

ELECTRICITY.

THE medicinal operation of electricity may be referred to its stimulating power. It produces forcible contractions in the muscular fibre; excites therefore to action, if duly applied, and, when in excess, immediately exhausts irritability. It possesses the important advantages of being easily brought to act locally, and of being confined to the part to which it is applied, without at all affecting the general system, while it can also be employed in every degree of force.

Electricity is applied medicinally under the form of the stream or continued discharge of the fluid, under that of sparks, and under that of a shock; the first being the most gentle, the second being more active, and the last being much more powerful than either of the others. The stream is applied by connecting a pointed piece of wood, or a metal wire, with the prime conductor of the electrical machine, and holding it by an insulated rod one or two inches distant from the part to which it is to be directed. A very moderate stimulant operation is thus excited, which is better adapted to some particular cases than the more powerful spark or shock. The spark is drawn either by applying a metallic knob connected with

a rod in communication with the machine, the operator holding it by a glass handle ; or by placing the patient on an insulated stool connected with the prime conductor, and, while the machine is worked, bringing a metal knob within a short distance of the part from which the spark is to be taken ; a sensation somewhat pungent is excited, and slight muscular contractions may be produced ; these effects being greater or less, according as the spark is more powerful, this being regulated by the distance at which the knob is held, if the machine be sufficiently in action. The shock is given by discharging the Leyden phial, making the part of the body through which it is intended to be transmitted part of the circuit. The shock is of course stronger as the phial is large, and as it is fully or partially charged ; the sensation it excites is unpleasant, and the muscular contractions considerable, if it is of moderate intensity.

At the first introduction of electricity as a remedy, it was very highly celebrated for its efficacy in a number of diseases ; its use is now confined to a few. In paralysis it is not unfrequently had recourse to, to excite muscular contraction, and perhaps with some advantage. It is usually applied under the form of sparks, the application of it requiring to be continued daily for a considerable time. Sometimes moderate shocks are also employed ; but the propriety of this practice is somewhat doubtful. In amenorrhœa, as the stimulant operation can be excited, in some measure, in the vessels which are affected, advantage may be derived from electricity ; and it is oc-

asionally used, both under the form of sparks taken from the pelvis, and that of moderate shocks transmitted thro' it. Ophthalmia, and some other varieties of inflammation, have been removed by the electric stream; it has also sometimes succeeded in dissolving tumors, and relieving pain. The general rule for the medical employment of electricity is to apply it at first under the milder forms, and gradually to raise it, if necessary, to the more powerful, taking care only not to employ it in too high a state of intensity, but in the greater number of cases rather to expect advantage from its continued and moderate use. In the treatment of paralysis, for example, by the application of electricity, the only rational indication is to excite moderate muscular action with the view of increasing the muscular power; to this, sparks of sufficient strength are adequate, and in employing shocks, there is always some risk of exhausting the irritability of the part through which they are transmitted.

GALVANISM.

THE peculiar power which is generated when two metals moistened or acted on by certain chemical liquids are in contact, at first named Animal Electricity, since Galvanism, has been applied as a remedy in various morbid affections. Its effects on the animal system are such as warrant this application. Its activity is shewn by its exciting, when applied in sufficient intensity, strong sensations in sensible parts, and powerful contractions in parts endowed with irritability.

Between galvanism and electricity there are so many points of resemblance, that they have been considered as ultimately the same power, and there is every reason to admit their identity. Still from the different states in which they exist, their effects on living matter are not precisely similar. The sensation which galvanism excites, though somewhat analogous to that produced by electricity, is still dissimilar; and the action of galvanism appears to be more extended, both to the nervous and muscular systems, than that of electricity, which is more local in its action. The galvanic excitation produces sensations and contractions in parts, which, from disease, or temporary suspension of power, are not sensible to electrical impressions; and the stimulant power which

both exert, appears in galvanism to be greater in proportion to its intensity than in electricity; or the sensations and muscular contractions which the galvanic discharge excites, are more than proportional to its power of producing electrical phenomena. Hence it is the most delicate test by which the presence of irritability can be detected.

The diseases in which galvanism has hitherto been employed, are principally those of the nervous kind. In paralysis, it has been affirmed to have restored the capability of muscular contraction, and consequently the power of motion. Cases of chorea, tetanus, and some other spasmodic affections, have been related, in which perfect cures were accomplished by its application. It appears, in several instances, to have relieved deafness, particularly that species of it arising from torpor of the auditory nerve; and it has been successful in discussing indolent tumors. The transient nature of the operation is, with regard to it, as well as electricity, an obstacle to their advantageous application.

Galvanism is applied by connecting two metallic wires with the two extremities of a galvanic battery, and bringing them in contact with the part affected, so that it shall form part of the circuit of the galvanic discharge: the one wire is kept in contact with the part it touches; the other is alternately applied for a moment, and removed, and this is continued for some time. If the skin is moistened, the galvanic influence is communicated more readily and effectually; and still more so if a small piece

of metallic leaf, as tinfoil, be laid on the parts to which the wires are applied. Sometimes even the cuticle has been previously removed by a blister, but the application of the galvanism is then attended with pain, and this is altogether unnecessary, if a galvanic apparatus of sufficient power be employed. One constructed of plates of zinc and copper, four inches square, and including from 25 to 50 of each metal, is sufficient for the greater number of purposes, a greater or less number of the plates being included in the circuit, according to the strength of the application required. The liquid best adapted to excite it is a solution of muriate in soda, with a little muriatic acid; diluted nitric acid, though rather more powerful, having its power sooner exhausted.