

number for April 10th, 1844, I was greatly surprised at the following expression of his opinion:—"I do not think ergot of rye would act unless natural action had commenced."

Having been engaged for more than twelve years in that arduous portion of our profession, midwifery, and since, during that time, no less, on an average, than from 20 to 30 cases of labour have been attended by myself during each month of the period already alluded to, I have had, I conceive, sufficient opportunities for inquiry into the action of so potent and specific an agent as the ergot of rye upon the impregnated uterus. Several cases of premature labour have been produced in my own practice at the sixth and seventh month of utero-gestation, by the administration of this agent alone. With every feeling of respect towards Dr. Shapter, I beg most distinctly to affirm my thorough conviction in the power the ergot of rye possesses in producing uterine action; and it has that power, provided the ergot is good, in an equal degree, to that of reproducing uterine action when it has been once established. I must further unhesitatingly state, that the ergot of rye possesses the power of producing abortion, though doubts might be entertained that it had not that specific action ascribed to it by many writers of the present day upon midwifery, if the opinion of so eminent an authority as Dr. Shapter were allowed to remain unquestioned.

Since writing the above, we have been favoured with the remaining portion of Dr. Shapter's paper, wherein he fully carries out the opinion entertained by some leading obstetricians of the present day. Dr. Shapter gives a condensed account of the action of the ergot of rye, as attested by men of eminence; yet, it appears, he rested his own opinion of the ergot of rye, as a non-producer of uterine action, unless that action had already commenced, on a single case. Such evidence will, to an ordinary reader, not be conclusive. I have before me numerous cases in which the ergot of rye was administered, for the purpose of producing a healthy action of the uterus, with success. In one case, in which hæmorrhage had been going on some time prior to its administration, after the lapse of two or three days a fleshy substance was expelled. This morbid production had given rise to passive hæmorrhage, unattended with uterine action, until excited by the ergot of rye, when the production alluded to was expelled; after which, the hæmorrhage ceased, and the patient rapidly regained her health and strength.

There can, as it appears to me, be only one opinion on the specific action of this drug; for, instead of plugging the uterus, administering lead and opium, acids, &c., in cases of uterine hæmorrhage, whether accompanied or not with uterine action, I invariably succeed in arresting the flow of blood by the timely, yet judicious, administration of the ergot of rye. Many practitioners differ with me in opinion on this point; I, however, still rest on my own experience, which continually adds new evidence of the justness of my views. I therefore repeat that ergot of rye never failed, in my hands, to produce the desired effect.

My mode of giving the ergot of rye does, I am well aware, differ from that of many of my professional brethren; for, instead of administering the ergot in large doses, I give small doses of the drug, say from two to three grains every three or four hours, or oftener,

EFFECTS OF ERGOT IN PRODUCING ABORTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL AND SURGICAL JOURNAL.

In the interesting trial relative to the production of abortion, related by Dr. Shapter, of Exeter, in your

according to the state of the patient, until uterine action is produced, evinced by pain in the bowels, &c.; thereby simulating, in my procedure, the manner in which nature would act, had not the powers of the system become enfeebled from the draining already sustained from the flow of blood continuing. The tissues of the body, when deprived of their natural stimuli, suffer enervation, which incapacitates them from throwing off the various intra-uterine products, to the great detriment of the patient; it is, in such cases, that the ergot manifests its wonderful powers over the functions of the uterus.

Labour, in general, commences gradually, the patient frequently suffering more or less pain for some hours previous to the action of the abdominal muscles being excited into those expulsive throes, sufficient to force the head of the child, after the os uteri is fully dilated, through the pelvic aperture. Should this salutary action be arrested from a want of energy in the uterus, and that organ be not fully dilated; the administration of a few grains (10 or 15) of the ergot of rye will produce the uterine action so as fully to dilate the os uteri; when in some cases, particularly if the patient be of a low or phlegmatic temperament, the uterine action becomes again suspended, and requires from half a drachm to two scruples of the ergot to be given, to arouse the uterus to complete its purpose in the animal economy.

I remain, Sir,

Yours most respectfully,

THOS. H. WARDLEWORTH.

Bury, May 3, 1844.