

LXVI. *An Account of the Case of a Boy troubled with convulsive Fits cured by the Discharge of Worms. By the Rev. Richard Oram, M. A. Chaplain to the Lord Bishop of Ely.*

Read Jan. 26, 1758. **J**oseph, son of John and Mary Postle, of Ingham in the county of Norfolk, was subject to convulsive fits from his infancy; which were common and tolerable till he was about seven years of age. About that time they began to attack him in all the varieties that can be conceived. Sometimes he was thrown upon the ground; sometimes he was twirled round like a top by them; at others he would spring upwards to a considerable height, &c. and once he leaped over an iron bar, that was placed purposely before the fire to prevent his falling into it. He was much burned; but was rendered so habitually stupid by his fits, that he never expressed the least sense of pain after this accident. His intellect was so much impaired, and almost destroyed, by the frequency and violence of his fits, that he scarce seemed to be conscious of any thing. He did not acknowledge his father or mother by any expressions or signs; nor seemed to distinguish them from other people. If at any time he escaped out of the house without the observation of the family, he had not understanding to find and return to it; but would pursue the direction or road he first took, and sometimes lose himself. Once he was missing for a whole night; and found the next morning

morning in the middle of a fen, stuck fast in mud as deep as his breast. He was very voracious, and would frequently call for something to eat ; which was the only indication he gave of his knowing any thing. No kind of filth or nastiness can be conceived, which he would not eat or drink without distinction. He appeared to be as ill as he really was ; for he was become a most shocking spectacle. He was so much emaciated, that he seemed to have no flesh upon his bones ; and his body so distorted, that he was rendered quite a cripple. His parents consulted a physician at Norwich, who very judiciously (as it will appear) considered his disorder as a worm-case, and prescribed for it accordingly ; but (being afraid, I presume, to give too violent medicines to the boy) without success. In short, he was so singularly afflicted, that his parents told me they could not help thinking him under some evil influence.

It was observed, that his disorder varied, and grew worse, at certain periods of the moon.

In these miserable circumstances the poor boy continued to languish, till he was about eleven years of age (July 1757), when he accidentally found a mixture of white lead \* and oil, which had some time before been prepared for some purpose of painting, set by on a shelf, and placed, as it was thought, out of his reach. There was near half a pint of this mixture when he found it ; and, as he did not leave

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\* It is not improbable, that a considerable portion of whiting might be used instead of pure white lead, which is frequently done : and this supposition is favoured by the mixture's not proving fatal to the boy, as such a quantity of white lead in all probability would.

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much, it is thought he swallowed about a quarter of a pint of it. There was also some lamp-black in the composition; which was added to give it a proper colour for the particular use it was intended for in painting. It was, as I suppose it usually is, linseed oil, which had been mixed with the lead and lamp-black.

The draught began to operate very soon, by vomiting and purging him for near 24 hours in the most violent manner. A large quantity of black inky matter was discharged; and an infinite number of worms, almost as small as threads, were voided. These operations were so intense, that his life was despaired of. But he has not only survived them, but experienced a most wonderful change and improvement after them: for his parents assured me in November 1757, when I saw him, that he had daily grown better from the time of his drinking the mixture, both in body and mind. Instead of a skeleton, as he almost was before, he is become fat, and rather corpulent: and his appetite is no longer ravenous, but moderate and common. His body too is become straight and erect. His understanding is at least as much benefited by this peculiar remedy. It cannot be expected, that he should already have attained much knowledge, as he seemed, before he was so wonderfully relieved, to be almost destitute of ideas. But he appeared, when I saw him, to have acquired nearly as much knowledge in four months, as children usually do in four years; and to reason pretty well on those things, which he knew. He is now capable of being employed on many occasions; is often sent a mile or two on errands, which he discharges

charges as carefully, and then returns as safely, as any person.

It is farther remarkable, that the boy's mother, her father, and sister, are frequently infested with worms. Her father, tho' about 60 years of age, is still much troubled with them: the worms, which he voids, appear flat, and much larger than those, which his children have observed. Her sister is often exceedingly disordered by them. About three months since they threw her into violent convulsions, and for some time deprived her of her senses. But the mother of the boy has been affected in a more extraordinary manner than the rest. About 20 years ago she voided some worms, which forced their way thro' the pores of the skin, as it is supposed; for they were found in small clusters under her arms. As she was very young then, she does not remember how she was particularly affected; only, that she suffered violent struggles and convulsions. She is still, about five or six times in a year, seized with fainting fits, which usually attack her in bed, and last three or four minutes; but she cannot certainly say, tho' there is very little reason to doubt, that they are occasioned by worms.

*An Account of the same Subject, in a Letter from Mr. John Gaze, of Walket, in the County of Norfolk, to Mr. Wm. Arderon, F. R. S. Communicated by Mr. Henry Baker, F. R. S.*

Read Jan. 26. 1758. **J**oseph Postle, son of John Postle, of Ingham in Norfolk, until about the age of seven years was an healthy well-looking child;

child ; but about that age was afflicted with stoppages, which often threw him into convulsive fits, and at last rendered him quite an idiot. He continued in this condition for about four years, eating and drinking all that time any thing that came in his way, even his own excrements, if not narrowly watched. His father took the advice of several eminent physicians, both at Norwich and elsewhere ; but all their prescriptions proved of no service.

About the beginning of August last he happened to get at a painting-pot, wherein there was about a pound of white lead and lamp-black mixed up with linseed oil. This he eat almost all up before he was discovered. It vomited and purged him, and brought away prodigious numbers of small worms. In a few days he grew well, his senses returned, and he is now able to give as rational answers as can be expected from a boy of his age. His appetite is good, he is very brisk, and has not had the least return of his former disorder.

I heard of the above by several people ; but not being satisfied, got my friend to go to Mr. Postle's house, of whom he had the foregoing account.

January 12th, 1758.