicum, the meadow saffron; but Colchicum is the most ancient name, and it appears that several species were called Hermodactyls, so that some confusion might naturally arise, and writers might call different plants by the name of Hermo-

* Chomel, who wrote about the beginning of the last century, under the word "Hermodacte," says that it is the Greek Colchicum, although different opinions have been entertained concerning it; that it purges easily the humours that create pains of the joints, and is ordered successfully in gout, sciatica, and rheumatism.—That it is an ingredient in the arthritic powder of Paracelsus—the panchimagogue of Quercetan—and pills of Mesue.
dactylus. Those who deny the identity of Colchicum and Hermodactylus, allege that the last is used in many parts of the East as an esculent vegetable without the smallest inconvenience; but it is to be attended to, that the root, at one season of the year altogether mild, and of no disagreeable flavour, becomes afterwards so acrid, that it has been called \textit{εφημερον}, from its destroying life in one day; occasioning, according to Nicander, symptoms of extreme violence; and at all times it is rendered by the use of fire altogether innoxious.

Demetrius says, that having been directed by the Emperor, of whose talents he speaks very highly, to write upon the subject of Gout, and describe the proper means by diet, medicine, and external applications,
of guarding against the disease, or removing it after it had actually come on; he proceeds in obedience to his commands, to execute the task, although many ancient and eminent physicians had written excellent treatises upon the same subject. And this, he says, he was the more inclined to do, because although diseases may be generally described, there is an unbounded variety of constitutions, climates, and external circumstances—according to the dictum of Hippocrates, "Naturae a naturis multùm differunt, et a locis, loca." He proceeds to state the causes of the disease, observing, that he who well understands these, will be most successful in his attempt to cure.

"Nature," he says, "being devoid of rea-
"son, yet acts conformably to its rules*; and "men eating, and from food receiving nourish-
"ment, it follows that after digestion, what-
"ever part of the food is fit for the pur-
"pose of nutrition and assimilation to the "body, should to that use be applied, and "whatever is useless should pass off as ex-
"crement; and nature thus operates in "the secretion of the liver, the veins, and "arteries, and all other parts."

And first, excrementitious matter is sepa-
rated from what affords nourishment to the body, through the whole course of the intestines, even to the rectum. The liver, according to Galen, produces two several secretions, and yet not entirely dissimilar; of which one proceeds from the gall blad-
der, the other from the spleen; standing in the same relation to each other as the flower of wine, and its dregs*. The yellow bile

* Διάσσον πόνον—καὶ Τρύγη. —What is here meant by the "flower of wine," I do not perfectly understand. Sir Kenelm Digby says, "The wine merchants observe in this country (and every where else) there is "wine, that during the season the vines are in flower, "the wine which is in the cellar makes a kind of fer-
"mentation, and pusheth forth a white lee upon the "surface of the wine (which I think they call the "mother of the wine), which continueth in a kind of "disorder, until the flowers of the vines be fallen, and "then this agitation being ceased, all the wine returns "to the same state it was in before." Supposing this periodical appearance on the surface of the wine really to take place, the analogy would be very incomplete between that and the constant secretion taking place at all times of bile. Perhaps, however, the Διάσσον πόνον—is referrible to the fermentation of the liquor, before the additions are made, that render it fit for use.
descending into the intestines, resembling in some measure the *flos vini*; while that supplied to the stomach is black bile, of an irritating quality, which Galen says is provided by nature to excite appetite for food. The excrementitious matter from the veins and arteries, is to be considered as the whey of curdled milk, separated by the kidneys, and transmitted to the urinary bladder. Sweat is the most refined of the sensible secretions; and some called *fuliginous*, on account of their subtle nature, entirely elude our sight.

According to Demetrius, gout and rheumatism proceed from disordered digestion, a redundancy of bile, and consequent corruption of the blood, and as the disease attacks different parts of the body, he says it is called "Ischias, podagra, arthritis, or
“odontagra.” Whatever we may think of his theory, we must admit that it leads to the most effectual practice, for the free discharge of bile never fails to relieve the pain to a certain degree, and sometimes removes it entirely; indeed after the disease has continued for some time, cathartics alone can be depended upon for its cure, attending at the same time to proper regimen. Blood letting, he says, may be useful during a first attack, but not in chronic cases; and even in the most dangerous cases, when the brain, the liver, or the heart itself is affected, he relies upon powerful cathartics for the speediest and most effectual relief. He recommends early and steady efforts for the cure of the disease, as after some time it becomes so rooted in the constitution, that according to some, it becomes hereditary; and when not heredi-
tary, he observes, that it arises from some excess, or error in regimen; introducing one meal into the stomach before that previously taken is digested—excessive use of wine, and venery, and want of exercise or over-fatigue.

His prophylaxis accords with his opinion of the cause of the disease, and this he says is very easily enjoined by the physician, but most difficult to be observed by the patient. The rule is by all means to avoid indigestion, and to eat and drink no more than the stomach easily bears, for the words of Hippocrates are true, "the man who eats and drinks little will suffer from no disease." Εἰ ὦλιγὰ ἐθεὶ καὶ ὦλιγὰ ποιεῖ ὁ αὐτὸς ὅ, ὦ μενειαν μνουσον ὑπαγεί. He adds, from the same author, an injunction, that moderation should
be used in food, drink, labour, sleep, and venery. Σιλα, ωδα, κοπία υπνοι αφροδισία συμμελα, and seems to approach very nearly to the precepts of the Pythagorean regimen. Evacuation, according to Hippocrates, is the natural cure of whatever diseases are occasioned by Repletion*; and as the stomach first suffers by excess, Demetrius recommends as the first remedy to be tried, its evacuation by emetics. He gives the rules laid down by Hippocrates concerning the diet to be used, before the exhibition of emetics, but prescribes no particular medicine for the purpose of producing vomiting, directing the patient to fill the stomach with certain roots, and fat flesh not perfectly

* Όσα γαρ αλησμονί τιπέει, κενωσίς ἵππας.
chewed, and drink abundantly of sweet wine; and when the patient has thus eat and drank what he can, he is to wait twenty minutes, then to drink warm water (from honey, μέλι μέλισσα) and inserting the finger, or a feather into the throat, he is to excite vomiting; and drinking again of warm water, is to repeat the operation till the water is returned pure. This practice to us appears very disgusting; but he subjoins the rules of Hippocrates and Alexander Trallianus, which are very nearly the same; and the quotation from the latter deserves particular notice, because there is reason to suspect an essential error in the Greek text, which materially affects the sense. The passage is this: ἐνωρίᾳ ἐν φαναρίῳ διὰ τῶν ἱεράν ἑκατον οὺς νυστοὺς χυμοὺς, φευγε σι τοι χεπαται φαρμακοις ἐμέλις δυναμενος κινησαι. The Parisian translator renders it thus:
“Si igitur tibi apparat noxios humores vomitu purgandos esse cave alia utaris medecinâ, si vomitum ciere possis.” This translation appears faulty, because there is no word in the Greek to warrant the introduction of the word “alia,” as connected with “Medicina”—nor the “si” as connected with the words “potes concitare vomitum.” Alexander, in my opinion, intended to say, that if the evacuation of the stomach should appear necessary, he would advise that the end should be obtained, without having recourse to drugs; for he adds, that diluted wine will effectually answer the purpose; and if in place of δυναμενος we read δυναμενοις, the sense is complete, and perfectly agrees with the context. The translation would then run thus: “Si igitur tibi apparat noxios humores vomitu purgandos esse
"cafe medicinis uteris emeticis. Facile
"autem innatabunt et rejicientur redundan-
tia, si large et saepius *vino diluto utaris."
The ecclesiastic Musurus, translating the
word *πυξαλον* temperatum, in place of *vinum
dilutum*, makes nonsense of the whole,
being ignorant of the medical import of
the word.

Demetrius next proceeds to recommend
the use of purgatives, moderate and sim-
ple, to be administered, if possible, once a
month, to those who are threatened with
gout, and gives the following formula, in
*parts*, which in definite quantities may be
thus expressed:

R Aloes . . . . . . 3 i.
Hermodactyli . . . 3 ss.
Cinnamoni . . . . 3 i. ss.
Scammoniæ . . . . gr. x.
Ex iis fiant pillulæ denturque pro viribus, materiæ copia, &c.

In the original thus:

In this prescription we have no account of the exact preparation of each of the ingredients, nor of the medium to be used in forming them into pills, most probably the dry root of the hermodactylus was powdered, and some simple addition made to
the aloes, that the whole might be formed into a ductile mass. It is evident that small doses were first to be tried, and increased according to circumstances.

The remedies already mentioned are adapted to the first attacks of the disease, when the stomach and primæ viæ only, are affected; when the disease has become constitutional, purgative medicines are absolutely necessary, and blood-letting can be of no service. The author recommends the use of whey, complete abstinence from wine, but at the same time a moderately nourishing diet. Of cathartics he gives the decided preference to hermodactylus, which from his own proper experience, he says, he had found of the greatest service, and the preparation he thus describes:
If the fluxion (ὡ ἑνμαλίσμος) frequently recurs from mere bile, with obscure fever, the following formula is recommended:

R. Hermodactyli . . . ʒ i.
Cuminum
Pyrethri
Aristolochiae
Agarici
Sii
Zedoariae
Alypiadis . . . . . . ʒ vi.
Mastiches . . . . . . ʒ ii.
Stachyos
Gentianae
Galangae
Moschi . . . . . . ʒ ii.

Dantur scriptula quatuor ex mulsa et scammonia pro purgationis instituto.
Glycanisi (Sextulas tres) ə xii.
Floris Cinnamoni . . ə viii.
Senæ (Sextulas quatuor) ə xvi.
Mannæ . . . . ə i.
Arida scite contundito et macerato deinde paulum cum Scammonia ferve facito, et pro voto et viribus cujusque bibendum dato.

With regard to the first of these two prescriptions, viz. for the pills, the author says, that the composition ought to be prepared two, or at least one month, before it is used; that the powers of the several ingredients may be properly blended and rendered one: χὴν δὲ τὴν τοιαύτην αὐτιδὸλον ἐχεῖν εὐσχευομενὴν πρὸ μνων δύο ἢ τὸ ελατίου ἐνος, ὅπως ἡ τῶν εἴδων φυσις καὶ δύναμις ὡς μία καὶ ἐν σώμα γεννησθαι.—This may be a very proper rule, but neither of the prescriptions are sufficiently exact to enable an apothecary
to make them up with the certainty that the medicines shall be in every respect those of Demetrius. Are the materials of the first to be merely pounded and mixed, or to be formed into a mass? With regard to the second, in what fluid are the component parts to be macerated, in what quantity, or how is the medicine to be boiled with scammony? Perhaps the word *macerato* would be better rendered *madefacito*, for the Greek is *αὐτοβίσεξεν*, which would rather imply simple moistening; but still the mode of preparation is left in obscurity, and we merely have the enumeration of active ingredients.

Another formula for the preparation of pills, he gives as follows:

\[ \text{R. Hermodactyli (Sextulam unam) } \text{Du iv.} \]
Aloes (Sextulæ dimidium) . . ṭ ii.
Mastiches (Sex. tres partes) . . ṭ iii.
Croci . . . . . . . . g. iii.
Floris Cinnamoni . . . ṭ iv.

Et ἰανρια Scammoniæ pro magnitudine fluxionis et viribus ægri. Facito pillulas et dato.—Paris Translation.

In this direction I suspect another mistranslation. The words in the original are ἰανρια την δύναμιν αὐτῶν, καὶ τῷ νοσέντος, which cannot apply to the disease, "magnitudo fluxionis," but simply mean that scammony is to be added to the ingredients according to its quality, and the strength of the patient.

The Ecclesiastic enumerates the several ingredients, and finding that ἰανρι signifies a tear, concludes the prescription thus:—
After these prescriptions the author proceeds to justify the use of cathartics in this disease, against some who condemned the practice, at the same time again repeating, that by temperance the necessity for such remedies is done away. The last part of the treatise relates to the use of external remedies, and the author approves of such as produce moisture on the skin of the part affected, if the disease be yet recent, as a cabbage-leaf; but if the proper use has been made of cathartics, and the disease is of longer standing, repellents may be safely used, as Solanum Hyoscy-
mus, &c. or even cold water. Ἡ καὶ αὐτο τὸ ὑδάτινον ἐστὶν ἐμένον μεῖα ὑπνία ἢ ὅμαλων.

Throughout the little tract, Hermodactylius is mentioned as the most active ingredient of all the prescriptions, and the dose is left to the discretion of the practitioner, who is to consider the strength of the patient, and other circumstances, before he proceed to the exhibition of a remedy so powerful. The preparations used are however left very indefinite: and as it is agreed that the plant is most acid in summer, and loses much of its activity on being dried, we may infer that when accidentally eaten in the fields, the effects must be much more violent, than the same quantity officinally prepared would produce. It is well known, that fresh garlic bruised and applied to parts affected with
gout, affords very considerable relief, by blistering the skin, and Petrus Hispanus informs us, that Hermodactylus thus used, occasions violent pain, as if the part had been burned, but very powerfully relieves.

In later times Hermodactylus retained its credit as an effectual remedy for gout. Sennertus mentions it with approbation, very closely adhering to Paulus Ægineta in describing its effects; and Fernelius, the most eminent physician of his time, says, "Hermodactylus pituitam crassam ex arti-"culis trahit et expurgat, podagrae et "arthritidi confert tum sumptus, tum "admotus in Cataplasmate;" but he adds, that it ought to be combined with other remedies, to give it full effect.
The German author already quoted, Wirtzung, gives very ample directions for its exhibition, and fully makes up for the omissions of Demetrius. The following passages are from a translation of his work published in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

"In summer the matter (i.e. gout) is thus to be handled, the patient is to be purged with that which ensueth:—Take agaricus one dragme, sugar one ounce, Hermodactils one dragme and a half, water of field cypers three ounces, make the water warme, and steep the rest four and twenty hours in it; afterwards wring it hard out and drink it warme in the morning, and then fast six hours upon it. . . . .

"In harvest is the patient to take every
"fortnight one dragme of these pills following:—Take aloes two ounces, agaricus and Hermodactyls of each one quarter of an ounce, coloquinte one dragme and a half, ginger, cinnamon, asarabacca, cloves and mace, of each one scruple; turbith and epithymus of each one dragme, saffron one scruple—stamp each alone; afterwards temper them together, and pour sufficient field cypers water upon it, and then set it out to drie in the sun; lastly, pour more of the same water upon it, and let it dry again, to the end you may fashion pills of it."

In cases of sciatica (for that he considers as a species of gout) he recommends the external use of Hermodactylus, and directs pills to be prepared as follows:
Turpentine, half an ounce.

Field cypers, two dragmes.

Hermodactylus, one dragme.

Make of a dragme six pills, and take one every night and morning.

But although Wirtzung strongly recommends this remedy as effectual in gout, his translator, Mose, entirely condemns it. "Dioscorides and Serapio," says he, "affirm their Colchicum and Hermodactylus to be a poison, and command that it be in no wise used or eaten; and although Serapio do saie that the Hermodactyles be good for the gowte and other jointe diseases; yet he addeth, that if one use too much of them, that thereby the muscles and the stomach are marvellously weakened, but then he speaketh of the root of the white Hermodactyls, and sup-
"poseth that they which are red and
"blacke should absolutely kill one. See-
"ing then they are so dangerous, these
"rootes ought not to be tolerated at the
"apothecary's, and much lesse to be used
"inwardly. Whereas then we know suffi-
"ciently that our Colchicum or Hermo-
dactylus is so venomous, therefore must
"they needes lie extreamly, that bragge
"that they can cure all joynt diseases with
"it. For it is most true that they that
"use these Hermodactyles for the goute,
"whether it be in pilles, potions, or any
"other way, waxe worse and worse everie
"daye, and at last are constrained to die
"an untimely death, as hathe been seen in
"divers men, notwithstanding that learned
"men have warned them that use such
"dogged medycynes: but no man will be
"taught of another, which is the only
cause that we will not leave our owne
opinions and errors, which thing doth not
only bereave many a man of this life,
but also of the life to come. Wherefore
I would admonysh and warne every man
to take heed of them, and where he
findeth Hermodactyls in any receipt that
he omit them; and so not fear any mis-
haps or danger from which I could not
omit to warn every good body. It is
very true that divers Grecian writers, as
Actuarius and Nicolaus Myrepsus have
left unto us certain compositions, wherein
are both the white and the red Hermo-
dactyl, but these authors have not meant
the Hermodactyles of the Arabians, or the
Colchicum of Dioscorides, but they have
meant the Behen album, et rubrum,
which very well ought to be noted, that
“pretious confectiones be not defiled with " the Hermodactyles."

If we suppose this translator, Dr. Mose, to have been a physician of repute in his day, his denunciation of the remedy may have contributed to deter practitioners from its use. Yet we find it approved of by Sir Theodore Mayerne*, in the time of James

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* Pulvis Arthriticus, of Mayerne.

℞. Cranii humani insepulti.
Turbith.
Hermodactyli.
Sene Jalapii.
Tartaris Cremoris.
Diagrydii opt. preparat.
Caraphyllorum . . . . . āā 3i. M. fiat pulvis tenuissimus.
the First. Dr. Lewis, in his Pharmacopoeia of 1751, gives a place to Colchicum, with the synonymes, Hermodactylus, meadow saffron; and Sir John Hill says, that no person who has seen the Hermodactylus of the East, and compared it with the meadow saffron of England, can, for a moment, doubt that they are the very same plant.

From the authorities quoted, I think it may be concluded, that our meadow saffron, Colchicum, and Hermodactylus, are the very

Dosis sit à ʒi. ad ʓiv. e jusculo, vino albo, hordeato, sero Lactis, cujus haustum amplum, superbibere operæ pretium fuerit. Sumitur circa plenilunium quum maxime humores turgent. Qui gravius ægrotant circa novilunium itidem repurgandi.—N. B. In casu D. N. Regis qui ονθβυρπαγες odit, cranium humanum poterit in ossium Bubulorum rasuram permutari.
same plant, although some writers have differed on the subject, and confused the synonymes.

We may also conclude that Colchicum judiciously used is a powerful remedy, and well deserving the attention of the faculty, in cases of gout and rheumatism. Mr. Want, of London, has again brought this medicine into notice, and believes it to form the active principle of the "Eau Médicinale D'Husson." A formula for the preparation of a syrup is now in our Dispensatories, which is used in doses from a drachm to an ounce, as a diuretic; but I believe Mr. Want's preparation is an infusion in white wine, and is of a much more powerful nature, and is to be very cautiously administered.
Thornton gives the following description:—The Colchicum Autumnale is of the class *Hexandria*, order *Trigynia*, bearing a corolla divided into six, on a radical tube, capsules connected, inflated. The leaves are flat, lanceolate, erect.

The root is a double succulent bulb. The flower is large, of a purple colour, and comes directly from the root. The leaves appear in spring, and are radical and spear-shaped. Corolla consisting of a single petal, divided into six lance-shaped erect segments. Capsule three-lobed, divided into three cells, containing globular seeds, which are not ripened until the ensuing spring, when the capsule rises above the ground upon a strong peduncle.

It is perennial, and grows in wet mea-
dows in the temperate climates of Europe; it flowers in the autumn, when the old bulb begins to decay, and a new one is formed. In the following May, the new bulb is perfect, and the old one wasted and corrugated. The roots are dug for use in the beginning of summer, when its powers are most active, producing the horrid effects described by Nicander, when eaten by accident in the fields, and ranked as the most deleterious of the Colchica venena of Medea. When dried, it loses its active qualities in a great degree, and by the action of fire is rendered altogether inactive, being safely used as an article of food.

The derivation of the name of the plant Hermodactylus has been strangely mistaken, "Quid enim vult Hermodactyli," (says Matthiolus) "nisi digiti mercurii?"
It grows in great abundance on the banks of the River Hermus, in Asia Minor, and resembling, as the root does, the *date* (Δακτύλιος), while it bears not the most distant similitude to *fingers*, a rational derivation presents itself which had not occurred to Matthiolus. Upon the whole, Hermodactylus was a powerful remedy for gout, and, properly prepared and administered, will no doubt prove to be so still, and regain its high character, for we have much reason to believe the words of the wise man true—

*That which is, hath been, and that which hath been shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun.*
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
SUDDEN DEATH
OF
WOMEN IN CHILD-BED,
IN CONSEQUENCE OF SPASMODIC AFFECTION OF THE UTERUS.

THE sudden death of women during la-
bour, or soon after delivery, occurs when
the subsequent inspection of the body af-
forded no information concerning the cause
of the misfortune; and in such cases it is
commonly said that human skill can be of
no avail. The bursting of a blood-vessel
of considerable size, and several other causes of sudden death, become evident upon examination; but cases are unfortunately too frequently to be met with in which death suddenly takes place when no organic lesion can be discovered, for the most part preceded by convulsions more or less severe.

A very melancholy case of this description occurred here in summer last. A young lady, of a good constitution, was safely delivered of her first child, a fine boy, and fell into convulsions, which terminated in death in about two hours after she had first been taken ill. When the convulsions first came on, the placenta had not come away, but it was without much difficulty removed, and sooner than in other circumstances would have been
thought necessary; the loss of blood being not at all extraordinary. In this case, there was great anxiety and violent tossing; the countenance pale, or rather livid, and the respiration exceedingly difficult; the pulse fluttering and feeble. The patient spoke, although with difficulty, and declined taking some brandy and water, saying, "I know I am gone." The event of this case led me to inquire into what probable causes might be assigned for the catastrophe, and I had already prepared some notes upon the subject, which another disastrous case, which has so deeply interested the whole empire, and which appears to have had some features in common with that just mentioned, has induced me to finish and submit to the inspection of the public.
In alarming attacks of this nature various remedies will no doubt be tried by the practitioner who may be in attendance, but no modern author, as far as I know, has accounted for the symptoms, or laid down any regular plan of prevention or cure.

Denman says, that he was led by accident to try the effect of dashing cold water in the face, and in some cases the benefit was beyond expectation or belief; and concludes, that convulsions may remain (during labour) with evident and extreme danger of the patient dying every time they return; and we shall be driven by necessity to wait quietly for the termination of the labour in the natural way, hoping she may struggle through; or we shall be obliged to seek farther resources, in the delivery of the patient by
art*. He adds, afterwards, that the convulsions that come on after delivery bear an appearance of more imminent danger than those that occur before it, frightful as they always are; and very candidly says, that there is yet room for much improvement in our knowledge of the causes, effects, and treatment of convulsions depending upon pregnancy and parturition. "We may be truly said to be ignorant, "or to have a very imperfect knowledge "of the subject of sudden death under "such circumstances; and it deserves "more accurate observation and greater "consideration than has hitherto been "given it."

A question will here naturally occur, whether the disease producing consequences so lamentable, and of which we know so little, be new, occurring only in later times, as we appear to have derived so little advantage from the experience of the older physicians? The answer is, that the disease is most minutely described by the ancient physicians, and their plan of treatment, which was said to be eminently successful, continued in use for more than two thousand years, and until medical practice came to be influenced by the physiological speculations broached during the seventeenth century*.

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* Mauriccau, who wrote in 1668, says, that he was induced to believe the pathology of the suffo-
Without entering upon disputed points in physiology and pathology, the fact may be stated with confidence that in former times the physicians believed that they understood the causes of these alarming attacks, provided against them, and used certain remedies which we are assured were frequently successful; while we, as Dr. Denman says, entertain very confused notions of the causes of such accidents, have no determined mode of treatment, and often stand by as mere spectators, while the patient perishes. It may then be useful to bring once more into public notice the simple doctrine of the ancients.

*cation de la matrice* unnecessary and inapplicable, in consequence of the discovery of the "*mouvement circulaire du sang.*"
It is in the first place necessary to state what was really implied by the 

\[ \text{εν ηρακλην} \]

of the Greeks, which the Latin authors term "Suffocatio matricis," and the French continue to call "Suffocation de la matrice." That the uterus is peculiarly liable to spasm, forming what we call hysterical fits in the unimpregnated state, inducing convulsions during labour, and producing fatal effects when it comes on after delivery, if timely remedies be not applied, is generally acknowledged, and the earlier writers on medicine took great pains, as has already been stated, to describe the disease minutely, and point out the proper remedies. They particularly impress upon the minds of their readers, the great sensibility of the part affected, so that it is immediately acted upon even by certain odours—that owing to the construction of its ligaments,
it changes its place very considerably when under the influence of spasm*—and that from it other parts become affected by a

* A very elegant account of the disease is given by Lommius.—“Uterus etiam ferri è sua sede potest, isque modò ascendere modò descendere, vel prolabi, et interdum in alternum latus inclinare. Ascensio adeo in quibusdam vehemens est, ut ad ventriculum etiam uterus velut globus aliquis afferatur, eumque viter premat, indeque manu depelli suum in locum possit.—Haud leve vitium est ab utero factus strangulatus, qui Græcis ἰερεῖ γεγίκην vocatur. Eo incipiente nausea multa fit, serèque sine vomitu, sequitur cibi fastidium, cum ventris quoque rugitu, tametsi hic iste non semper comitatur; post hac incipit esse spiritus difficilis, creber ac brevis, idemque post paulun ita arctatur, ut veluti vinculo præstricti fauces videantur, magno metu præfocationis, inter quæ leviter anima deficit, ex qua tamen re vix pulsus immutatur.—Sæpius autem altus
like spasmodic action, by which the most violent and dangerous symptoms are produced. Of the danger of such attacks immediately after delivery, when the uterus and parts immediately connected are necessarily in a state of inflammation,

"incidit quasi sopor, sub quo obmutescit fæmina, tota-
que pallescens atque oculis clausis corruit, at veluti
attonita jacet, sensūs motuśque expers, sic ut comi-
tiali morbo videatur prostrata. Spiritus huic summē
parvus, rarus, et obscurus est, adeo ut vix superesse
ullus credatur: pariterque ipse prope concidit
pulsus tametsi is (ubi levius malum est) interdum
constet. Cum remittit accessio uterus paulatim laxa-
tur, et humores quippiam emittit; tum obmurmurant
intestina, oculi aperiuntur, malæ rubescunt, pro-
tinusque mens, sensus, ac motus fæminæ re-
deunt."

they were fully sensible, and had in preparation the remedies upon which they depended for relief. *Hippocrates* says, that in such a case, unless relief be speedily obtained, the woman is suffocated and dies, *αὐτὸν ἰμὴν*, and *Aretæus* has a complete chapter upon this affection of the uterus; the substance of which I shall give in English, subjoining part of the original in a note.

He begins his chapter "*de uteri strangulatione,*" with a short account of the viscus, its situation, and great mobility, so that it very readily changes its situation from side to side, upwards or downwards, and "in a word is altogether erratic*." *Spasmodic*

*καὶ ἔναλησθὼν εἰσάγεται, ζωὴ εἰς τοὺς πλανώδης.*
affections of the uterus, he says, produce violent and dangerous symptoms, by affecting the heart and organs of respiration. "The pulse intermits, becomes quite irregular, and fails, the respiration is violently interrupted, the patient becomes speechless and insensible, the breathing is with difficulty perceived, or is altogether imperceptible, and death suddenly and unexpectedly closes the scene*." In this concise, and in the original very elegant account of the symptoms, brought on by violent spasm affecting the uterus, the author does not particularly allude to the disease as it affects women in childbed, for

* φυγμοὶ διαλειώσεις, αλαλοί, εκλειώσεις, χνικαζέση, αφωνι, αναιθήσει, ἡ ανάσωση ασημένιος, ασάφης, ωξίσος καὶ ἀωίσος ὅ Θανάτος.
he says that young women are liable to violent attacks of this nature, and we know that, although not very frequently, hysteric fits prove fatal.

It is however universally agreed upon, that immediately after delivery, the uterus is peculiarly liable to spasmodic affections, which produce immediate corresponding effects on the vital organs, and sudden death more frequently proceeds from such spasmodic affections, than from any other cause, hæmorrhage alone excepted.

Proceeding to describe the proper means of cure in such cases, Aretæus again repeats a short description of the peculiarities of this viscus—stating that it is sensibly affected by odours, which powerfully affect it, even in a state of disease, a point on
which all the physicians of antiquity are agreed; and although at the present day we disregard their physiology, we still to a certain degree retain their practice, in having recourse to strongly odorous remedies in cases of this description. He again describes the various ways in which the uterus is affected by inflammation and spasm, and particularly states that when by spasm it is carried upwards, so as to affect the parts concerned in respiration, it occasions immediate death, unless the proper remedies are promptly applied*. In such a case he says, the patient can neither complain nor call for assistance, and therefore adds, that it is necessary to procure medical

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* Ην δ' ανωθεν φοιλιν ὡς οξυλατε την ανθρωπον αστεωςε ιανγα ε δ' αγχων της ανανων.
aid immediately, before the patient expire*. If then, says he, you fortunately arrive in time in such a case†, you are to open a vein in the ancle, and if that do not discharge blood freely, open one in the arm; but again repeat your attempt to obtain blood from the ancle, and have recourse to those remedies, which, supposing inflammation not to be present, prove useful in relieving symptoms which threatened suffocation. Ligatures are to be applied to the limbs, and tightened until torpor of the extremities is produced, foetid odours are to be applied to the nostrils, as liquid pitch, the ashes of

* eixos ὧν τοῖς ἐν Ιατρείσι καλεσαί τον ἱῆκον πρὶν τον αὐτῆων ἀπειν.

† So I think the words ἀλλ' ἐν κολκὲ ἐκ συμπυκνητικὸς ἴδια may be fairly rendered, although the common translation is somewhat different.
burnt wool, or the smoke of an extinguished torch, or castor, long kept fœtid urine, which produces wonderful effects when life seems almost extinct, and relieves that spasm which raises the uterus upwards. At the same time fragrant odours are to be applied to the parts affected, mixed with mild ointments; and if these remedies prove ineffectual, the hypochondria are to be strongly squeezed by the hand of a vigorous attendant, or a bandage is to be tightened below the sternum, so as to compress all the abdominal viscera. Sneezing is to be produced by the administration of proper errhines, and cupping glasses are to be applied to the muscular parts surrounding the pelvis, and strong friction applied to the face, and tearing out hairs have sometimes produced good effects. Sitting over a decoction of aromatic herbs, is also
recommended, and care is to be taken upon the woman's recovery, that the menses may be brought on as soon as possible.*
The Greek scholar will see that what is given above, is not a literal translation from the original, it is however the substance of what Aretæus recommends for the cure of this very formidable disease, expressed sometimes in a paraphrastical manner, but keeping in view, as I think, the general scope of the author. Remedies of the same kind are directed by Hippocrates, and we have reason to believe that the method of cure was in use at a period of very remote antiquity. With some variations, the same description of the disease, and enumeration of remedies, were given by medical writers, till the hypothesis of Harvey concerning the circulation of the blood prevailed, and since that time the causes of the disease have been held to be inexplicable, and the patient is left to her fate. It deserves to be remarked, that in cases of
insanity, where violent spasms had been induced by the exhibition of Hellebore, and affecting the organs of respiration, so as to induce the τυχον already explained, the practice was to apply ligatures with a view to prevent deliquium in subjects of the male sex, as Aretæus enjoins when females are threatened with suffocation from the τυχον τυτευχην. The object in applying these ligatures was, no doubt, to prevent the dissipation of heat, while the action of the heart remained irregular and weakened; and this remedy they thought applicable, from whatever cause symptoms were produced, affecting the heart and organs of respiration, so as to threaten suffocation. They had not the most distant idea that ligatures thus applied might prove hurtful by obstructing the circulation of the blood, an hypothesis which it is very evident from
their writings, that they would not have admitted upon such proofs and arguments as Harvey has adduced in its favour; and the recent experiments of Parry, Cooper and others, shew in the most convincing manner what never had occurred to him, viz. that the principal arteries may be tied near the heart without occasioning immediate death, or materially injuring the health of the animal. I have quoted Aretæus as the first medical writer whose works have come down to our times, who has succinctly treated of this disease, but as has already been mentioned, Hippocrates more briefly, and less methodically, gives nearly the same description of the symptoms, and enumerates nearly the same remedies. Of succeeding writers, Galen, Oribasius, and Paulus Ægineta, with some variations, prescribe the like means of relief
on like principles; and Ætius treats of the disease very fully, collecting all that appeared to him valuable in the writings of the most eminent physicians.

In describing the symptoms of this disease, he agrees in the opinions already given, that it proves fatal by calling into diseased action the vital parts, and not from the disease of the uterus immediately. The diaphragm, heart, and muscles of respiration become strongly affected, and blood is violently forced into the carotids, so as to render the countenance livid. The pulse becomes weak and irregular, intermitting, and sometimes altogether suspended, together with respiration. The stomach is oppressed, and saliva is often evacuated in great quantity, when the symptoms are in so far relieved; *humiditas quaedam ex locis*
muliebris excurrens tactū perceptur, and
a murmuring noise of the bowels is heard,
the uterus is gradually relieved from spasm
as the patient recovers her powers of per-
ception. He describes the disease as aris-
ing from various causes in young women,
also from abortion, or a sudden suppression
of blood issuing from the uterus, whether
during menstruation or in the puerperal
state. With regard to cure, he recom-
mends that the patient be placed in a
reclining posture, the head and trunk
raised as much as may be practicable,
and the lower extremities hanging down.
Tight ligatures are to be applied to
the extremities, and the feet and legs
are to be briskly rubbed; odorous sub-
stances are to be applied to the nostrils,
as galbanum, castor or sagapenum, tritur-
ated with vinegar, and applied to the lining
membrane of the nose; or the strongest vinegar in which pennyroyal, calamint, or thyme has been boiled. Sternutatories are also to be applied, and vomiting is by the readiest means to be effected. Fumigations of castor, bitumen, galbanum, or sulphur, are to be applied, or the smoke of a newly extinguished torch, of burnt feathers, or woollen cloths rubbed over with sulphur. The smell of fetid urine, or that of rue strongly rubbed in the hands.

While these graveolentiae are applied to the nostrils, the most bland and agreeably perfumed unguents are to be applied by the midwife per vaginam, and various pessaries are recommended as useful, composed of ingredients of a similar nature. With a view to rouse the patient from a state of insensibility it was recommended
to pull out hairs by the roots from various parts of the body, particularly the pudendum; loud vociferation, in order to excite the sense of hearing, and pinching the extremities, in order to bring on the feeling of pain.

Such was the practice in ancient times, in cases when spasm of the uterus threatened fatal consequences, and we have reason to believe that during, or immediately after delivery, when symptoms so alarming come on, the practice may be revived with hopes of success. It is well known that in the puerperal state, spasmodic affections are much relieved by the warm bath, in which many have been delivered without the slightest inconvenience to mother or child, and the remedies anciently in use, may, for the most part, be
applied while the patient is in the bath, the warmth of the water powerfully contributing to aid the remedies used to prevent the rapid diminution of heat.

In cases of this nature it ought to be borne in mind, that the suspension of the vital functions taking place without any observable organic lesion, resuscitation is in many cases practicable, and therefore the means in every case ought to be tried. Pliny tells us, that from such affections of the uterus, women have remained for several days apparently dead, and afterwards recovered; and adds, that for that reason women seemingly dead of such complaints, were not to be buried until after three days*. Forestus mentions a case to which

* Ad tertium usque diem, sœminam ab eo malo (i. e. suffocatione uteri) non efferri, clamet omnis schola.
he was called, where a woman aged forty-two, after the delivery of a first child, while the midwife was employed in cleansing the child, was suddenly seized with this complaint, and appeared to die instantly. He pursued the ancient plan; applied assafœtida to the nostrils, and a plaster of galbanum to the umbilicus, by which remedies the woman recovered, to the great astonishment of those present. His words are "Uxor Petri Opmeri, quae annum 42 aget cum illam duceret, (nam virgo annosa erat antequam matrimonium iniret) anno sequenti, mense Augusto primipara, cum noctu pararet, atque obstetrix infantem suscepisset, et valde intenta esset in puero mundando, ipsa interea in uteri suffocationem incidens mox exanimis reperta est, et pro mortuâ habita. Ad quam et ipse accitus in nocte, assam fœtidam pro odo-
"ratu naribus applicabam, et emplastrum
"contra matricem, galbano obductum, um-
"bilico apponi jussi: quibus duobus tantum
"præsidiis ad se rediit, et illicò a paroxys-
"mo excitata est, atque ab illâ molestia
"etiam mox liberata, cum magnâ astan-
"tium admiratione. Cum jam a paroxys-
"mo excitata foret, imperavimus ut em-
"plastrum amoveret, et cum bene purgare-
"tur in partu, postea belù se habuit."

How long this patient remained appa-
rently dead, Forestus does not inform us; 
but Ambrose Parè relates the case of a lady of Spain, who seemed to expire under si-
milar circumstances, and who recovered after the medical practitioner had made his first incisions in order to dissection, which pro-
bably would not be attempted for at least twenty-four hours after the vital functions
had been suspended. Indeed, it appears probable, that animation may be restored at a more distant period, after apparent death from this affection of the uterus, than in cases of drowning, or suffocation by external violence, where we may suspect that organic lesion has taken place.

The theory upon which the practice of the older physicians proceeded, we may suppose to have been this. They believed that respiration is the immediate means of keeping up the heat of living animals. They believed that a portion of elemental fire is derived by the lungs from the atmosphere, and is the cause of the contraction of the heart, and pulse of the arteries, while heat is conveyed to all parts of the body. They believed a very small quantity of blood to be held in solu-
tion by this elementary fire, forming a fine
vapour, highly elastic, and ever attempting
to combine itself with the atmosphere from
whence it was derived. The unequal dif-
fusion of this vapour, by them called vital
spirits, they believed to produce spasm, in
the parts in which over accumulation had
taken place, and that this spasm, unless
immediately relieved, had a natural ten-
dency to bring on a like action upon parts
immediately connected with that already
diseased. The principal means of relieving
spasm, when affecting external parts, they
believed to consist in affording the ready
means of escape to the fluid in excess, by
removing the non-conducting cuticle, by
Epispastics, or by scarifications passing
through the skin. What precise qualities
or mode of operation, they attributed to
the odours agreeable and disagreeable, we
do not exactly know; but experience has confirmed the opinion, that odours very disagreeable applied to the nostrils, often relieve spasmodic affections of the uterus. They believed that when blood passed into the arteries, or the natural contents of arteries into veins, the vital functions must necessarily be disturbed, and an appearance not unusual in women who have died of this disease, viz. the heart and large vessels in its immediate vicinity, entirely empty of blood, an appearance which Dr. Denman calls altogether unaccountable, and really is so upon the Harveian hypothesis, they would on their principles have readily explained. They would have said, that the elastic fluid, naturally confined to the left ventricle and arteries, had, in consequence of violent diseased action, passed into the right ventricle and contiguous cava, forcing
a congestion of blood in other parts of the body, particularly the liver; or throwing it into the carotids, and occasioning that livid countenance, which is for the most part observable in such patients. Whatever we may think of the ancient theory, one thing is very certain; that when it was abandoned, the practice in regard to women dangerously affected by spasms of the uterus during the puerperal state, underwent a fatal change; and patients are now said to die by the visitation of God, whose deaths in former times would have been charged against the medical practitioners as criminal neglect of duty, according to the rule, "Quem non servasti cum potuisses, eum occidisti." "Whomsoever you have not preserved when it was in your power, him have you killed." The cases are rare indeed, in which a medical practitioner
may with truth pronounce, that *nothing is to be done*, and the physician is fortunate indeed, who cannot call to mind cases, in which, from the want of knowledge, of which he afterwards became possessed, patients have been lost.

Let us then briefly recapitulate the remedies that have been found serviceable in spasmodic affections of the uterus, during the puerperal state, leaving it to the judgment of practitioners, whether at the present day they deserve a trial, and ought to be revived.

When the patient began to show much anxiety, with difficulty of respiration, and a livid countenance, the heat of the body undiminished, blood-letting was thought advisable; and we know that opening the
jugular vein has in modern practice been attended with the best effects. When from increased difficulty of respiration the pulse had become feeble, and the heat of the body sensibly diminished, they applied tight ligatures to the arms and thighs, so as to occasion numbness, "ad torporem "usque," and to this remedy we cannot doubt that the warm bath would prove a powerful auxiliary. At the same time they applied strong and disagreeable odours to the nostrils, and those of a fragrant nature to the region of the uterus, or as liniments and pessaries per vaginam. To rouse the patient from a state of torpor, they used various means to excite the sensation of pain, or by strongly affecting the organs of hearing, to create an impression on that sense, and if possible fix the patient's attention. Sometimes by mechanical pres-
sure they attempted to bring the uterus into its natural situation, and by bandaging the abdomen tightly, to retain it there. They considered it as important to excite spasmodic affections of the stomach and diaphragm by vomiting or sneezing; and when by such means they had in so far succeeded, they considered a murmuring noise of the bowels, and "humiditas quae- "dam ex locis muliebribus excurrens," as signs of a prosperous termination of the case. They then used proper means to promote the natural uterine discharge, and considered the patient as in a state of safety. Indeed, in such cases there is for the most part no great danger of relapse, because the uterus speedily regains its natural dimensions, and the inflammation necessarily produced by parturition soon subsides. The same mode of treatment they

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pursued, when the disease occurred, as sometimes it does, in the unimpregnated state, and as has been already mentioned, they believed a patient apparently dead under such circumstances, to be capable of re-animation for a very considerable time. With a view to resuscitation after the patient has been for some time without respiration or pulse, perhaps no means would be better accommodated to the end in view than to place her in a warm bath not under the 99th degree of Fahrenheit's scale; distending the thorax, as in other cases of suspended animation, by pure atmospheric air, which by a very simple apparatus may be conducted from without into the apartment.

Oxygen gas has, in cases of suspended animation, been thrown into the lungs by
means of a syringe, with great advantage, and slight shocks of electricity have produced the best effects. Whether galvanism may not also prove a successful remedy in such cases, remains to be ascertained; but it appears probable, that by judicious management, it will become a powerful agent in restoring suspended animation.

Nothing can be more remote from the intentions of the writer of these observations, than to impute blame to practitioners, who having met with cases of the nature described, have not tried the means in former times found efficacious. A complete change of physiological theory, has in some instances essentially altered medical practice, and led to the total neglect of authors who held opinions different from those at present entertained. Facts, how-
ever, at all times deserve consideration; and as it appears unquestionable, that the sudden death of females during the puerperal state was prevented, or resuscitation was effected, by means not now in use, that these means were in themselves simple, and could not possibly do harm if ineffectually applied, it will deserve the serious attention of practitioners, whether the ancient practice ought not to be again adopted.

Aberdeen, January 31, 1818.

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