

CHAP. II.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON FEVERS, &c.

FEVERS, though the most common complaints, are those in which mankind, whether professional or laical, are those by which they are most apt to be misled. It has been well observed, that "in reality, no writer seems to have been fully satisfied with his own definition, and it is not extraordinary, therefore, that he should have seldom given satisfaction to others." This difficulty proceeds from the complexity of the symptoms that enter into the character of a fever; the contrariety of many of them to each other in different stages of it; and the occasional absence of some, that, in other instances, appear to constitute its leading features. There are also two other difficulties of no inconsiderable magnitude, which the nosologist has to contend with in laying down a clear and perspicuous survey of fevers; namely, their division or collocation, and their generic names,—a province, on which, however, it is not our intention now to discuss.

The remote cause of fever can frequently be traced; but we are too little acquainted with the nature of several of them to be able to restrict them to a specific mode of action: of the proximate cause, but very little is at present known, and will probably be long before we know much more.

The usual division of fevers is into intermittents, and continued, on account of their taking up different times in their natural duration; some being compounded of a number of paroxysms, following each other in a regular succession, at some distance of time, as happens in intermittents or agues; in others, a fresh paroxysm comes in, immediately as the crisis of the former, so as hardly to leave the patient wholly free from fever, as occurs in remittents; and in others, there is such a quick succession of paroxysms, that the one comes on before there is any visible abatement of the febrile symptoms as in continued fevers.

CAUSES OF FEVERS, &c.—As more than one half of mankind is said to perish by fevers, it is of importance to be acquainted with their causes. The most general causes of fevers are, *infection, errors in diet, unwholesome air, violent emotions of the mind, excess or suppression of usual evacuations, external or internal injuries, and extreme degrees of heat or cold.* As most of these have already been treated of at considerable length, and their effects shown, we shall not now resume the consideration of them, but shall only recommend it to all, as they would wish to avoid fevers and other fatal diseases, to pay the most punctual attention to these articles.

Fevers are not only the most frequent of all diseases, but they are likewise the most complex. In the most simple species of fever there is always a combination of several different symptoms. The distinguishing symptoms of fever are, *increased heat, frequency of pulse, loss of appetite, general debility, pain in the head, and a difficulty in performing some of the vital or animal functions.* The other symp-

toms usually attendant on fevers, are nausea, thirst, anxiety, delirium, weariness, wasting of the flesh, want of sleep, or the sleep disturbed and not refreshing.

When the fever comes on gradually, the patient generally complains first of languor or listlessness, soreness of the flesh or the bones, as the country people express it, heaviness of the head, loss of appetite, sickness, with clamminess of the mouth; after some time come on excessive heat, violent thirst, restlessness, &c.

When the fever attacks suddenly, it always begins with an uneasy sensation of excessive cold, accompanied with debility and loss of appetite; frequently the cold is attended with shivering, oppression about the heart, and sickness at stomach, or vomiting.

FEVER CONSIDERED AS AN EFFORT OF NATURE, &c.—As a fever is only an effort of Nature to free herself from an offending cause,* it is the business of those who have the care of the sick to observe with diligence which way Nature points, and to endeavour to assist her operations. Our bodies are so framed, as to have a constant tendency to expel or throw off whatever is injurious to health. This is generally done by urine, sweat, stool, expectoration, vomit, or some other evacuation.

There is reason to believe, if the efforts of Nature, at the beginning of a fever, were duly attended to and promoted, it would seldom continue long; but when her attempts are either neglected or counteracted, it is no wonder if the disease prove fatal. There are daily instances of persons, who, after catching cold, have all the symptoms of a beginning fever; but by keeping warm, drinking diluting liquors, bathing their feet in warm water, &c. the symptoms in a few hours disappear, and the danger is prevented. When fevers of a putrid kind threaten, the best method of obviating their effects is by repeated vomits.

Our design is not to enter into a critical inquiry into the nature and immediate causes of fevers, but to mark their most obvious symptoms, and to point out the proper treatment of the patient with respect to his diet, drink, air, &c. in the different stages of the diseases. In these articles the inclinations of the patient will in a great measure direct our conduct.

Almost every person in a fever complains of great thirst, and calls out for drink, especially of a cooling nature. This at once

* It was the opinion of Hippocrates, that fever is an effort of nature to expel something noxious to the body either ingenerated, or introduced from without. Beholding a violent commotion in the system, followed by an evacuation from the skin and kidneys, with which the paroxysm terminated, he ascribed the commotion to a fermentation, concoction, or ebullition, by which the noxious matter was separated from the sound humours; and the evacuation to a despumation or scum, which such separation produces, or rather to the discharge of this morbid scum from the emunctories that open externally. Galen supported this hypothesis with all the learning of his day, and it is the only explanation of fever to be met with in his medical writings, through the long course of three thousand years; in fact till the time of Sydenham, who still adhered to it, and whose pages are full of the language to which it gave birth; and it was blended almost insensibly with the dialect of the chymists of the day. In itself, this doctrine, considered merely hypothetically, is not only innocent, but highly ingenious and plausible. It is in unison with several phenomena of pyretic or febrile diseases; and derives a strong collateral support from the general history of eruptive fever, in which we actually see a peccant matter, producing general commotion, multiplying itself in a ferment, and at length separated and thrown off at the surface by a direct depuration of the system. ED.

points out the use of water, and other cooling liquors. What is so likely to abate the heat, attenuate the humours, remove spasms and obstructions, promote perspiration, increase the quantity of urine, and, in short, produce every salutary effect in an ardent or inflammatory fever, as drinking plentifully of water, thin gruel, or any other weak liquor, of which water is the basis? The necessity of diluting liquors is pointed out by the dry tongue, the parched skin, and the burning heat, as well as the unquenchable thirst of the patient.

In inflammatory fevers, where the thirst is great, the following forms a grateful and cooling beverage:

Take cream of tartar half an ounce.

White sugar four ounces.

Fresh confection of orange three ounces.

Hot water three pints.

Half a pint or more may be drunk as occasion requires.

Many other cooling liquors, which are extremely grateful to patients in a fever, may be prepared from fruits, as decoctions of tamarinds, apple-tea, orange whey, and the like. Mucilaginous liquors might also be prepared from marshmallow roots, linseed, lime-tree buds, and other mild vegetables. These liquors, especially when acidulated, are highly agreeable to the patient, and should never be denied him.

SYMPTOMS OF FEVER.—At the beginning of a fever, the patient generally complains of great lassitude or weariness, and has no inclination to move. This evidently shows the propriety of keeping him easy, and if possible, in bed. Lying in bed relaxes the spasms,* abates the violence of the circulation, and gives nature an opportunity of exerting all her force to overcome the disease. Confinement to bed alone would often remove a fever at the beginning; but when the patient struggles with the disease instead of driving it off, he only fixes it the deeper, and renders it more dangerous. This observation is too often verified in travellers, who happen when on a journey to be seized with a fever. Their anxiety to get home, induces them to travel with the fever upon them; which conduct seldom fails to render it fatal.

In fevers, the mind as well as the body should be kept easy. Company is seldom agreeable to the sick. Indeed every thing that

* The hypothesis of Stahl, Hoffman, and Cullen, is founded on the doctrine of a spasm on the extremities of the living fibre. According to the more elaborate principles of this system, as improved by Cullen, the human body is a congeries of organs, regulated by the laws not of inanimate matter, but of life, and superintended by a mobile and conservative power or energy, seated in the brain, but distinct from the mind or soul, acting wisely but necessarily for the general health; correcting deviations, and supplying defects, not from a knowledge and choice of the means, but by a pre-established relation between the changes produced, and the motions required for the restoration of health; and operating, therefore, through the medium of the moving fibres, upon whose healthy or unhealthy state depends the health or unhealthiness of the general frame, which fibres he regarded with Stahl, as simple nerves, the muscular filaments being nothing more than their extremities, and by no means possessed of an independent *vis insita*. Ed.

disturbs the imagination increases the disease: for which reason every person in a fever ought to be kept perfectly quiet, and neither allowed to see nor hear any thing that may in the least affect or discompose his mind.

Though the patient in a fever has the greatest inclination for drink, yet he seldom has any appetite for solid food: hence the impropriety of urging him to take victuals is evident. Much solid food in a fever is every way hurtful. It oppresses nature, and, instead of nourishing the patient, serves only to feed the disease. What food the patient takes, should be in small quantity, light, and of easy digestion. It ought to be chiefly of the vegetable kind, as panada, roasted apples, gruels, and such like.

Nothing is more desired by a patient in a fever, than fresh air. It not only removes his anxiety, but cools the blood, revives the spirits, and proves every way beneficial. Many patients are in a manner stifled to death in fevers for want of fresh air; yet such is the unaccountable infatuation of most people, that the moment they think a person in a fever, they imagine he should be kept in a close chamber, into which not one particle of fresh air must be admitted. Instead of this, there ought to be a constant stream of fresh air into a sick person's chamber, so as to keep it moderately cool. Indeed, its degree of warmth ought never to be greater than is agreeable to one in perfect health.

Nothing spoils the air of a sick person's chamber, or hurts the patient more, than a number of people breathing in it. When the blood is inflamed, or the humours in a putrid state, air that has been breathed repeatedly will greatly increase the disease. Such air not only loses its spring, and becomes unfit for the purpose of respiration, but acquires a noxious quality, which renders it in a manner poisonous to the sick.

In fevers, when the patient's spirits are low and depressed, he is not only to be supported with cordials, but every method should be taken to cheer and comfort his mind. Many, from a mistaken zeal, when they think a person in danger, instead of solacing his mind with the hopes and consolations of religion, frighten him with the views of hell and damnation. It would be unsuitable here to dwell upon the impropriety and dangerous consequences of this conduct; it often hurts the body, and there is reason to believe seldom benefits the soul.

Among common people, the very name of a fever generally suggests the necessity of bleeding. This notion seems to have taken its rise from most fevers in this country having been formerly of an inflammatory nature; but true inflammatory fevers are now seldom to be met with. Sedentary occupations, and a different manner of living, have so changed the state of diseases in Britain, that there is now hardly one fever in ten where the lancet is necessary. In most low, nervous, and putrid fevers, which are now so common, bleeding is really hurtful, as it weakens the patient, sinks his spirits, &c. We would recommend this general rule, never to bleed at the beginning of a fever, unless there be evident signs of inflammation. Bleeding is an excellent medicine when necessary, but should never be wantonly performed.

It is likewise a common notion, that sweating is always neces-

sary in the beginning of a fever. When the fever proceeds from an obstructed perspiration, this notion is not ill-founded. If the patient only lie in bed, bathe his feet and legs in warm water, and drink plentifully of warm water-gruel, or any other weak, diluting liquor, he will seldom fail to perspire freely. The warmth of the bed, and the diluting drink, will relax the universal spasm, which generally affects the skin at the beginning of a fever; it will open the pores, and promote the perspiration, by means of which the fever may often be carried off. But instead of this, the common practice is to heap clothes upon the patient, and to give him things of a hot nature, as spirits, spiceries, &c., which fire his blood, increase the spasms, and render the disease more dangerous.

In all fevers, a proper attention should be paid to the patient's longings. These are the calls of Nature, and often point out what may be of real use. Patients are not indeed to be indulged in every thing that the sickly appetite may crave; but it is generally right to let them have a little of what they eagerly desire, though it may not seem altogether proper.

When a patient is recovering from a fever, great care is necessary to prevent relapse. Many persons, by too soon imagining themselves well, have lost their lives, or contracted other diseases of an obstinate nature. As the body after a fever is weak and delicate, it is necessary to guard against catching cold. Moderate exercise in the open air will be of use, but great fatigue is by all means to be avoided; agreeable company will also have a good effect. The diet must be light, but nourishing. It should be taken frequently, but in small quantities. It is dangerous, at such a time, to eat as much as the stomach may crave.

From the great variety of fevers that afflict the human body, it is impossible to find any medicine adapted to them all, or, indeed, to all the symptoms of any one of them. Notwithstanding this, the people of England have, for half a century, been swallowing a powder said to possess wonderful virtues in the cure of fevers. Nor has the use of this powder been confined to England; it has been carried to every part of the globe; and great cures have been attributed to it, with what truth I will not pretend to say. I remember bleeding to have been as much in vogue in fevers, though now it is seldom prescribed, unless in local inflammations. But there is a fashion in physic, as well as in other things; and it is always heresy to talk against the doctrine of the day.

This fever-powder, like other quack medicines, is said to be good in a variety of complaints, and is used by some people in every disorder, real or imaginary. I knew a lady, who not only administered it to all the poor of the parish when ill, but likewise gave it to her dogs and horses; and never failed to take it daily herself, till she destroyed her constitution. Many persons look upon it as *panacea*, or universal remedy, and keep it continually by them in case of emergencies. The fatal consequences of such credulity must be often irreparable. This, at least, was the situation of an old General of my acquaintance, whom no argument could dissuade from taking the powder, till he lost the use of all his extremities.

There is not a greater solecism in language, nor a greater absurdity in real practice, than to pretend that any one medicine is of certain efficacy in fevers. The most skilful physicians that ever existed have always found it necessary to watch attentively the progress of a fever; and to adapt both the regimen and medicines to the different changes and symptoms as they occurred.

CHAP. III.

INTERMITTENT FEVERS, OR AGUES.

THE generic character of an intermittent fever consists of periods or paroxysms, between each of which there is a perfect interval when no fever is present. They admit of several distinctions, as *true*, *spurious*, *perfect*, and *imperfect*.

The true and perfect intermittents which occur are;

1. The quotidian or daily—having an intermission of 24 hours.
2. Tertian, or third-day, 48 hours.
3. Quartan, or fourth-day, 72 hours.

When the return of an intermittent exceeds the latest of these times, it is called erratic or wandering. The other distinctions are of no practical utility, the means of cure being the same.

The paroxysm of an intermittent consists of three successive stages, viz. a hot, a cold, and a sweating stage.

Intermitting fevers afford the best opportunity both of observing the nature of a fever, and also the effects of medicine. No person can be at a loss to distinguish an intermitting fever from any other, and the proper medicine for it is now almost universally known.

The several kinds of intermittent fevers take their names from the period in which the fit returns, as quotidian, tertian, quartan, &c.

It appears to be generally acknowledged, that *marsh miasmata* or the effluvia arising from stagnant water, or marshy ground, when acted upon by heat, are the most frequent exciting cause of this fever.

EXCITING CAUSES.—This is evident from their abounding in rainy seasons, and being most frequent in countries where the soil is marshy, as in Holland, the fens of Cambridgeshire, the hundreds of Essex, &c., although we are not yet sufficiently acquainted with all the circumstances which are requisite to render marsh miasmata productive of intermittents. In acknowledging, however, the influence of marsh effluvia to produce intermittents, they must not, at the same time, be considered as their universal cause, since it is found that persons residing constantly in the most healthy