

lant; in large doses, it acts as a sedative, causing paralysis and death." My colleague Dr. T. K. Chambers tells me that he has no fear of giving digitalis in cases of weak heart with flickering pulse; and finds that it steadies the heart, makes its action stronger, and the pulse firmer. It is true that digitalis is commonly given with other remedies, especially steel; but the following case, which has lately been under my care, goes far to prove that the chief virtue is not due to the steel.

J. F., aged 24, a robust male, had, on October 17th, great shortness of breath, palpitation, "awful" pains in the chest, much dry cough at night. The heart's impulse was widely diffused, perceptible to sight and touch almost as far as the right nipple. There was a marked regurgitant aortic *bruit*, audible above the left back. The rhythm of the heart was regular; pulse 114, regular. The breathing was good in both backs. Tongue clean; urine free and clear. He had taken, three times a day, the following:—

R Strychnia gr. 1-24; tinct. ferri sesquichlor. $\text{m}\times$; spirit. æther. chlor. $\text{m}\times$; acidi nitro-hydrochlor. mi ; aquæ $\mathfrak{z}\text{j}$.

This was replaced by the following:—

R Tinct. digitalis $\text{m}\times$; tinct. ferri sesquichlor. $\text{M}\times\text{v}$; spirit. æther. chlor. $\text{m}\times$; aquæ $\mathfrak{z}\text{j}$.

A belladonna plaster was applied. He improved on this at once, and decidedly; and continued to do so till November 10th, when he ceased attendance; his pulse then was 84 (standing), regular, and of good force. In this case, I think, there can be little room for doubt that the heart, especially the right side, was enlarged and dilated, and was incapable, from debility, of propelling the blood in a normal manner; and that, under the influence of digitalis, it became stronger, and fulfilled its function better. The strychnia, which was omitted, is surely more than an equivalent for the additional five minims of tincture of sesquichloride of iron; and the belladonna plaster can scarcely be supposed to have had any tonic effect. If T. H. will refer to Mr. Dickinson's paper in vol. xxxix of the *Med.-Chir. Transactions*, I think he cannot but observe how well the patients, exhausted by hæmorrhage, bore the large doses of digitalis.

I may observe further, that it is quite conceivable that fatal syncope may occur with two different states of heart; viz., either with relaxed and open cavities, or with contracted and closed. Now, it is evidently of prime importance to know in what state the heart is found after death from digitalis; and this point I am now investigating experimentally. In two animals, I have found the left cavities very firmly contracted, the right less so; while, after death from aconite, the condition was very different. It is therefore possible that digitalis may kill, not by paralysing, but by causing excessive and enduring contraction of the heart.

Trusting that I have now in some measure complied with your correspondent's request,

I am, etc.,
C. HANDFIELD JONES.

33, Albion Street, Hyde Park, W.

PHYSIOLOGICAL ACTION OF DIGITALIS.

LETTER FROM H. DUNCALFE, ESQ.

SIR,—The physiological action of digitalis has for some time past occupied my attention; and in a paper on Chronic Bronchitis (the corrected proof of which lies at your office), I have alluded to the beneficial effects which foxglove produces independently of its sedative action on the heart itself. The question arises, Whether digitalis possesses properties other than sedative? I believe it does, and that its power is exerted over the capillary circulation. If such is the case, we can then clearly understand how the action of a weak heart becomes steadier, and the pulse firmer, when the circulation of the blood is accelerated in the smaller vessels.

Bearing this supposed action of foxglove in mind, it occurred to me some months back to try digitalis in the treatment of hæmorrhoids, and the results were as I had anticipated they would be. I was so satisfied of the value of foxglove as a remedy in that troublesome disease, that I brought the treatment before the notice of the Birmingham Medico-Chirurgical Society, and I have already collected a number of cases, which I intend in a short time to make the subject of a paper for the JOURNAL.

The present time, however, seems fitted for me to make known the fact, that I have for some time past recognised properties in digitalis, which, *if previously known*, have been much neglected.

I am, etc.,
HENRY DUNCALFE.

West Bromwich, December 26th, 1859.

1058

Medical News.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DEATHS, AND APPOINTMENTS.

* In these lists, an asterisk is prefixed to the names of Members of the Association.

BIRTHS.

Of sons, the wives of—

BLOMFIELD, Josiah, M.D., Peckham, on December 15.
BRAND, S. E., Esq., Surgeon, Stoke Newington, on Dec. 27.
SAUNDERS, George, Esq., Surgeon Bengal Army, at 4, Dorset Square, on December 24th. (Twins.)

Of daughters, the wives of—

BROWN, Andrew, M.D., Weymouth, on December 18.
BRUSH, John R., M.D., Clifton, on December 23.
LOWDELL, Charles, Esq., Assistant-Surgeon Bengal Army, at Brighton, on December 21.
WEBER, Frederick, M.D., 44, Green Street, W., on Dec. 22.

MARRIAGES.

ALDER, William, Esq., of Wells, Somerset, to Emily Jane, only daughter of *Henry L. SOPWITH, Esq., Tunbridge Wells, on December 27th.

APPOINTMENTS.

*HUTCHINSON, Jonathan, Esq., elected Assistant-Surgeon to the London Hospital.
*JONES, T. Eyton, Esq., elected Surgeon to the Wrexham Infirmary.

HEALTH OF LONDON—DECEMBER 24TH, 1859.

[From the Registrar-General's Report.]

	Births.	Deaths.
During week	{ Boys .. 961 Girls .. 807 }	1768 .. 1548

Average of corresponding weeks 1849-58.. 1478 .. 1270

Among the causes of death were—bronchitis, 260; pneumonia, 135; asthma, 24; phthisis, 186; small-pox, 37; scarlatina, 85; diphtheria, 14. The deaths from pulmonary diseases (exclusive of phthisis) were 430, being 152 above the corrected average. Of 66 persons who died at the age of 80 and upwards, 6 were nonagenarians. Of bricklayers, 2 died in the week, of bricklayers' wives, 3, of bricklayers' children, 11; of carpenters, 12 died, of carpenters' wives, 7, of carpenters' children, 21; of masons, 2 died, of masons' wives, 2; of painters, 4 died, of painters' wives, 2, of painters' children, 9; of plasterers, 1 died, of plasterers' children, 10.

Barometer:

Highest (Mon.) 29.653; lowest (Sat.) 28.990; mean 29.402 in.

Thermometer:

In sun—highest (Sat.) 49.6°; lowest (Mon.) 30.4°.

In shade—highest (Sat.) 47.0°; lowest (Mon.) 14.0°.

Mean—33.0°; difference from mean of 43 yrs.—5.4°.

Range—during week, 33.0°; mean daily, 10.5°.

Mean humidity of air (saturation=100), 81.

Mean direction of wind, S.W.—Rain in inches, 0.37.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THE NEW VOLUME. The first number of the New Volume of the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL will be published on Saturday, January 7th. The names of gentlemen wishing to join the Association should, as far as possible, be transmitted to the General Secretary as early as possible, in order that an estimate may be formed of the number of copies to be printed weekly. Members will oblige also by forwarding to the Publisher any alterations they may wish to have made in their addresses.

Dr. W. KING. We are not aware that there is any agent in London to the Parisian Vaccination Institution. You had better apply, in French, to M. le Dr. B. Mangeant, Médecin Vaccinateur de la Société Nationale de Vaccine de France, 8 Faubourg St. Denis, Paris.

Communications have been received from:—MR. WM. CORNEY; MR. A. B. STEELE; DR. KEILLER; DR. H. HANCOX; DR. BIRCH; MR. T. HOLMES; MR. T. E. JONES; DR. INMAN; MR. H. DUNCALFE; DR. W. BIRD; DR. C. H. JONES; MR. R. T. HUNT; DR. ANDREW WOOD; MR. R. S. FOWLER; MR. R. S. STEDMAN; MR. W. BRADLEY; MR. J. G. DOWSE; MR. W. W. MORRIS; DR. GILLIBRAND; MR. F. JORDAN; DR. D. ARCHIBALD; MR. HOWARD; MR. H. ASHTON; MR. C. T. S. KEVERN; DR. W. KING; and MR. H. M. WILLIAMSON and DR. THORBURN.

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