

MATERIA MEDICA.

Indian hemp as an oxytomic. By JOHN GRIGOR, M. D., Nairn.

AT the meeting of the Edinburgh Obstetrical Society, July 1850, Dr. Simpson stated that " he had been induced to try the effects, if any, of Indian hemp, during labour, in consequence of Dr. Churchill stating that it possessed powers similar to those of ergot of rye in arresting hæmorrhage, when dependent upon congested states of the unimpregnated uterus. In the few cases of labour in which it was tried, parturient action seemed to be very markedly and directly increased after the exhibition of the hemp, but that far more extensive and careful experiments would be required, before a definite opinion could be arrived at relative to its possession of oxytomic powers, and their amount."

In the last August number of the *Monthly Journal of Medical Science*, there is an article, by Dr. A. Christison, on the parturient effects of Indian hemp, being a continuation of a previous one on the natural history, &c., of that medicine. These remarks are, so far as I know, the first and last that have been given birth to on that peculiar, and as I think uncertain, effect of the *Cannabis Indica*. I could have wished that these observations had been made on a more extended scale, and the effects more particularly and individually noticed, yet I will hope that my evidence may induce some others of my brethren to try it and note its effects, so that from step to step we may at length attain a full and correct knowledge of its powers and defects as a promoter of the labour pain.

Since reading Dr. Christison's seven cases, conducted at the Maternity Hospital of Edinburgh, I have used the Tinct. *Cannabis Indicæ* (24 grs. ext. to ℥j.) in sixteen cases. In nine of these, though given to the extent of ℥ij. ss. in separate doses of 25 and 35 drops at a time—in some in quick succession, in others at longer intervals—I could not perceive any increased uterine action, nor the slightest physiological change in any one way during labour or afterwards, with the exception of one instance of sleep (much required at the time) in a lady, far from strong, confined of her third child, and much exhausted by inefficient throes, in whom the third ℥ss. dose completely arrested the pains and induced sleep, which continued for an hour, when she awakened refreshed. Labour then set in in earnest, chloroform was given, and the child was speedily born. These nine cases made good recoveries.

In the seven cases in which the tincture of hemp succeeded so well with me, five were cases of first confinement, of satisfactory though very slow labour, and phlegmatic temperament. I have noticed the contractions acquire great increase of strength frequently immediately

on swallowing the drug, and have seen four or five minutes elapse ere the effect ensued ; and if none was induced within the latter space of time, I have not observed its effects at all afterwards, notwithstanding repeated doses. In these few cases, I had opportunities of giving it from the time when the os uteri would admit the point of my finger till the expulsion of the child. Judging from experience, I believe that, in appropriate cases for the use of this stimulant, and when effectual, it is capable of bringing the labour to a happy conclusion, considerably within a half of the time that would otherwise have been required, thus saving protracted suffering to the patient, and the time of the practitioner.

I have not observed it to possess any anæsthetic effects. I have used it in two cases along with the inhalation of chloroform, and did not observe that that agent interfered in any way with its action. When the effects of the hemp were subsiding, I have been able to recal and keep up the "good pains", by the addition of ten drops, given from time to time. I consider the expulsive action of the cannabis to be stronger than that of the ergot, but less certain in its effect ; and it has the advantage over the ergot, of usefulness in the early stage of parturition. I believe that the previous ineffectual administration of the hemp does not interfere with the after-exhibition and full working of the ergot.

Such are my brief observations on the new and interesting use to which Bang, or the Hachisch of India, has been put. In the few cases in which I thought its administration safe, and not counter-indicated by malformation, &c., you have given the result of those in which this effect was, and was not displayed. I cannot conclude these remarks without entering my dissent against the use of uterine medicinal stimuli in general, on account of the frequent difficulty of accurate conception of relative dimensions of parts, &c. Yet all obstetricians must acknowledge that, in many cases, such stimuli are indispensable ; and to be possessed of one capable of so early application, is decidedly a matter of much importance. I would also notice that in labour, whether the cannabis shows its peculiar effect on the uterine contractions or not, there seems, as in tetanus, &c., to be a very great tolerance of the drug—nor have unpleasant consequences, so far as I have seen, appeared afterwards ; and whilst it is acknowledged as a powerful controller of inordinate muscular spasm, it is equally, in many cases, a powerful stimulant of the uterine muscular fibre in labour, if not in the unimpregnated.—*Monthly Jour.—Dublin Med. Press.*