

GENERAL PRACTICE, 1793–1803

The Transactions of a Huntingdonshire Medical Society

by

ARTHUR ROOK

PART II*

At a 3rd Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Smiths Whittlesey May 6th 1794.

Members present S. Allvey Presid^t.
 R. Stewart
 Jo^s. Vise
 Jo^s. Michael
 John Smith
 Fran Hopkinson

The Minutes of the preceeding Meetings were Read over and approved.

Mr. James Smith Jun. of Ramsey whose Thesis was read and discussed at the Last half yearly Meeting was Unanimously admitted a Member of this Society, and Mr. Hopkinson who proposed him was desired to inform him by letter of his admission.

A case of Syphilis was Read by Dr. Allvey & Ordered to be copied.

A Case on the Treatment of Typhus fever was Read by Mr. Stewart and he was requested to draw it out to be inserted in the Society Book.

Mr. Smith read a Case on the Milk abscess and a Case on the Adhesion of the placenta which were ordered to be inserted in the Case Book.

Mr. Vise delivered the History of a Case of Ulcerated Leg where the Native Vegetable acid† as an anti-septic was successfully employed and he was requested to draw the Case up in a regular form and Read it to the Socy. at their Next Meeting.

Mr. Hopkinson informed the Society that the Cataract operated upon Last Year was either not depressed or otherwise Return'd again into its natural Situation.

The Next Meeting was order'd to be held at Mr. Michaels at Stamford on the first Monday in September nearest the Full Moon.

Here are the reports of cases as follows:

1. Case of Syphilis accompanied with a Phagogenic Ulcer in the inguinal region of Alarming tendency—Extracted from a Letter addressed to Dr. Allvey of St. Neots requesting his assistance in the further treatment of the Case
 2. Case of Milk Abscess successfully treated by Justamonds Plan, by John Smith Surgn.
 3. Case of Adhesion of the Placenta, to the Fundus Uteri by John Smith Surgn.
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* The first part of this article appeared in the July issue of *Medical History*, page 196.

† Native Vegetable Acid—orange juice or orange and lemon juice combined. Used here as an ulcer dressing.

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Case of Adhesion of the Placenta
to the Fundus Uteri

by John Smith Surgn.

I was sent for to Ann Palmer aged 38, of her fourth Child on the 16th of Febr^y 1794 at seven o'Clock in ye Morning she was taken in Labour about three the same Morning after being in the room a short time she had a Pain, I then examined her & found that the os Uteri was much dilated, and the Membranes considerably protruding, I broke them & found both the feet, I sat down and waited the return of Labour pains which came in exceeding feeble and the feet came down very slow the pains tho very weak kept coming on till the Foetus was born up to the shoulders, when they lost in a great measure their frequency & power, & the Funis being much comprest I found it necessary to render nature some assistance, I made use of gradual slight force, and in a few minutes brought away the Foetus; my Patient all this time appeared gradually sinking, Pulse scarce perceptible and complaining of extreem weakness in the Uterus, and said she must die. I gave her a glass of Brandy & Water with grt 60 Tr. op. & found her a little reviv'd by it but her pulse no stronger. I waited the usual time for extracting the Placenta but she had no pain after the Expulsion of the Foetus. I took hold of the Funis, and used a moderate degree of force, but found it not to stir, the consequence of the power employed tho' very inconsiderable was the produceing of violent pains in the Fundus Uteri, but not from the contraction of the Uterus. I waited a little longer gave her more brandy & water with T.O. nevertheless she still grew more and more faint & had no pain whatever I then made use of the same moderate Force as before she immediately complain'd of the same pain and the Placenta mov'd not at all, she still kept sinking, I was then determin'd to introduce my hand to endeavour to find out the cause of the pain, and how far the Placenta adher'd when to my great surprise, I found it very firmly attach'd to all the Fundus Uteri, and only a part of the size of a large Hens egg which did not adhere, I began very carefully separating it, by a small piece at a time, it caused no pain till I came to that part where the Funis enters, when she said I must desist for she could not bear it, it made her smart so very much, I began then on the other side and got it nearly all away without much more of the smarting Pain, the Haemorrhage was very inconsiderable & the Uterus during the whole time contracted not at all, after this she had no more pain. I had her immediately put to bed gave her a draught with Gutt xxx T.O., and desired them when faint, to give her warm Brandy & Water, they found her tolerable easy & comfortable after the draught for three hours, when she was seiz'd with Syncope and died in five minutes.

The Case Mr. President, which I have just read to the Society appears to me as singular & uncommon as it is Melancholy & distressing, the weak state of the Uterus, or disposition to paralysis was evident with the first coming on of Labour, from the weakness & infrequency of the pains, from the slow descent and great protrusion of the Membranes, from the lingering Nature of ye Labour and very great dilatation of the Os Uteri. Tho the pains were sufficient with some degree of Manual assistance to bring forth a small child, and the Uterus itself was extremely sensible when the smallest Force was applied to the Funis: nevertheless I think its entire Loss of contractile power as a muscular Envelope sufficiently proves a Paralysis of its Fibre; in all probability produced by the preternatural and morbid Adhesion of the Placenta.

This Woman consulted me Six Months before her delivery for a violent pain in the Neighbourhood of the Uterus which used frequently to affect her Stomach, brought on costiveness, and continued to afflict her more or less during the whole of her Pregnancy. I have since conceiv'd tho' from a cause which I never could discover, that the pain then complain'd of was of the passive Inflammatory nature, which perhaps by occasioning an effusion of coagulable Lymph might give rise to the preternatural Adhesions of the Placenta evinced by examination.

The sensibility of the Uterus being increased while its contractile Power was diminished or destroy'd, is a circumstance which the Society well knows happens some times to other Muscles in a state of Palsy, and it can be no matter of surprize to the well informed Practitioner that an increase of Sensibility in an organ at all times so irritable, as the Womb, should be productive of local and general Irritation which in numberless Instances when other internal parts have

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been so effected, has brought on the most alarming and sudden depression of strength frequently terminating in instant Death.

At a fourth Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Michael's Stamford September 15th 1794.
Members present

Saml Alvey President
Joseph Vise
Rich^d Stewart
Francis Hopkinson
James Smith
Joseph Michael

The Minutes of the preceeding Meeting were read and approv'd.

Mr. Vise read a case of putrid ulcer of the leg cur'd by the application of vegetable acid; which, was order'd for insertion in the case-book.

He also inform'd the Society of a new & successfull method of treating the Tinea Capitis a case of which he promis'd to draw up and read before the Society at the next Meeting.

Mr. Hopkinson read a Case of Syphilis which was order'd for insertion in the book.

He also read some observations on the use of the pullies in dislocations of the shoulder which were order'd for insertion.

Mr. Stewart read a case of Laceration of the Vagina from the Uterus from a letter of Mr. Haighton* Surgeon in London which was order'd for insertion.

Mr. James Smith of Ramsey related a Case of lacerated perineum during the time of labour when the child was deliver'd thro' the orifice the wound heal'd and the woman perfectly recover'd.

The next meeting was order'd to be held at Mr. Stewart's at Bourn in May 1795 of which he was desir'd to inform the Members by circular letters.

Here are the reports of cases as follows:

1. Case of putrid ulcer of the leg cur'd by the application of Vegetable acid by Jos. Vise Surgeon Stilton
 2. Case of Syphilis by Fras. Hopkinson
 3. Observations on the use of Pulleys in dislocations of the Shoulder by Fras. Hopkinson
 4. Case of laceration of the Vagina from the Uterus communicated in a letter from Mr. Haighton Surgeon London to Mr. Stewart Surgeon Bourn
 5. Case of Fever from Exposure to Cold by Richd. Stewart
 6. Examinatn. of a Limb after Amputation for Disease in the Joint by Richd. Stewart
 7. State of an Epidemic Affection of the Year 1795 by R: Stewart
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At a Fifth Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Stewarts of Bourn

March 1st 1796 Members Present
Samuel Allvey M.D. President
Rich^d. Stewart. Fran^s. Hopkinson
James Smith. Jos. Vise
Joseph Michael

* John Haighton, 1755-1823, M.D., F.R.S. Lecturer on physiology and midwifery at St. Thomas's and Guy's Hospitals. An irritable and opinionated man he was a noted obstetrician and was also famous for his researches on nerve regeneration. There is a MS. volume of his midwifery lectures in the Library of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

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The minutes of ye preceeding Meeting were read and approved.

This meeting from a variety of untoward circumstances occasioned by the ill health of Mr. Stewart & the inconvenience attending the repairing his House, and from ye different engagements of the other Gentlemen has been from time to time postponed to ye present Day & in consequence of these unfortunate & various disappointments Dr. Allvey proposed the following resolution. Resolved—That previous to ye adjournment of every meeting of the Society

A day be appointed for ye holding of ye next meeting—and if two Members only be present That the Meeting shall be considered as constituted And ye Gentlemen at whose House ye meeting is held (the President not being present) be desired to take the Chair.

N.B. Part of the Minutes of this Meeting thro' mistake, are placed at ye end of ye cases—vide Michaels case.

Here is the report of the case as follows:

1. Case of Scrophulous Ulceration of the Elbow Joint attended with Hectic Fever terminating by counter Stimulus in ye soft Parts very successfully by Joseph Michael

The Minutes which were left out
Mr. Stewart

Read a Case of concussion of the Brain Successfully treated by the Means employ'd, with remarks, & observations on the case with a view of forming a diagnosis to draw a line between concussion & extravasation the case was greatly approved of, and ye Gentlemen desired it might be Inserted into the Case Book.

Mr. Stewart read an ingenious treatise upon a diseased state of ye Skin illustrated by two cases which were ordered to be inserted.

The meeting was then adjourned to Mr. James Smiths of Ramsey, & ordered to be held there on Monday 23d. May at eleven o'clock in the Morning.

Mr. Michael read a Case of Scrophulous Ulceration &c. see his title. The Case was consider'd a very interesting one, very correctly drawn up, & accurately related—The Gentlemen confess'd their obligation to him & desired it might be inserted in their Case Book.

Here are the reports of the cases as follows:

1. Case of Concussion Upon The Brain By Richd. Stewart
2. Case of apparent disease upon ye Liver By Richd. Stewart
3. Hints upon a certain diseased State of the Skin by Richd. Stewart.

At a sixth Meeting of the Society held at Mr. James Smyth's Ramsey May 23d. 1796.
Members present.

Samuel Allvey M.D. President
Rich^d. Stewart
Fran^s. Hopkinson
John Smith
Jo^s. Vise
Jo^s. Michael
Ja^s. Smyth

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The Minutes of the preceeding Meeting were read & approved.

Mr. Smith of Whittlesea related a Case of Fracture of the Cranium, which he was requested to draw up & read to the Society at their next Meeting.

Mr. Vise & Dr. Allvey in consequence of consulting together in a Case of Ascites proposed an experiment to be made in the treatment of that disease, with a view to a more permanent relief & prevent the frequent repetition of the operation of Paracentesis, which the Society acquiesced in; & they desired that the Treatment with the consequences might be laid before them.

In consequence of a conversation which passed in the Society on the Subject of Rabies canina, & the miserable & unfortunate consequences terminating the disease: The Gentlemen became all anxious to secure every information the extent of their opportunities wd. allow on the subject of so distressing a disease; & every Member was requested by the President from an order of the Society to give every satisfaction in writing they each could afford, to be brought forward at the next meeting which was appointed to be held at Mr. Hopkinson's Peterborough on Monday the 19th of September next & this Meeting was adjourn'd accordingly to that Day—

Whereas it was thought by some of the Members present that a small fund should be established to answer the various contingent expences of the Society the President moved that each member, on the next meeting of the Society do subscribe 10s. 6d. towards establishing the same. The motion was ordered to lay over to the next meeting & then to be balloted for; A Treasurer to be appointed at the same time.

At a seventh Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Hopkinson's Peterboro. Aug. 20th 1796

Members Present

Sam^l. Allvey President

Fran^s. Hopkinson

John Smith

Jos Vise

Jam^s. Smyth

Jo^s. Michael

The Minutes of the preceeding Meeting were read and approved.

Mr. Vise engaged to satisfy the Society respecting the success he might meet with in the further treatment of Ascites by the operation of Paracentesis, if possible at their next meeting.

Further promises were made to bring forward observations on the Rabies Canina by the Gentlemen present at their next meeting.

The motion respecting a fund was also ordered to lie over to another meeting.

Several cases of importance were related by way of Medical news which gave general satisfaction.

Mr. Smith of Whittlesea through his multifarious evocations was not able to bring forward his case on fractured cranium as desired, but engaged at the next meeting it should be forth coming.

A motion was made by Dr. Allvey that the sense of the Society be taken on their next meeting for the admission of Gentlemen to be considered as corresponding Members. That any Gentleman be proposed by the Member desirous of his admission his character and situation spoken to the ballot for his introduction passing round, and his admission if unanimous be entered in the Books the same day.

Mr. Jams. Smyth read a case on fracture of the Fibula, with compound dislocation of the Tibia attended with an extensive lacerated wound which was unanimously approved of and general thanks were given to the author, and the case was ordered to be inserted in their book against their next Meeting.

A motion was made by Dr. Allvey that the rules be revised at the next meeting by the whole

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society formed into a committee and necessary corrections and improvements made at the time.

The next meeting was adjourned to Mr. Vises on the first Monday in May nearest the full moon of which Mr. Vise engaged to give general notice.

Here follows the report of the case

1. A Case of Fractured Fibula with dislocation of the Tibia attended with an extensive lacerated wound, through which that part of the Tibia which forms the Malleolus internus protruded.

At an 8th meeting of the Society held at Mr. Vise's Stilton, May 8, 1797.

Members present.
Sam. Allvey President
Fran^s. Hopkinson
John Smith
Jos. Vise
Ja^s. Smyth
Jos. Michael
Rich^d. Stewart

The minutes of the preceeding meeting were read and approved.

The Society was satisfied respecting the requests made to the different members at their last meeting.

Mr. Vise's information on the subject of Ascites mention'd in the last minutes were order'd to be copied; as also another Case of Ascites following an obstinate intermittent, which is also to be inserted, together with a Case of very extensive fracture of the Cranium in which the operation succeeded, read by Mr. Jno. Smith; and some observations illustrated with cases of the inflammatory pleuritic epidemic which has so long prevail'd in the Country by Dr. Allvey.

The next meeting was adjourn'd to Mr. Smith of Whittlesea to monday the 7th of August of which Mr. Smith is requested to give particular notice.

Here are the reports of the cases as follows:

1. Case of Ascites following an obstinate Intermittent by Jos. Vise Surg Stilton
2. A Case of fracture of the Cranium, in which it became necessary to remove a very large portion of bone, on account of the extensive depression upon the dura mater by Jno. Smith Surgn. Whittlesea.
3. Case of Ascites by Jos. Vise Surgn. Stilton

At a 9th Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Smiths at Whittlesey August 7th 1797

Members present
S. Allvey Presid^t
Fr Hopkinson
John Smith
Jo^s Vise
Ja^s Smith
Jo^s Michael
Ric Stewart

Arthur Rook

The Minutes of the Preceding Meeting were Read & Approved.

The Society was Satisfied respecting the requests made to the different Members at their Last Meeting.

The laws were examined & revised agreeable to the desire of the Society some Additions were made & ordered to be printed.

The Society received several communications from different Gentlemen with great satisfaction.

The next Meeting was Ordered to be held at Mr. Michaels at Stamford the Monday in May nearest to the Full Moon of which he was desired to inform the Members by circular letters.

Here are reports of the cases as follows:

1. The History of a Case of Hydrophobia with Remarks and Observations by Saml. Allvey M.D:
2. Observations illustrated by Cases on A Very fatal inflammatory Epidemic which prevailed during the Spring and part of the Summer 1797 in several parts of England by Saml. Allvey M.D:

At a Tenth Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Michael's at Stamford May 28th 1798

Members present
Jos. Michael Appointed Presidit.
Jos. Vise
Rich^d. Stewart
John Smith
James Smyth

The Minutes of the last meeting were read & approv'd.

[Agreed, that the very handsome apology sent to the Society by the President Dr. Allvey for his absence this day, be deem'd sufficient, and that the Thanks of the Members for the same be sent to him by the appointed President in the name of the Society.

2dly

That Mr. Hopkinson is consider'd by the Society inattentive, for his absence from this Meeting on account of the apology sent by Mr. Smith of Whittlesea not being deem'd sufficient; and for its not coming from Mr. Hopkinson by letter to the Society—for which, a Censure was desir'd to be sent to him by the appointed President in the name of the Society.]*

Agreed That any Person who can be recommended by any original or attending Member of this Society as a man of Medical or chirurgical science may be proposed as a corresponding Member.

That the Person who shall have propos'd a corresponding Member shall immediately send him a letter acquainting him of his Election with a copy of the Laws.

4thly

Mr. Stewart propos'd Dr. Haighton Lecturer on Physiology & Midwifery in London as a Corresponding Member who was unanimously elected by the Society.

Mr. Stewart mention'd some instances of good success from the local application of the Nitric acid the cases of which he promis'd to give neat & correct at the next meeting.

Mr. Vise has tried the Nitric acid in a variety of venereal cases is sorry to say at present but with little success as a specific but with considerable advantage to the general constitution.

Mr. Michael also related an instance of the good effects of the nitric acid in a case of bad syphilitic ulceration of the Rectum & general bad Health which he promis'd to give in detail at the next meeting.

* The passages in square brackets are crossed out in the minutes.

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The Next Meeting was order'd to be held at Mr. Stewart's at Bourne the Monday in September nearest the full moon of which he was desir'd to send circular Letters to the Members.

FINIS

At the Eleventh Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Stewarts—Bourn—Sept. 24th 1798

Members Present—

Rich^d. Stewart (Appointed President)

Jo^s. Vise

James Smith

Jo^s. Michael

Fran: Hopkinson

The Minutes of the last meeting were read & [Mr. Hopkinsons apology admitted for his absence, being obliged to attend a Case of midwifery & not having it in his power to send a Letter in time for the Society.

Agreed that the handsome Apology by Mr. Alvey for his Absence this Day be deem'd sufficient.]*

Mr. Stewart read a Paper upon a New Method of Amputation, wth Physiological remarks upon the Parts wounded, for wch. He reciev'd the Thanks of the Society, and the same was requested to be inserted in the Book of the Society, but on account of some further addition to the Paper it is for the present omitted.

Mr. Michael read a Case of siphylitic Ulceration of the Rectum in wch. the Nitric Acid internally, wth. a solution of Corrosive Sublimate & Thebaic Tincture diluted as an External Applicat; were employd wth. success the thanks of the Meeting were given to him & his Case orderd to be inserted in the Book.

Different Gentlemen gave their Opinions upon the use of the Nitric Acid, Mr. Vise had never seen it of service in the early stages of Siphylis, but in Old Cases where Mercury had been much used & the Constitution much reduced it has been of the highest service in restoring given in the Dose of Two Drachms twice a Day.

Mr. Vise mention'd a Case of Epilepsy in wch. half a Drachm of Miseltoe† twice a Day was successfull, & promised to present the Case to the Society at their next Meeting.

Mr. Vise propos'd Mr. Henry Miver as a Member of this Society wch. was seconded by Mr. Hopkinson.

The next Meeting of this Society was orderd to be held at Mr. Jos. Smyths Ramsey the first Monday in May nearest the full moon, of wch. He was desired to inform the Members.

Here is the report of the case as follows:

1. Case of Siphylitic Ulceration of the Rectum in wch. the Nitric Acid was successfully employd —by Jos. Michael.

At a Twelfth meeting of the Society held at Mr. Smyth's at Ramsey, May the 31st 1799

Members present

Samuel Allvey M.D. President

Jo^s. Vise

Fran^s. Hopkinson

* The passage in square brackets is crossed out in the Minutes.

† Mistletoe was employed in the treatment of epilepsy, chorea and hysteria. It still finds a place in the B.P.C. and the French Codex and it is stated to have hypotensive properties.

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Jo^s. Michael
John Smith
James Smyth

The minutes of the last meeting were read & approved of, at the same time the Gentlemen expressed a general Dissatisfaction at not finding Mr. Stewart's Case inserted in their book according to order, enlarged & corrected agreeable to Mr. S's promise which they considered neglectfull, & also at not receiving any apology from him for his nonattendance on this day—Mr. Smyth was desired to send Mr. Stewart a copy of this minute.

Mr. Hny. Oliver of Stilton, Surgeon, who was proposed a member, by Mr. Vise at the last meeting, sent the Society a Thesis upon *Fistula Lachrymalis* which was discussed & Mr. Oliver unanimously admitted a Member of this Society by ballot, of which Mr. Jas. Smith was desired to inform him by Letter & to return him the thanks of this Society for his paper.

Dr. Allvey undertook to have the laws reprinted according to a corrected copy & to have them delivered to the members at the next meeting.

Dr. Allvey read a letter from Dr. Haighton on a case which the Dr. sent him for his opinion which letter being read to the Society/Dr. H. being a corresponding Member/ the Gentlemen present beg'd the favour of Dr. A. to write to him & beg his acceptance of unanimous & particular thanks for his letter.

Dr. Allvey read a case on the successfull treatment of confirm'd Ileus by an hydraulic machine wh. was ordered to be inserted in their book. The Dr. received the general thanks of the Gentlemen present & received their permission to publish the case as being previously read before them.

The next meeting of the Society was appointed to be held at Mr. Hopkinson's at Peterboro' on the first Monday in September nearest the full Moon—of which Mr. H. was requested to give circular notice.

Here is the report of the case as follows:

1. A Case of Ileus successfullly treated by the use of the same Hydraulic machine as was employed in the unsuccessful case which was delivered to this Society in May 1793. Read before the Society by Samuel Allvey M.D.

At a thirteenth Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Hopkinsons at Peterboro Sepr. 16. 1799
Members present

Fra^s. Hopkinson appointed President
Rich^d. Stewart
Jos^h. Vise
Jos^h. Michael
Joⁿ. Smith
Ja^s. Smith
Hen. Oliver

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and approved.

[Mr. Stewart made an Apology for not attending the Meeting at Ramsey, the Road being very bad, having lamed his Horse & lost his way.]* He likewise Apologised for not compleating his paper on an improved method of Amputating by informing the Society that he wished for more experience on the Subject he promises to compleat it as soon as he possibly can.

[A Letter from Dr. Allvey was read informing the Society that He was so particularly engaged in business as to make it impossible for him to attend.

* The passage in square brackets is crossed out in the Minutes.

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The Society admitted the Drs. excuse & lamented that they had not the pleasure of his company.]*

Communications were made to the Society by Mr. Stewart & Mr. Vise on the external use of the Antimon. Tart in cases of Strumous affections of the Joints, they were requested to communicate the effects of this Remedy in Writing at the next meeting of this Society.

Mr. Vise has applied it in the form of Ointment in the Proportion of oz. $\frac{1}{2}$ of Ant. Tart to oz. $\frac{1}{2}$ of Simple Ointment.

Mr. Vise read a Case of extra Uterine Foetus which the Society deemed very interesting & Curious, he recd. the thanks of the Society and it was ordered to be inserted in the Case Book.

Mr. Oliver proposed Mr. Thomas† of London Surgeon & Anatomist as a Corresponding Member of this Society. He was unanimously elected.

The next meeting of the Society was appointed to be held at Mr. Vise's at Stilton on the first Monday in May nearest the full Moon of which he was requested to give circular notice.

Here is the report of the case as follows:

1. Copy Verbatim from the Acct: and in the hand writing of Mainwaring—— A Man
Midwife —— Court in the Strand

At a fourteenth meeting of the society held at Mr. Vise's at Stilton on the 26th May 1800 the following members were present

Mr. Fran^s. Hopkinson
Mr. James Smyth Ramsey
Mr. Michael
Mr. Oliver
Mr. Vise—deputed President

[Mr. Vise received a letter from the President, Dr. Allvey informing the Society that he was disappointed in attending as Mr. Price of London was expected at his house. This apology was not deemed sufficient. Mr. Vise was desired to write him to that effect.]‡

Mr. Smith of Whittlesea sent his son to acquaint the society that he was confined at home by ill health, of which the society was sorry to hear.

Mr. Vise is still using the Antimonium tartarizatum in the form of ointment in strumous affections & he hopes by the next meeting to be able to say more upon its good effects. Dr. Higgins of Peterboro was proposed a member of this society by the members present, of which Mr. Hopkinson was requested to inform the Doctor.

Mr. Oliver read a case of diseased Testis with aneurism of the spermatic artery, for which he received the thanks of the society with a request that it might be inserted in the case book.

Mr. Vise received the thanks of the society for his two interesting cases of convulsions, which they requested might also be inserted in the case book.

The next meeting of the society was appointed to be held at Mr. Smith's Whittlesea on the first monday in September nearest the full moon, Mr. Smith is requested to inform the society by circular letters.

Copy of the letter sent to Dr. Allvey

[Dear Allvey,

The society requested me to inform you that they were sorry to have the painful necessity

* The passage in square brackets is crossed out in the Minutes.

† Honoratius Leigh Thomas, 1769–1846, F.R.S., and an original Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of which he was President in 1829 and 1838.

‡ The passage in square brackets is crossed out in the Minutes.

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of expressing themselves very much hurt by your non attendance, not thinking the reason assigned a sufficient excuse.

I am dear Allvey
Yours truly,
Jos. Vise.]*

Stilton May 27. 1800

Here is the report of the Lecture as follows:

1. Substance of a Lecture delivered by Mr. Home† at St. George's Hospital on Saturday December 30th 1797 upon a case of scrophulous Testis which had recently come under his care and which had terminated fatally, communicated by Henry Oliver

At a 15th meeting of the Society held at Mr. Smiths of Whittlesey Sepr. 9th 1800
The following members were present.

Sam^l. Allvey M.D. President
Francis Hopkinson
Joseph Vise
Richard Stewart
John Smith
Joseph Michael
James Smith
Henry Oliver

The minutes of the preceeding meeting were read:—

Mr. Vise read a description of the epidemical fever lately prevalent at Peterborough drawn up by James Higgins M.D. in conformity with the laws of this Society in order to become a candidate for admission.

Dr. Higgins was immediately ballotted for and unanimously admitted.

Mr. Oliver read a paper entitled 'Observations on the treatment of ulcers and the cicatrizing of wounds', which met with the General approbation of the Society and the Secretary was desired to insert the paper in the case book.

The next meeting of the Society was appointed to be held at Mr. Michaels at Stamford on the first Monday in May nearest the full moon of which Mr. M. was informed and requested to give due notice by circular letters.

Here are the reports of the cases as follows:

1. A Description of the Epidemical Fever lately prevalent at Peterborough—James Higgins M.D.
2. Observations on the treatment of Ulcers, and the cicatrizing of Wounds

A DESCRIPTION of the Epidemical Fever lately
prevalent at Peterborough

This Disease that has been very General particularly among Children and young Persons appeared in three distinct variations.

The first—the Scarlatina mitis with the usual febrile symptoms efflorescence on the Skin and

* The passage in square brackets is crossed out in the Minutes.

† Sir Edward Home, 1756–1832, F.R.S. First President of the Royal College of Surgeons. Surgeon to St. George's Hospital. Pupil and brother-in-law of John Hunter.

inflammation on the tonsils—which terminated about the fifth day — aperients and saline medicines were only necessary —

The second variation was the true Anjina maligna — with great prostration of strength, Pulse small and frequent, and scarlet efflorescence on the skin but darker than in the Scarlitina mitis—burning heat on the Head and throat; enlargement of the tonsils with deep ulceration, the tonsils generally approached each other touching the Uvula — which also became ulcerated; there was always an aggravation of Symptoms at night with delirium — in most Cases about the seventh day the Symptoms began to abate, and the Patients soon recovered; in others it ran on to Typhus Fever with the worst Symptoms.

I found Emetics do mischief unless immediately on the first attack,—the Bowels were open'd by Infus Sennae—Magnesia vitriol. vel Kali tartaris. after which the Decoction of Bark in a state of fermentation or with saline mixture — the Bark in substance did not agree with the Stomach — I found great benefit from the Application of Cold Vinegar and water to the Head and Throat which was left off when the heat diminished and returned to again; Blisters on the back relieved much more than on the throat. I used a steam of a solution of Myrrh* in vinegar and water and the Gargles in general use.

The third variation was a true erysipelalous inflammation of the Membranes connected with the Fauces without ulceration or considerable enlargement of the tonsils little difficulty in swallowing, but a painful burning sensation during the passage of anything down the Oesophagus, the throat of a Deep crimson red which spread as from a center over the roof of the mouth and downwards; the efflorescence on the neck and upper parts of the thorax had an erysipelalous appearance; the pulse quick and at unequal distance; about the third day a puslike discharge took place from the Nose that shortly became foetid and soon after the same matter was discharged from the fauces; Delirium very speedily followed by stupor came on and the Patient died generally about the fifth or seventh day when the Disease seem'd to kill by specific inflammation before putridity took place:—this variation was frequent with Children and as the difficulty of swallowing was not great the friends were not alarmed till too late:

In any Case of this description where Emetics had been used I thought the Case aggravated, no benefit was derived from Antimonials but rather disadvantage, they occasioned increased action of the capillary vessels without inducing perspiration: — Blisters to the throat volatile applications or even flannel occasioned derivation to the Part without any relief and hasten'd enlargements of the external Glands to which there was always tendency and if the Patient recovered sometimes terminated in suppuration;

I applied Blisters to the Nape of the Neck with evident advantage and cold Vinegar and Water to the throat as before; warm fomentations of Vinegar and Water to the feet were sometimes of Service, the best gargle was cold milk and water — I gave Magnesia Vitriolata with Manna† and afterwards Decoction of Bark with Aqua Ammon acetate or with Camphor Mixture there was much restlessness thro' the disease especially at night but anodyne medicines increased it by hastening Delirium and increasing irritability of the Stomach — I procured abatements of Symptoms and Sleep by a solution of opium and Camphor in a Lini-ment applied externally — this variation seldom terminates in Typhus — in some poor Children it was followed by Dropsy.‡

James Higgins M.D.

Peterborough Sepr. 9. 1800

* Myrrh. Still retained in many National Pharmacopoeias and employed mainly in mouth washes. Formerly used extensively (Flückiger and Hanbury 1879).

† Manna is a sugary exudation from the tree *Fraxinus ornus*, and has mild laxative properties. Not to be confused with the manna of the Israelites which was the lichen, *Lecanora*.

‡ Comment by D. M. T. Gairdner, D.M., F.R.C.P., Consultant Paediatrician, Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge.

'It is of course difficult to be sure that all three variations were different responses to one organism. It is worth noting that in the third variation it is mentioned that dropsy sometimes followed suggesting perhaps a streptococcal nephritis.'

Arthur Rook

At the 16th Meeting of the Society held at Mr. Michael's May ye 25th 1801
The Following Members present

James Higgins M.D. Appd. President
Francis Hopkinson
Joseph Vise
Rich^d Stewart
John Smith
Henry Oliver
Joseph Michael

A letter was receiv'd from Dr. Allvey informing the society that he was prevented by Indisposition from attending the Meeting and expressive of much Regret at the same.

It was Requested in consequence of the unavoidable absence of Dr. Allvey by the Members present that Dr. Higgins take the Chair.

The Minutes of the preceeding Meeting were read and approved.

Mr. Stewart related a Case of Fractur'd Scull in which after the Symptoms were remov'd by the Trephine a Disposition to inflame with strong arterial action took place on the seventh Day which, were compleatly remov'd by the use of Digitalis*—The case appear'd to the society so interesting that they requested Mr. Stewart to favour them with it in detail.

An Important case was read by Mr. Vise of Labour attended with Convulsions & Fractur'd Scull.

Mr. Hopkinson inform'd the Society that he had inoculated more than 60 persons with vaccine Matter† without any alarming symptom in any of them. That His own Children having gone thro this disease were afterwards inoculated with variolus infection and expos'd to its contagion without being effected by either.

Dr. Higgins propos'd Mr. Clapham Surgeon at Horney to be a Member of the Society which was seconded by Mr. Hopkinson.

Mr. Michael was requested to inform Dr. Alvey that the Society thank Him for his Letter & are very sorry for the Cause which prevented his attendance; Also to inform Him that on Monday the 17th of August the Society will hold their Meeting at his House.

At the 17th meeting of this Society held at Dr. Allvey's Aug. 17. 1801.

The following members present.

Dr. Allvey in the chair
Mr. Jos: Vise
,, John Smith
,, Francis Hopkinson
,, James Smyth

The Minutes of the preceding meeting were read, and as the socy were informed, by a letter address'd to their president, of Mr. Michael and Mr. Stewarts illness, the Secretary for the time being was desired to write to those Gentn. to assure them how much the Socy were hurt at the cause which prevented their attendance, and to beg of Mr. Stewart to recollect that his case of fracture which was promised in May last be produced at the next meeting, which was appointed to be held at his house on the Monday in May 1802 nearest the full

* William Withering (1741–1799) learned of the value of digitalis in dropsy in 1776. He advised its use in heart disease. It was included in the *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia* in 1783 and was recommended by Cullen. Hence its use relatively soon after its introduction by this group of practitioners, who followed Cullen's teachings closely.

† Edward Jenner vaccinated his first patient, the boy James Phipps, on May 14th, 1796. *An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae* was published 1798. By 1801 vaccination was a well recognized procedure but was not yet widely practised. It was still regarded as hazardous and met with much public opposition. During the early years of the nineteenth century accounts of bizarre and alarming symptoms attributed to vaccination were often published in the country newspapers.

moon, & that he be desired to send circular letters to every gentleman belonging to the establishment, that they may endeavour so to arrange their business as to be able to give their attendance at Bourn at an early hour.

The minutes of the last meeting could not be approved of in consequence of the necessary orders not being given for the insertion of Mr. Vise case, and an order was instantly made that a case of so much importance be immediately inserted upon their records.

Samuel Allvey President

Dr. Allvey read a paper entitled 'Observations on the use and effects produced by the employment of cold in Typhus and its varieties'—which received the thanks of the Society wh. an order for its insertion in the Case Book.

Mr. Hopkinson read a paper entitled 'On the extraction of the Placenta &c &c.' written by Mr. Clapham the Gentleman proposed as a member by Dr. Higgins at the last meeting which was generally approved of, Mr. Clapham was balloted for, & unanimously admitted as a member, the Secretary received orders to inform him immediately of his admission.

Samuel Allvey President

The Society was adjourned to Mr. Stewarts at Bourn.

Here are the reports of the cases as follows:

1. Observations on the use and effects produced by the employment of cold in typhus and its varieties by Dr. Allvey
2. Two cases of Convulsions successfully treated by immediate delivery By Mr. J. Vise
3. A Singular case of Convulsions in Labor attended with fracture of the Skull at the extra period of Utero gestation Joseph Vise

DISCUSSION

The Society

A preliminary examination of the Laws and Regulations suggested that the Society might well have been founded primarily to further the practices of the members in competition with many powerful rivals. It is probable that this was indeed one of its objects but a detailed study of the Transactions leaves no doubt that the members were genuinely devoted to the expressed object of the Society 'to improve its Members in the Practice of Medicine and Surgery by receiving and communicating Medical and Surgical Information'. Attendance at Meetings was strictly enforced and conventional excuses were not accepted. Even the President was censured. It was clearly important that members should not travel great distances with the risk of their colleagues failing to attend. The meetings must often have lasted the greater part of a day as from three to ten communications were made and discussion no doubt followed. The most interesting of the communications were industriously recorded in the Transactions. The performance of operations at meetings is twice mentioned and is apparently a unique activity of this Society.

Contemporary Medical Literature

The members were familiar with the works of the acknowledged authorities of the day. William Cullen and John Hunter are most frequently quoted. Vise,

in discussing his case of retroversion of the gravid uterus refers to Thomas Denman (1733–1815) who was Obstetric Physician to the Middlesex Hospital from 1769–83. Stewart mentions the opinion of (Charles) Bell (1774–1842) on the differential diagnosis of concussion and cerebral compression and refers also to ‘that able practitioner Mr. Pott’ (Percival Pott 1714–88. Surgeon to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital). Oliver considers Baynton’s* emphasis on adequate supporting bandages in the treatment of leg ulcers to be a most important advance but rightly points out that Richard Wiseman† had made the same recommendation many years before.

There were few medical journals in existence and their circulation was limited. Allvey’s apologium in presenting his case of syphilis sounds a modern note and is somewhat surprising.

The numerous Medical Periodical publications daily intruded upon us under a variety of appellations that continue to repeat accounts of diseases from which we can possibly derive neither new information, nor Instruction; are sufficient to render well informed Men indifferent to the relation of all cases which promise from their title nothing particular interesting or new.

The Approach to Practice

The case reports are sufficiently detailed to provide some insight into the approach to medical practice of this group of country doctors. Inevitably treatment was largely empirical and was directed against the most prominent symptoms. The ‘observations’ which follow many of the reports show how profoundly these men were influenced by Cullen, whose teaching they followed closely in their attempts to rationalize and explain the phenomena of disease. Cullen’s *Methodical Nosology* is quoted by Allvey, and Cullen’s theories of disease colour most of the speculations of both physicians and surgeons. The experimental findings of Hunter, quoted in Vise’s ‘Observations’ on his case of tetanus, and the empirical knowledge gained by experience were alike grafted on to Cullen’s system to form a cumbersome but functionally useful growth. The principles of treatment which can be logically derived from the System were in general accepted but were not slavishly followed when observation or experience suggested an improved therapeutic approach to a particular disease or symptom.

Bleeding, Counter-Irritation and the Enema

Bleeding was apparently not much in favour. In none of the recorded cases was it practised or advocated. In two instances the patient had been bled by another practitioner before the member was called in and the wisdom of the procedure was questioned. Allvey’s patient with abdominal pain (possibly appendicitis) and Stewart’s patient with concussion had both been bled. Stewart quotes Bell’s authority against blood-letting. This is perhaps surprising

* Thomas Baynton, 1761–1820. Surgeon in Bristol. Author of *A New Method of treating old ulcers of the legs*. 1797.

† Richard Wiseman, 1622–76, was a distinguished Royalist surgeon. His account of leg ulcers appeared in *Severall chirurgicall treatises*, London, 1676.

as for many practitioners of the period blood-letting was almost a routine practice although it only reached extreme and dangerous proportions some thirty years later, under the influence of the French school, shortly before its final decline.

Counter-irritation was very commonly employed, by applications such as soap liniment, by blistering or by issues. This was an ancient and widely accepted practice designed to draw off noxious humours and rationalized in each generation to bring it into line with current medical theory.

The enema was popular, and was employed in most patients with any form of abdominal pain or discomfort. The favoured enemata were warm water, salt or turpentine. In one instance Allvey gave a tobacco-smoke enema for which special apparatus had to be obtained. Allvey, as was appropriate in a disciple of Cullen, was the strongest advocate of the enema and placed great confidence in the new 'hydraulic apparatus' which he possessed. Dr. Brockbank's entertaining and instructive book (1954), provides illustrations of the fearsome machines of this period.

Materia Medica

The number of drugs in common use was relatively small, and fewer than thirty were prescribed with any frequency. Preparations of quinine were given, often in large doses, to all fevers except those with an obvious origin in a localized infective lesion. Opium, usually in the form of Thebaic tincture, was prescribed in a variety of conditions but in moderation. The heroic doses advocated by Brown and to a lesser degree by Cullen, were seldom employed. Inunction of mercury in salivating dosage was the accepted treatment for syphilis, a diagnosis made much too frequently in the absence of reliable diagnostic criteria. Digitalis was occasionally administered, either for dropsy of any origin or for suspected heart disease. In one case of 'dropsy' it seems probable that the patient had in fact a large ovarian cyst; the vomiting and bradycardia (pulse 40) following the digitalis suggest overdosage which must have been difficult to avoid when tinctures and infusions were not standardized. Antimony as Tartar emetic or as Morris's drops was employed as an emetic and as an expectorant and diaphoretic. Alcohol, as French wine, was a popular excipient and brandy was often prescribed as a stimulant but rarely in the large doses favoured by some nineteenth-century practitioners. Purging was seldom carried to extremes but was a popular measure in a large variety of disease; castor oil, colocynth, calomel or Daffy's elixir* were usually favoured. A variety of herbal preparations were used for wound dressings and for poultices and compresses: cold carrots and decoctions of camomile flowers are mentioned: Diapente was the most complex.

Surgery

Surgical operations were necessarily usually restricted to the opening of abscesses, issues, venesection and other minor procedures. Amputations were

* Daffy's elixir was a product resembling Compound Tincture of Senna.

sometimes undertaken, nasal polyps were removed and cataracts were couched. The lack of anaesthesia or antiseptics greatly limited the surgeon's territory.

General Practice in Huntingdonshire 1650, 1790, 1870

Our knowledge of the work of the general practitioner in past centuries is scanty and the convincing evidence, provided by these Transactions, of the successful practical compromise effected between empiricism and a speculative system during its period of declining influence, is of the greatest interest.

By a fortunate chance we are able to compare the methods of general practice in the same rural area in three successive centuries. The correspondence and the case-book of John Symcotts (1592?–1662) was edited by Poynter and Bishop (1951) for the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society. Symcotts, a Cambridge graduate, practised in Huntingdonshire. His medical thought was dominated by the doctrine of the humours and both his diagnoses and his treatments were usually forced to conform to the restricted patterns imposed by these traditional theories. Blood-letting, purgations, emetics, enemata and counter-irritants were prescribed with remarkable frequency. Indeed few patients whatever their disease or injury were spared blood-letting and repeated emetics. Scarification and leeches were very commonly resorted to. Setons and cupping, as well as issues were employed to induce counter irritation. All these procedures Symcotts used with greater energy and less discrimination than the members of the Society 150 years later but in their mode of application and the practical indications for their use there were no essential differences. The theoretical background had however changed and both Symcotts and the Members claimed to find justification for the use of these traditional procedures in the different speculative systems on which their medical education had been based. The *materia medica* had undergone far greater changes. Symcott's prescriptions contained exotic remedies such as mithridate, theriac, terra sigillata and bezoar stones which receive no mention in the Transactions, and his lengthy and complex herbal prescriptions contrast strikingly with the simple preparations, seldom with more than two or three ingredients favoured by the members of the Society. The curious Diapente is the only notable exception.

In 1847 a Medico-Chirurgical Society was founded in Huntingdon under the presidency of the Dr. Foster who was a former owner of the Transactions. The MS. Proceedings of this Society are in the possession of Dr. Garrood of Alconbury, the son-in-law of the Society's original secretary. The Proceedings illustrate impressively the advance in medical theory which had taken place during a period of seventy-five years. Clinical medicine was now firmly grounded in pathological anatomy and the diagnoses were in general those of today. Surgical treatment had developed beyond recognition. Medical treatment had however changed surprisingly little and was largely empirical and symptomatic. A quotation from the report of Dr. Foster's Presidential Address, 'Marginal References of a Practice of Many Years' [forty-five years; Ed.], emphasizes the lack of important advances and although he was himself

conscious of change the change was rather in the approach to disease and to diagnosis than in the *materia medica*.

There had been a gradual change in practice. He was confident that it was not a change of treatment without a cause for he believed it was a change in the type of disease, which change came about after the first epidemic of cholera in 1831–32. The population now would not survive the amount of bleeding of old times but it was certainly not injurious for they regularly used to be bled each Spring and Fall. He still felt venesection had a place. The first step was from venesection to cupping, then to leeches, then tartar emetic, then to Liqueur Ammon. Acet., then beef tea, then stimulants and all for the very same disease. . . . Some drugs had stood their grounds, especially calomel, tartar emetic and quinine. . . . He then showed that a large amount of treatment was and is empirical because we know by experience that the thing is right, as for example, iron in erysipelas and quinine in ague. But there were still some modes of rational treatment, especially a rational consideration of the patient. . . . He then finished by pointing out the extraordinary means of diagnosis as we at present possessed. For example the stethoscope in chest diseases, the microscope in urinary diseases, the ophthalmoscope for the eye, the thermometer in fevers. In olden times they had a remarkable power of assorting the symptoms for they were able to judge very accurately all diseases without the above aids. He thought there was some danger in these facilities. . . .

If Symcotts, the Members of the Society, and Dr. Foster can be regarded as representative of their periods the evidence suggests that medical as distinct from surgical practice changed little between 1650 and 1870 and that the medical mind showed remarkable flexibility in adopting and incorporating into the currently accepted theories of causation and treatment the well tried empirical remedies. The Members of the Society appear to have been in advance of their contemporaries and many of their successors in their attitude to blood-letting and in the relative simplicity of their prescriptions.

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