

ETHER SPRAY IN STRANGULATED HERNIA.

By JOHN BARCLAY, M.D., C.M., Banff, N.B.

On the evening of Tuesday, the 25th of September last, I was asked by Dr. Wallace, of Turriff, to see along with him a patient who suffered from strangulated hernia; and the following is an account of the case.

G. F., aged 35 years, a farm labourer, had always enjoyed very robust health till about two years ago, when he noticed a swelling occur suddenly in his left groin. This he found he could reduce at will by manual pressure, and little trouble was occasioned by it, and no medical advice had ever been sought by him on account of it, as it only made its appearance now and then when he was subjected to hard work, and he had never any difficulty in accomplishing its reduction himself. Thirty-two hours before I saw him, he had been engaged cutting oats in the harvest-field, work requiring a good deal of muscular exertion when the crop is a heavy one, when he suddenly experienced a severe pain in the left groin, and on examination, found that the swelling had come down. I need scarcely here remark that he had never worn a truss. He now found that to work longer was impossible, so he proceeded home and got to bed. No advice was asked, however, until the following day, when Dr. Wallace saw the patient, and found him complaining of eructations, nausea, sickness, and vomiting, pain of the bowels and constipation. On being asked whether at any time he had been the subject of rupture, he replied that he had not. An examination of the usual seats of the disease, however, showed Dr. Wallace that a hernia existed in the left groin, and which, no doubt, caused the symptoms complained of. There was no tenderness in the swelling, no discoloration, and though the patient complained of a good deal of pain over the abdomen, the pulse had not yet become affected. After a steady, gentle, and cautious application of the taxis, Dr. Wallace found that he could not return the hernia, so calomel and opium were prescribed, with the effect of allaying the pain and relieving the vomiting; and additional assistance was sought for by the doctor in anticipation of the necessity for operative proceedings.

About seven o'clock on the evening above referred to, Dr. Wallace and I visited the patient, and found him asleep. On awakening him, he complained of pain over the belly, though not quite so severe as in the morning, much tenderness in the swelling, and constant eructations and sickness. At the request of Dr. Wallace I made a very gentle attempt to return the hernia, but found that the pain induced by the most gentle handling of it could not be borne, so I at once desisted. I had brought with me Richardson's ether spray apparatus, thinking it might be useful in lieu of ice, which is difficult to be had, so after consulting with Dr. Wallace, it was determined to invert the patient, apply the ether spray short of freezing the skin, then to attempt reduction, and, if failure was the result, to operate by the knife.

The head and shoulders then being supported on the floor by some pillows, and the buttocks raised as much as possible against an inclined plane extemporised by an inverted bedroom chair, the ether spray was directed in the usual way on the swelling, for about forty seconds, when a minute spot of skin appeared white. The spray was at once removed, and, on applying the fingers of my left hand on the swelling, for about two seconds, accompanied by the most trifling pressure, plump up (or rather down) went the hernia, to the great delight and satisfaction

of us all. And such a result was exceedingly gratifying in many respects. The man made a first-rate recovery.

I have not up to this time seen or heard of a case where the spray was used for a similar purpose, but I think there can be no doubt but that in a great many cases of strangulated hernia, its employment is to be preferred to that of ice, or even that of chloroform.

Transactions of Branches.

NORTHERN BRANCH.

ON THE SELF-ELIMINATION OF POISONS.

By WILLIAM MURRAY, M.D., Newcastle-on-Tyne.

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THERE exists in the human body a sphere for the operation of almost all the physical forces which are at work in the organic world; and, in all probability, the correlation of these forces with the vital force brings about the life and functions of which the body is possessed. If this be true, we shall find that the general laws which regulate the forces of the outer world apply also to the regulation of the vital economy. To select one of these laws and apply it, may test the truth of our remark. The great forces around us do not manifest their power, nor even their existence, unless they meet with appropriate material to act upon; *e.g.*, the chemical forces are without manifest existence till bodies with an affinity for each other give them an opportunity to act; and the electrical force is without effect in the presence of non-conductors. So that to present appropriate conditions and material to act upon is necessary in order to produce the forces and call forth their effects. In like manner, there are powers in the body latent till appropriate material is introduced, which calls them into action; and we desire to show that, when certain poisons are introduced, they afford a material on which the forces of the body act in such a manner as to eliminate the poison; in other but less definite terms, poisons bring into play a *vis medicatrix nature* which destroys them. I wish, therefore, to demonstrate that we are often dependent on the poison for producing the very action which best of all eliminates it; and further, that, were no such extraordinary action set up by the poison, it would remain in the body till removed by the ordinary processes of elimination, and, while so remaining, would do harm.

The great and almost universal principle of action and reaction finds a beautiful illustration in the action of poisons on the body, and the consequent reaction of the body on poisons.

At the outset, I ought to state that I do not use the word *poison* in a narrow or limited sense. I give it a larger signification than is allotted to it by medical jurist or toxicologist; and I mean by it any substance which is foreign to the body as food or drink, and which has the power of altering or deranging the natural structure or functions of the tissues. I therefore include by the term many substances which we call medicines, whose therapeutic effects depend upon a power to poison or alter the action of a part, so as to enable it to overcome conditions which are the consequence of disease. For instance, a diuretic medicine, such as digitalis, is a poison which excites the kidney primarily for its own elimination; but, in so doing, a dropsical accumulation is removed or reduced. The effects of poisons cannot, however, be called therapeutic or medicinal