CHAP. XLIV.

DISORDERS OF THE SENSES.

WE de not mean to treat of the nature of our sensations, or to give a minute description of the various organs by which they are performed; but to point out some of the diseases to which these organs are most liable, and to shew how they may be prevented or remedied.

OF THE EYE.

No organ of the body is subject to more diseases than the eye, nor is there any one of which the diseases are more difficult to cure. Though more ignorant persons pretend to cure these than any other class of diseases, yet a very superficial acquaintance with the structure of the eye and nature of vision will be sufficient to convince any one of the danger of trusting to them. These diseases often exceed the skill of the most learned physician; hence we may easily infer the danger of trusting them to ignorant quacks, who, without all peradventure, put out more eyes than they cure. But, though the diseases of the eye can seldom be cured, they might often, by due care, be prevented; and, even where the sight is totally lost, many things might be done which are generally neglected, to render the unhappy person both more useful to himself and to society.

It is a pity those who have the misfortune to be born blind, or who lose their sight when young, should be suffered to remain in ignorance or to beg. This is both cruelty and want of economy. There are many employments of which blind persons are very capable, as knitting, carding, turning a weel, teaching languages, &c. Nor are instances wanting of persons who have arrived at the highest pitch of learning, without having the least idea of light. Witness the late famous Nicholas Sanderson of Cambridge, and the late excellent poet Dr. Thomas Blacklock of Edinburgh. The former was one of the first mathematicians of his age, and the latter, besides being a good poet and philosopher, was master of all the learned languages, and a very considerable adept in the liberal arts.

The eyes are hurt by viewing bright or luminous objects; keeping the head too long in a hanging posture; violent head-achs; excessive venery; the long use of bitters; the effluvia from acrid or volatile substances; various diseases; as the small-pox, measles, &c. but, above all, from night-watching, and candle-light studies. Long fasting is likewise hurtful to the eyes, and frequent heats and colds are no less pernicious. The eyes are often hurt by the stoppage of customary evacuations; as morning sweats; sweating of the feet; the menses in women; and the bleeding piles in men. All kinds of excess are likewise hurtful to the sight, particularly the immoderate use of ardent spirits and other strong liquors.

In all diseases of the eyes, especially those attended with inflammation, the cool regimen ought to be observed. The patient must abstain from all spirituous liquors. The smoke of tobacco, smoky rooms, the vapours of onions and garlic, and all vivid lights and glaring colours are carefully to be avoided. The drink may be water, whey, or small beer; and the aliment must be light and of easy digestion.

For preventing disorders of the eyes, issues and setons are of prime use. Every person, whose eyes are tender, ought to have one or more of these in some part of the body. It will likewise be of use to keep the body gently open, and either to bleed or purge spring and fall. All excess and night studies are to be avoided. Such as do not chuse a seton or an issue, will reap benefit from wearing a small Burgundy-pitch plaster between their shoulders.

A gutta serena or amaurosis, is an abolition of the sight without any apparent cause or fault in the eyes. When it is owing to a decay or wasting of the optic nerve, it does not admit of a cure; but when it proceeds from a compression of the nerves by redundant humours, these may in some measure be drained off, and the patient relieved. For this purpose, the body must be kept open with the laxative mercurial pills. If the patient be young and of a sanguine habit, he may be bled. Cupping, with scarifications on the back part of the head, will likewise be of use. A running at the nose may be promoted by volatile salts and stimulating powders, as compound powder of asarabacca, &c. But the most likely means of relieving the patient are issues or blisters kept open for a long time on the back part of the head, behind the ears, or on the neck. I have known these restore sight, even after it had been for a considerable time lost.

Should these fail, recourse must be had to a mercurial salivation; or what will perhaps answer the purpose better, twelve grains of muriated quicksilver (the corrosive sublimate of mercury) may be dissolved in an English pint and a half of brandy, and a table-spoonful of it taken twice a-day, drinking half a pint of the decoction of sarsaparilla after it.

A cataract is an obstruction of the pupil, by the interposition of some opaque substance, which either diminishes or totally extinguishes the sight. It is generally an opacity of the crystalline humour. In a recent or beginning cataract, the same medicines are to be used as in the gutta serena: and they will sometimes succeed. But when this does not happen, and the cataract becomes firm, it must be couched, or rather extracted. I have resolved a recent cataract by giving the patient frequent purges with calomel, keeping a poultice of fresh hemlock constantly upon the eye, and a perpetual blister on the neck. In both these cases may not electricity merit a trial?

The myopia or short-sightedness, and the presbyopia, or seeing only at too great a distance, are disorders which depend on the original structure or figure of the eye, therefore admit of no cure. The inconveniences arising from them may however be, in some measure, remedied by the help of proper glasses. The former requires the aid of a concave, and the latter of a convex glass.

A strabismus, or squinting, depends upon an irregular contraction of the muscles of the eye from a spasm, palsy, epilepsy, or an ill habit. Children often contract this disorder by having their eyes unequally ex-

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posed to the light. They may likewise acquire it by imitation from a squinting nurse or play-fellow, &c. As this disorder can hardly be cured, parents ought to be careful to prevent it. Almost the only thing which can be done for it is to contrive a mask for the child to wear, which will only permit him to see in a straight direction.

Squinting, according to the observations of that acute anatomist Mr. Home, appears to rise from the vision in one eye being obscure. It may however be acquired by children who have the lenses of their eyes of different focuses; or have one eye less perfect in its vision than the other; living constantly with those who do squint, and by imitation acquiring a habit of neglecting to use one eye.

The power of squinting voluntarily may also be acquired at any age. Persons who look much through telescopes are led to apply the mind entirely to one eye, not seeing at all with the other. In this case the neglected eye will at first, from habit, follow the other; but in time, if frequently neglected, may lose this restraint, and be moved in another direction. Some astronomers, whose eyes have been much used in this way, are said to be able to squint at pleasure.

From this view of squinting, it takes place under the three following circumstances; where one eye has only an indistinct vision; where both eyes are capable of seeing objects, but the one less perfect in itself than the other; and where the muscles of one eye have acquired from practice a power of moving it independently of the other.

Where squinting arises from an absolute imperfection in the eye, there can be no cure.

Where it arises from weakness only in the sight of one eye, it may, in some instances, be got the better of; but to effect the cure there is only one mode, which is that of confining the person to the use of the weak eye by covering the other; in this way the muscles, from constant use, will become perfect in the habit of directing the eye upon the object, gain strength in that action, and acquire a power of adjusting the eye: when these are established in a sufficient degree, the other eye may be set at liberty. The time that will be necessary for the cure must depend on the degree of weakness of the sight, and the length of time the muscles have been left to themselves; for it is with difficulty they acquire an increased degree of action after having been long habituated to a more limited contraction.

Since a small deviation in the direction of either eye from the axis of vision may produce squinting, it is worthy of notice that this unsightly habit may be acquired by infants who have not any defect in the eyes, but may arise from the cradle in which they lay being so situated with respect to the light, as to attract their notice in one particular direction, so much as to occasion a cast of one eye.

Spots or specks on the eyes are generally the effect of inflammation, and often appear after the small-pox, the measles, or violent ophthalmias. They are very difficult to cure, and often occasion total blindness. If the specks are soft and thin, they may sometimes be taken off by gentle caustics and discutients; as vitriol, the juice of selandine, &c. When these do not succeed, a surgical operation may be tried: the success of this however is always very doubtful.

We read in the book of Tobit in the Apocrypha (chap. vi. and

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chap. xi), "As for the gall" (of a fish) "it is good to anoint a man who hath whiteness in his eyes, and he shall be healed;—the gall being straked into the eyes of Tobias, his eyes began to smart, and he rubbed them, and the whiteness pilled away from the corners of his eyes: then Tobias saw his son, and he fell upon his neck."—A watchmaker at Paris having heard that the gall of a barbel was the remedy which Tobias employed, resolved to try its effects on his mother-in-law, a widow in her fifty-third year, whose eyes had for six months been afflicted with ulcers, and covered with film, which rendered them totally blind. He squeezed the gall of that fish into a phial, and in the evening he rubbed it with the end of a feather into his mother's eyes. It gave her great pain for half an hour, which abated by degrees, and her eyes watered very much. Next morning she could not open them, the water as it were gluing her eyes up. He bathed them with pure water, and she began to see with the eye which had received the most liquor. He used the gall again in the evening: the inflammation dispersed; the white of her eyes became red, their colour returned by degrees, and her sight was thus restored. In short, she recovered her sight without any other remedy.

The blood-shot eye may be occasioned by a stroke, a fall, retching, vomiting, violent coughing, &c. I have frequently known it happen to children in the hooping-cough. It appears at first like a bit of scarlet, and is afterwards of a livid or blackish colour. This disorder generally goes off without medicine. Should it prove obstinate, the patient may be bled, and have his eyes fomented with a decoction of comfrey roots and elder flowers. A soft poultice may be applied to the eyes; and the body should be kept open by gentle purgatives.

The WATERY or WEEPING EYE is often the mark of a scrophulous habit, is generally occasioned by a relaxation or weakness of the glandular parts of that organ. These may be braced and strengthened by bathing the eye with brandy and water, Hungary-water, rosewater with white vitriol dissolved in it, &c. Medicines which make a revulsion are likewise proper; as mild purgatives, perpetual blisters on the neck, bathing the feet frequently in lukewarm water, &c.

When this disease proceeds from an obstruction of the lachrymal duct, or natural passage of the tears, it is called a fistula lachrymalis, and can only be cured by a surgical operation.

OF THE EAR.

THE functions of the ear may be injured by wounds, ulcers or any thing that hurts its fabric. The hearing may likewise be hurt by excessive noise; violent colds in the head; fevers; hard wax or other substances sticking in the cavity of the ear; too great a degree of moisture or dryness of the ear. Deafness is very often the effect of old age, and is incident to most people in the decline of life. Sometimes it is owing to an original fault in the stricture or formation of the ear itself. When this is the case, it admits of no cure; and the unhappy person not only continues deaf, but generally likewise dumb, for life.

When deafness is the effect of wounds or ulcers of the ears, or of old age, it is not easily removed. When it proceeds from cold of the head, the patient must be careful to keep his head warm, especially in the

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night; he should likewise take some gentle purges, and keep his feet warm, and bath them frequently in lukewarm water at bed-time. When deafness is the effect of a fever, it generally goes off after the patient recovers. If it proceeds from dry wax sticking in the ears, it may be softened by dropping oil into them; afterwards they must be syringed with warm milk and water.

If deafness proceeds from dryness of the ears, which may be known by looking into them, half an ounce of the oil of sweet almonds, and the same quantity of the compound soap liniment, commonly called liquid opodeldoc, or the tincture of asafœtida, may be mixed together. Or take oil of almonds three drachms, water of ammonia one drachm; mix them for use. A few drops of this or the former mixture may be put into the ear every night at bed-time, stopping them afterwards with a little wool or cotton. Sneezing powders may then be serviceable. Some, instead of oil, put a small slice of the fat of bacon into each ear, which we have known to answer the purpose very well. When the ears abound with moisture, it may be drained off by an issue or seton, which should be made as near the affected parts as possible.

Some, for the cure of deafness, recommend the gall of an eel mixed with spirit of wine, to be dropped into the ear; others, equal parts of Hungary-water and spirits of lavender. Etmuller extols amber and musk; and Brookes says, he has often known hardness of hearing cured by putting a grain or two of musk into the ear with cotton-wool. But these and other applications must be varied according to the cause of the disorder.

Though such applications may sometimes be of service, yet they much oftener fail. Neither the eyes nor ears ought to be tampered with; they are tender organs, and require a very delicate touch. For this reason, what we would chiefly recommend in deafness is, to keep the head warm. From whatever cause the disorder proceeds, this is always proper; and perhaps more benefit is derived from it alone, in the most obstinate cases of deafness, than from all the medicines usually employed for the cure of deafness.

Dr. Horsely, well known fifty years ago in the northern counties for his success in expelling the various species of worms from the human body, lived to a great age: he frequently washed his ears with his own urine, poured warm from a proper vessel; putting in them every night and morning during the latter years of his life, a bit of wool well moistened with the same fluid. Dr. Horsley frequently recommended this practice to others, and the Editor has often known it restore the secretion to the auditory organs, after the patient had long been without it. We have seen some instances of deafness cured, and also a few instances of aged persons recovering their hearing by electricity, wearing salt in their ears for a fortnight or three weeks. Perhaps a strong watery solution of salt merits a preference.

In cases of simple puriform discharge from the tympanum of the ear, weak injections, either of vitriolated zinc or of acetated ceruse, are beneficial; and in aid of topical applications, blisters and even setons can never be injurious, but they may often conduce to the cure.

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OF THE TASTE AND SMELL.

THOUGH these senses are not of so great importance to man in a state of society as the sight and hearing, yet as the loss of them is attended with some inconveniency, they deserve our notice. They are seldom to be restored when lost; which ought to make us very attentive to their preservation, by carefully avoiding whatever may in the least prove injurious to them. As there is a very great affinity between the organs of tasting and smelling, whatever hurts the one generally affects the other.

Luxury is highly injurious to these organs. When the nose and palate are frequently stimulated by fragrant and poignant dishes, they soon loose the power of distinguishing tastes and odours with any degree of nicety. Man, in a state of nature, may perhaps have these faculties as acute as any other animal.

The sense of smelling may be diminished or destroyed by diseases; as, the moisture, dryness, inflammation or suppuration of that membrane which lines the inside of the nose, commonly called the olfactory membrane; the compression of the nerves which supply this membrane, or some fault in the brain itself at their origin. A defect, or too great a degree of solidity, of the small spungy bones of the upper jaw, the caverns of the forehead, &c. may likewise impair the sense of smelling. It may also be injured by a collection of fœtid matter in those caverns, which keeps constantly exhaling from them. Few things are more hurtful to the sense of smelling than taking great quantities of snuff.

When the nose abounds with moisture, after gentle evacuations, such things as tend to take off irritation, and coagulate the thin sharp serum, may be applied; as the oil of anise mixed with fine flour; camphor dissolved in oil of almonds, &c. The vapours of amber, frankincense, gum mastic, and benjamin, may likewise be received into the nose and mouth.

For moistening the mucus when it is too dry, some recommend snuff made of the leaves of marjoram, mixed with the oil of amber, marjoram, and aniseed; or a sternutatory of calcined white vitriol, twelve grains of which may be mixed with two ounces of marjoram-water, and filtrated. The stream or vapour of vinegar upon hot iron received up the nostrils is likewise of use for softening the mucus, opening obstructions, &c.

If there is an ulcer in the nose, it ought to be dressed with some emollient ointment, to which, if the pain be very great, a little tincture of opium (laudanum) may be added. If it be a venereal ulcer, it is not to be cured without mercury. In that case, the solution of the corrosive sublimate in brandy may be taken, as directed in the gutta serena. The ulcer ought likewise to be washed with it; and the fumes of cinnabar may be received up the nostrils.

If there be reason to suspect that the nerves which supply the organs of smelling are inert, or want stimulating, volatile salts, strong snuffs, and other things which occasion sneezing, may be applied to the nose. The forehead may likewise be anointed with balsam of Peru, to which may be added a little of the oil of amber.

The taste may be diminished by crusts, filth, mucus, aphthæ, pel-

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licles, warts, &c. covering the tongue; it may be depraved by a fault of the saliva, which being discharged into the mouth, gives the same sensations as if the food which the person takes had really a bad taste; or it may be entirely destroyed by injuries done to the nerves of the tongue and palate. Few things prove more hurtful either to the sense of tasting or smelling than obstinate colds, especially those which affect the head.

When the taste is diminished by filth, mucus, &c. the tongue ought to be scraped, and frequently washed with a mixture of water, vinegar, and honey, or some other detergent. When the saliva is vitiated, which seldom happens unless in fevers or other diseases, the curing of the disorder is the cure of this symptom. To relieve it however in the mean time, the following things may be of use: if there be a bitter taste, it may be taken away by vomits, purges, and other things which evacuate bile. What is called a nidorous taste, arising from putrid humours, is corrected by the juice of citrons, oranges, and other acids. A salt taste is cured by plentiful dilution with watery liquors. An acid taste is destroyed by absorbents, and alkaline salts, as powder of oyster-shells, lime-water, or a solution of salt of tartar or prepared kali.

When the sensibility of the nerves which supply the organs of taste is diminished, the chewing of horse-radish, or other stimulating substances, will help to recover it.

OF THE TOUCH.

The sense of touching may be hurt by any thing that obstructs the nervous influence, or prevents it being regularly conveyed to the organs of touching; as pressure, extreme cold, &c. It may likewise be hurt by too great a degree of sensibility, when the nerve is not sufficiently covered by the cuticle or scarf-skin, or where there is too great a tension of it, or it is too delicate. Whatever disorders the functions of the brain and nerves, hurts the sense of touching. Hence it appears to proceed from the same general causes as palsy and apoplexy, and requires nearly the same method of treatment.

In a stupor, or defect of touching, which arises from an obstruction of the cutaneous nerves, the patient must first be purged; afterwards such medicines as excite the action of the nerves, or stimulate the system, may be used. For this purpose, the volatile liquor of hartshorn, compound spirit of ammonia, horse-radish, &c. may be taken inwardly; the disordered parts at the same time may be frequently rubbed with fresh nettles, or water of ammonia, commonly called spirit of sal ammoniac. Blistering-plasters, and sinapisms applied to the parts, will likewise be of use, as also warm bathing, especially in the natural hot baths.

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