



PHILOSOPHICAL
TRANSACTIONS.

I. *An Account of a Cure of the St. Vitus's Dance by Electricity. In a Letter from Anthony Fothergill, M. D. F. R. S. at Northampton, to William Henly, F. R. S. Communicated by Mr. Henly.*

S I R,

Northampton,
O^r. 28, 1778.

Read Nov. 5,
1778.

A GREEABLE to my promise, I now proceed to give you some account of a recent cure performed by electricity, which will, I think, afford you much pleasure.

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ANN AGUTTER, a girl of ten years of age, of a pale, emaciated habit, was admitted an out-patient at the Northampton Hospital on the 6th of June last. From her father's account it appeared (for she was speechless and with difficulty supported from falling by two assistants) that she had for six weeks laboured under violent convulsive motions, which affected the whole frame, from which she had very short intermissions, except during sleep; that the disease had not only impaired her memory and intellectual faculties, but of late had deprived her of the use of speech.

Volatile and fetid medicines were now recommended, and the warm bath every other night; but with no better success, except that the nights which had been restless became somewhat more composed. Blisters and anti-spasmodics were directed, and particularly the flowers of zinc, which were continued till the beginning of July, but without the least abatement of the symptoms; when her father growing impatient of fruitless attendance at the hospital, I recommended, as a dernier resort, a trial of electricity, under the management of the Rev. Mr. UNDERWOOD, an ingenious electrician. After this I heard no more of her till the first of August, when her father came to inform me that his daughter was well, and desired she might have her discharge. To

which, after expressing my doubts of the cure, I consented; but should not have been perfectly convinced of it, had I not received afterwards a full confirmation of it from Mr. UNDERWOOD, dated Sept. 16, an extract from whose letter I will now give you in his own words.

“ I have long expected the pleasure of seeing you, that I might inform you how I proceeded in the cure of the poor girl. As the case was particular, I have been very minute, and wish you may find something in it that may be useful to others. If you think it proper, I beg you will state the case medically, and make it as public as you please.

“ July 5. On the glass-footed stool for thirty minutes: sparks were drawn from the arms, neck, and head, which caused a considerable perspiration, and a rash appeared in her forehead. She then received shocks through her hands, arms, breasts, and back; and from this time the symptoms abated, her arms beginning to recover their uses^(a).

“ July 13. On the glass-footed stool forty-five minutes: received strong shocks through her legs and feet, which from that time began to recover their wonted uses; also four strong shocks through the jaws, soon after which her speech returned.

(a) The coated bottle held near a quart.

“ July 23. On the glass-footed stool for the space of
 “ one hour: sparks were drawn from her arms, legs,
 “ head, and breast, which for the first time she very sen-
 “ sibly felt; also two shocks through the spine. She
 “ could now walk alone; her countenance became more
 “ florid, and all her faculties seemed wonderfully
 “ strengthened, and from this time she continued mend-
 “ ing to a state of perfect health.

“ Every time she was electrified positively, her pulse
 “ quickened to a great degree, and an eruption, much
 “ like the itch, appeared in all her joints.”

Thus far Mr. UNDERWOOD. To complete the history of this singular case, I this day (Oct. 28) rode several miles, on my return from the country, to visit her; and had the satisfaction to find her in good health, and the above account verified in every particular, with this addition, that at the beginning of the disease she had but slight twitchings, attended with running, staggering, and a variety of involuntary gesticulations which distinguish the St. Vitus's dance, and that these symptoms were afterwards succeeded by convulsions, which rendered it difficult for two assistants to keep her in bed, and which soon deprived her of speech and the use of her limbs. The eruptions which appeared on the parts electrified soon receded, without producing any return of the symptoms,

symptoms, and therefore could not be called critical, but merely the effect of the electrical stimulus. Having given her parents some general directions as to her regimen, &c. I took my leave, with a strong injunction to make me acquainted in case she should happen to relapse. Before I conclude, it may not be improper to observe, that some time ago I was fortunate enough to cure a boy who had long had the St. Vitus's dance (though in a much less degree) by electricity. A violent convulsive disease, somewhat similar to the above, though, if I recollect right, not attended with the *aphonia*, was successfully treated in the same way by Dr. WATSON, and is recorded in the Philosophical Transactions. May we not then conclude, that these facts alone, and more might perhaps be produced, are sufficient to intitle electricity to a distinguished place in the class of antispasmodics?

I am, &c.

