

CHAP. XLV.

OF A SCHIRRUS AND CANCER.

A SCHIRRUS is a hard indolent tumour usually seated in some of the glands; as the breasts, the arm-pits, &c. If the tumor becomes large, unequal, of a livid, blackish, or leaden colour, and is attended with violent pain, it gets the name of an occult cancer. When the skin is broken, and a sanies or ichorous matter of an abominable fetid smell is discharged from the sore, it is called an open or ulcerated cancer. Persons after the age of forty-five, particularly women, and those who lead an indolent sedentary life, are most subject to this disease.

CAUSES.—This disease is often owing to suppressed evacuations; hence it proves so frequently fatal to women of a gross habit, particularly old maids and widows, about the time when the menstrual flux ceases. It may likewise be occasioned by excessive fear, grief, anger, religious melancholy, or any of the depressing passions. Hence the unfortunate, the choleric, and those persons who devote themselves to a religious life in convents or monasteries, are often afflicted with it. It may also be occasioned by the long continued use of food that is too hard of digestion, or of an acrid nature; by barrenness; celibacy; cold; blow; friction; pressure; or the like. Women often suffer from the last of these by means of their stays, which squeeze and compress their breast so as to occasion great mischief. Sometimes the disease is owing to an hereditary disposition.

SYMPTOMS.—This disorder seems often very trifling at the beginning. A hard tumor about the size of an hazel nut, or perhaps smaller, is generally the first symptom. This will often continue for a long time without seeming to increase, or giving the patient great uneasiness; but if the constitution be hurt, or the tumor irritated by pressure or improper treatment of any kind, it begins to extend itself towards the neighbouring parts by pushing out a kind of roots or limbs. It then gets the name of CANCER, from a fancied resemblance between these limbs and the claws of a crab. The colour of the skin begins to change, which is first red, afterwards purple, then bluish, livid, and at last black. The patient complains of heat, with a burning, gnawing, shooting pain. The tumor is very hard, rough, and unequal, with a protuberance, or rising, in the middle; its size increases daily, and the neighbouring veins become thick, knotty, and of a blackish colour.

The skin at length gives way, and a thin sharp ichor begins to flow, which corrodes the neighbouring parts till it forms a large unsightly ulcer. More occult cancers arise, and communicate with the neighbouring glands. The pain and stench become intolerable; the appetite fails; the strength is much exhausted by a continual hectic fever; at last a violent hæmorrhage, or discharge of blood, from some part

of the body, with faintings, or convulsion fits, generally put an end to the miserable patient's life.

REGIMEN.—The diet ought to be light, but nourishing. All strong liquors, and high-seasoned or salted provisions, are to be avoided. The patient may take as much exercise as he can easily bear, and should use every method to divert thought, and amuse his fancy. All kinds of external injury are carefully to be guarded against, particularly of the affected part, which ought to be defended from all pressure, and even from the external air, by covering it with fur or soft flannel.

MEDICINE.—This is one of those diseases for which no certain remedy is yet known. Its progress however may sometimes be retarded, and some of its most disagreeable symptoms mitigated, by proper applications. One misfortune attending the disease is, that the unhappy patient often conceals it too long. Were proper means used in due time, a cancer might often be cured; but after the disorder has arrived at a certain height, it generally sets all medicines at defiance.

When a schirrus tumour is first discovered, the patient ought to observe a proper regimen, and to take twice or thrice a-week a dose of the common purging quicksilver (i. e. mercurial) pills. Some blood may also be let, by the occasional application of leeches to or near the part affected; and it may be gently rubbed twice a-day with a little of the ointment of quicksilver, and kept warm with fur or flannel. The food must be light, and an English pint of the decoction of woods or sarsaparilla may be drank daily. I have sometimes discussed hard tumours, which had the appearance of being cancers, by a course of this kind.

So also has a milk diet; and small doses of calomel and hemlock, as a quarter of a grain of the former with four grains of the inspissated juice of hemlock, may be taken every six hours: the dose of the latter may be gradually but cautiously increased; and the patient may drink three half pints of the following mixture in the course of the day: Three pints of the compound decoction of sarsaparilla, and one pint of lime-water; let them be mixed.

Should the tumour however not yield to this treatment, but on the contrary, become larger and harder, it will be proper to extirpate it, either by the knife or caustic. Indeed whenever this can be done with safety, the sooner it is done the better. It can answer no purpose to extirpate a cancer after the constitution is ruined, or the whole mass of humours corrupted by it. This however is the common way, which makes the operation so seldom succeed. Few people will submit to the extirpation till death stares them in the face; whereas, if it were done early, the patient's life would not be endangered by the operation, and it would generally prove a radical cure.

When the cancer is so situated that it cannot be cut off, or if the patient will not submit to the operation, such medicines as will mitigate or relieve the most urgent symptoms may be used. Dr. Home says, that half a grain of muriated quicksilver (the corrosive sublimate of mercury) dissolved in a proper quantity of brandy, and taken night and morning, will often be of service in cancers of the face and nose. He likewise recommends an infusion of the solanum, or nightshade, in cancers of the breasts.

But the medicine most in repute at present for this disease is hew-

lock. Dr. Stork, physician at Vienna, has of late recommended the extract of this plant as very efficacious in cancers of every kind. The Doctor says, he has given some hundred weights of it without ever hurting any body, and often with manifest advantage. He advises the patient however to begin with very small doses, as two or three grains, and to increase the dose gradually till some good effect be perceived, and there to rest without further increase. From two or three grains at first, the doctor says he has increased the dose to two, three, or four drachms a-day, and finds that such doses may be continued for several weeks without any bad consequences.

The regimen which the doctor recommends during the use of the medicine, is to avoid farinaceous substances not fermented, and too acrid aromatics. He says, good wine will not be hurtful to those who are accustomed to it, nor a moderate use of acids; and adds, that the patient should live in a pure free air, and keep his mind as quiet and cheerful as possible.

The doctor does not pretend to fix the time in which a cancer may be resolved by the use of hemlock, but says he has given it for above two years in large doses without any apparent benefit; nevertheless the patient has been cured by persisting in the use of it for half a year longer. This is at least encouragement to give it a fair trial.

Though we are far from thinking the hemlock merits those extravagant encomiums which the Doctor has bestowed upon it, yet, in a disease which has so long baffled the boasted powers of medicine, we think it ought always to be tried.

The powder of hemlock is by some preferred to the extract, or inspissated juice. They are both made of the fresh leaves, and may be used nearly in the same manner. The dose of the powder may be gradually increased from a few grains to half a drachm, and nearly four drachms of it have been given in the day with remarkably good effects. The hemlock may also be used externally either as a poultice or fomentation. The sore may likewise be kept clean by injecting daily a strong decoction of the tops and leaves into it.

Few things contribute more to the healing of foul sordid ulcers of any kind than keeping them thoroughly clean. This ought never to be neglected. The best application for this purpose seems to be the carrot poultice. The root of the common carrot may be grated, and moistened with as much water as will bring it to the consistence of a poultice or cataplasim. This must be applied to the sore, and renewed twice a-day; previously to its application, the deep ulcers may be washed to the bottom by means of a syringe with a strong infusion of cinchona, or a decoction of carrots; and the patient should take, four or five times a-day, a glass of good wine, with half a drachm of powdered Peruvian bark in it. The sores, after being washed, should be sprinkled with the same powder, or with red nitrated quicksilver. This process cleans the sore, generally assuages the pain, and suppresses the disagreeable smell, which are objects of no small importance in a loathsome and dreadful disorder.

Pure air ought to have free access during the day to the apartments of the patient; they may also be purified with the muriatic acid vapour, by putting a pound of common salt into an earthen vessel, and pouring

over it, from time to time, a small quantity of vitriolic acid, till the whole of the salt is moistened. The earthen dish, thus filled with salt, &c. may be placed in a corner, and requires no attention. If the air is foul, and peculiarly offensive, or if the apartments to be ventilated are spacious, the vessel may be placed in heated sand, so extricating a larger quantity of vapour.—The same process is effectual in correcting the insalubrious or mephitic air of privies.

Wort, or an infusion of malt, has been recommended not only as a proper drink, but as a powerful medicine in this disease. It must be frequently made fresh, and the patient may take it at pleasure. Two, three, or even four English pints of it may be drank every day for a considerable time. No benefit can be expected from any medicine in this disease, unless it be persisted in for a long time. It is of too obstinate a nature to be soon removed; and, when it admits of a cure at all, it must be brought about by inducing an almost total change of the habit, which must always be a work of time. Setons or issues in the neighbourhood of the cancer have sometimes good effects.

Arsenic has been administered internally with evident advantage, for some time; it has also been employed externally as a lotion, made by boiling one ounce of white arsenic in four pints of water to three pints, the liquor, when cold, being filtered through paper by means of a glass funnel: but we do not recommend that deleterious drug to the use of Domestic practitioners: when it is resorted to, it ought to be given under the direction of more than ordinary medical skill and experience. It is however with satisfaction that we recommend to the notice of our readers, a safe, new, and apparently valuable remedy, that has been employed by Mr. Carmichael, a surgeon in Dublin, for certain species of ulcers that have hitherto proved very difficult of cure. Cancerous sores of the nose, of the upper eye-lid, on the scrotum, and on the calf of the leg, are said to have been successfully treated, by giving twelve grains, gradually increased to doses of a scruple (formed into pills of five grains each), of the carbonate or rust of iron, every four or six hours: the sores were sprinkled with levigated rust of iron. Or an ointment may be compounded of equal parts of the carbonate of iron and hog's lard; this may be rubbed in near the sore, that the absorbent vessels may convey it to the diseased part.

When medicines fail to cure this direful disease, recourse must be had to opium, or the inspissated juice of henbane: these will not, indeed, cure the disease; but they will abate pain, and, by soothing the anguish of the sufferer, render life tolerable, while the all-wise and supreme Disposer of Events shall be pleased to continue it.

To avoid this dreadful disorder, people ought to use wholesome food; to take sufficient exercise in the open air; to be as easy and cheerful as possible; and carefully to guard against all blows, bruises, and every kind of pressure upon the breasts, or other glandular parts.