

## OPIUM EATING.

Is there any sure and safe method of curing a person of the habit of opium eating, when that habit is confirmed by many years' use of the article? This is a question not important so much from the number of persons who contract and indulge this noxious practice, as from the intense desire generally felt and often expressed by the few who are so unfortunate as to be its slaves, to be rid of so dreadful an evil. There are not many in this country addicted to the free and constant use of opium; but every person of this description we have chanced to know, has manifested a strong sense of the impropriety and danger of the practice, and entreated us to prescribe, if possible, some effectual remedy. That remedy we have not yet found; and if it be known to any whose eye shall glance over these lines, we trust he will delay not in giving us and the profession all the information on the subject that he may possess.

When we allude to opium eaters, we mean those only who took it originally as a medicine for some nervous affection, and continue it from necessity, rather than from choice;—who take it, not to intoxicate, but to strengthen and balance the nervous system and enable them to attend to business, and to appear like other people. Of those who take opium for purposes of unnatural excitement and inebriation, we have no knowledge. They need less of our sympathy, and would excite us less to exertions in their behalf.

A lady, for example, is now under treatment for a common disorder, who allows no visit to terminate without entreaties that something may be done to break up this habit to which she has been many years a bound and servile slave. The drug was originally prescribed to her to quiet some slight degree of nervous irritation. It answered the purpose to a charm. From a useless thing, lolling about in idleness and pain, a trouble to herself and an annoyance to all around her, she became composed in body and mind, and capable of performing well her part as a wife and mother, a neighbor and friend. The effect however of the dose went off with the day, and each successive morning found her a spiritless, fretful, uneasy being, until a small pill brought her up again to health and usefulness. After a time, she found it necessary to increase the dose. The same quantity failed to bring her up to the standard of health. And so it went on. Month after month, and year after year, she did well so long as she took her pills, but each month required a larger dose than the preceding. About a year ago she became alarmed at the prospect

before her. Still young and with a family of children, what must become of her a few years hence, when already an ounce a day scarcely sufficed to answer her purpose. She sent for me, stated her case in anguish, and prayed for a remedy.

No one had ever suspected this lady of using opium or any other stimulus, for she had never, in any one instance, been in the least degree over-excited by it. She had never taken more than she found necessary to enable her to attend properly to her family and friends. Her husband even knew it not. Could she have got along without increasing the dose, she would have continued to use it without much apprehension. But this was impossible. The prospect was full of horror, and she resolved to divulge her secret, and to seek a remedy.

Here was a case of the most touching character, and yet of the greatest difficulty. Suffice it to say, we devoted as much care and research to the case as it demanded. Every resource was tried without effect. Often have we seen this lady, whilst under a course of gradual reduction or of substitution, convulsed for hour after hour in every muscle, and vomiting almost without intermission; and yet she has insisted on bearing it all, and more by far than we ventured to advise, in the faint hope that she might yet become quiet without resorting to her accustomed dose. That hope has always vanished, and she is now going on in the same course as before—well in every respect, capable, and agreeable, but supporting herself by increasing quantities of opium—alive to the danger of her practice, and dreading it more than any degree of suffering that may attend any measure that may be adopted to arrest it, with the slightest prospect of success.

This case we have given as illustrating the kind of opium eating that we apprehend is most common with us, and that which calls most loudly for the sympathy and aid of the humane physician. Other cases are perhaps less aggravated; but in this, death must follow a sudden withdrawal of the stimulus. A gradual reduction of the dose has been tried in vain, and so has the substitution of other narcotics and antispasmodics.