

REMARKS ON THE INDIAN HEMP.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—It was with much pleasure that I read in your Journal the paper of Dr. O'Shaughnessy upon the beneficial effects of the Indian hemp in those cases which so often resist the influence of other remedies; and availing myself of the kind offer made by Dr. O'S., in his communication of the 4th of February, I immediately procured from Mr. Squire half an ounce of the extract of gunjah, as prepared by him.

At the time when I received the extract I happened to have a slight attack of rheumatism, and, in consequence, I commenced the trial of the gunjah upon myself. From the doses administered to his patients in India, as stated in his paper above alluded to, Dr. O'Shaughnessy found that half a grain was sufficient, in one instance, to induce catalepsy for several hours (p. 365), and that frequently the cataleptic state was brought on by the exhibition of one single grain (p. 364). I began, therefore, with half a grain of the extract, and in an hour repeated the dose; but I could not perceive the slightest effect from it. On the following night I prepared a tincture containing three grains of the extract in a drachm of alcohol, and of this tincture I took twenty drops; in two hours after I took sixty drops (equal to three grains of the extract); the pain, however, continued, and sleep was not induced. On the succeeding night I took five grains of the extract, and, no effect resulting, I thought I might with impunity at least try the effects of the gunjah upon my patients. I accordingly selected four men and four women, who had suffered for nearly two years from chronic rheumatism, and I gave the gunjah to each of them in half grain doses, to the extent of two grains in the day. In two of the women slight numbness of the legs was induced after the first grain of the extract had been taken; but in none of the others was any effect produced, nor was the sensation of numbness brought on again by repetition of the medicine.

The next case was that of a coach-driver, aged forty-five, who had been under the treatment of my friend, Mr. Tubb, from January 22 until the 11th of February, upon which day we commenced the use of the gunjah. At the beginning of the attack, in January, it was a case of acute rheumatism; it had now passed into the chronic form. At night, on the 11th, two half-grain pills were given without any effect; upon the 12th, six half-grain doses were given, at an interval of an hour between each; on the 13th, 100 drops of the tincture were given in two draughts, containing 50 drops each; and on the 18th, two five-grain pills were taken; and no beneficial effect being produced the patient could not be induced to continue its use, but returned to the more usual remedies, from which he thought he derived more benefit.

I do not, however, consider that this was a case wherein a fair trial of the gunjah could be made, in as much as a quantity of opiate medicines had been taken previous to its administration. The following cases, however, are not subject to this objection:—I allude to the cases of three young ladies, who, for reasons foreign to the subject-matter of this communication, were considered to require some gentle sedative; and as opium and its preparations induced restless, headache, thirst, &c., whilst hyoscyamus produced no effect at all, I thought the gunjah might be advantageously given, and accordingly ordered it for them in two and a half-grain doses. In two of the cases calm sleep was obtained without any disagreeable symptoms on the following day; but in the third, the pulse was much accelerated, the thirst was excessive, and general feverishness was induced; these symptoms were slightly alleviated by the addition of a grain of ipecacuanha to each pill. I had, nevertheless, in this case, to desist in consequence of the feverish excitement, and to discontinue the use of the gunjah in the other two, although it had, in them, produced a good effect, my small store of the extract having become exhausted.

The last case I shall mention is that of a gentleman, who, for many years, has suffered much from gout, sometimes in its pure form, sometimes combined with rheumatism. On the night of the 15th of March I first commenced the gunjah. He took five grains of it about ten o'clock, soon after which he fell into a quiet sleep; and remaining in this state for about nine hours he awoke, much refreshed, and quite delighted with the remedy; pain, however, returned towards night, and at ten o'clock he took a pill containing two and a half grains of gunjah; this was repeated in the morning at three, and again at half-past ten. I then saw him. The pulse was quickened; he complained of thirst; but there being a moisture upon the skin which I attributed to the gunjah, and the tongue being moist and clean, I ordered it to be continued; and at half-past twelve he took another pill, containing two and a half grains, which was repeated at four, p.m. In the evening the symptoms continued nearly as they had been in the morning, with rather more perspiration about the neck and chest. Five grains more were ordered to be taken during the night, five were repeated in the morning, and upon the night of the 18th another five-grain pill was taken. On the morning of the 19th the pain was unabated; he was restless; the pulse from 100 had risen to 130; there was much thirst, but the tongue was still moist and clean. I thought that the gunjah had now had a pretty fair trial, my patient having taken, from the night of the 15th to the night of the 18th, thirty-two and a half grains of the extract. At the patient's own request he took again, on the night of the 21st, eight grains of the extract, hoping that as no sleep for above an hour at a time had been obtained since the first administration of the gunjah on the 15th, probably the same beneficial effect might be produced as then; but no—the pain continued, restlessness increased, and not the slightest tendency to sleep was felt.

From what has been said it would appear, either that much larger doses of the gunjah can be taken with impunity by Europeans in their own country than by the inhabitants of India in theirs, or that the

drug has become much deteriorated, which deterioration must have taken place either by the decomposition of its active principle, or from the fugations or volatile nature of that principle, which latter is not, however, very probable. Mr. Ley, in his paper of the 22nd of February, notices this deterioration, but does not state the doses in which he administered the gunjah in this country. I had hoped, from the easily induced cataleptic state as narrated of the Indian cases in Dr. O'Shaughnessy's paper, that the pathology of that disease might have readily been investigated in the lower animals, and that by this drug phenomena, now nearly hidden, might have been in some degree elucidated.

Had any other statements regarding the use of the gunjah in this country appeared in your Journal I should never have thought of bringing forward the four I have done; but I considered that, after Dr. O'Shaughnessy's liberal offer to the profession, and Mr. Squire's kindness in so promptly transmitting a portion of the extract to me, I should but ill perform my duty did I not take this opportunity for thanking them whilst I make the result of these few observations public.

I am, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,
JAMES INGLIS, M.D.

Halifax, March 27, 1843.