

OBSERVATIONS

ON

THE DISTEMPER IN DOGS,

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Read March 21, 1809:

THAT disease among dogs which has familiarly been called “the distemper,” has not hitherto, I believe, been much noticed by medical men. My situation in the country favouring my wishes to make some observations on this singular malady, I availed myself of it during several successive years, among a large number of fox hounds belonging to the Earl of Berkeley; and from observing how frequently it has been confounded with hydrophobia, I am induced to lay the result of my inquiries before the Medical and Chirurgical Society. — It may be difficult, perhaps, precisely to ascertain the period of its first appearance in Britain. In this and the neighbouring counties, I have not been able to trace it back much beyond the middle of the last century; but it has since spread universally. I knew a gentleman who, about forty-five years ago, destroyed

the greater part of his hounds, from supposing them mad, when the distemper first broke out among them ; so little was it then known by those the most conversant with dogs. On the continent, I find it has been known for a much longer period. It is as contagious among dogs, as the small-pox, measles, or scarlet fever among the human species ; and the contagious miasmata, like those arising from the diseases just mentioned, retain their infectious properties a long time after separation from the distempered animal. Young hounds, for example, brought in a state of health into a kennel where others have gone through the distemper, seldom escape it. I have endeavoured to destroy the contagion, by ordering every part of a kennel to be carefully washed with water, then white-washed, and finally to be repeatedly fumigated with the vapour of marine acid ; but without any good result.

The dogs generally sicken early in the second week after exposure to the contagion. It is more commonly a violent disease than otherwise, and cuts off, at least, one in three that is attacked by it. It commences with inflammation of the substance of the lungs, and generally of the mucous membrane of the bronchiæ. The inflammation at the same time seizes on the membranes of the nostrils, and those lining the bones of the nose ; particularly the nasal portion of the ethmoid bone. These membranes are often inflamed to such a degree, as to occasion extravasation of blood, which I have observed coagu-

lated on their surface. - The breathing is short and quick, and the breath is often fetid. The teeth are covered with dark-looking mucus. There is frequently a vomiting of a glary fluid. The dog commonly refuses food, but his thirst seems insatiable, and nothing seems to cheer him like the sight of water. The bowels, though generally constipated as the disease advances, are frequently affected with diarrhœa at its commencement. The eyes are inflamed; and the sight is often obscured by mucus secreted from the eye-lids, or by opacity of the cornea. The brain is often affected as early as the second day after the attack. The animal becomes stupid, and his general habits are changed. In this state, if not prevented by loss of strength, he sometimes wanders from his home. He is frequently endeavouring to expel, by forcible expirations, the mucus from the trachea and fauces, with a peculiar rattling noise. His jaws are generally smeared with it, and it sometimes flows out in a frothy state, from his frequent champing. During the progress of the disease, especially in its advanced stages, he is disposed to bite and gnaw any thing within his reach. He has sometimes epileptic fits, or quick successions of general, though slight, convulsive spasms of the muscles. If the dog survives, this affection of the muscles continues through life. He is often attacked with fits of a different description. He first staggers, then tumbles, rolls, cries as if whipped, and tears up the ground with his teeth and fore-feet. He then lies down senseless and exhausted. On

recovering he gets up, moves his tail, looks placid, comes to a whistle, and appears in every respect much better than before the attack. The eyes, during this paroxysm, look bright, and unless previously rendered dim by mucus, or opacity of the cornea, seem as if they were starting from the sockets. He becomes emaciated, and totters from feebleness in attempting to walk, or from a partial paralysis of the hind legs. In this state he sometimes lingers on till the third or fourth week, and then either begins to shew signs of returning health (which seldom happens when the symptoms have continued with this degree of violence) or expires. During convalescence, he has sometimes, though rarely, profuse hæmorrhage from the nose. When the inflammation of the lungs is very severe, he frequently dies on the third day. I knew one instance of a dog's dying within twenty-four hours after the seizure, and in that short space of time the greater portion of the lungs was, from exudation, converted into a substance nearly as solid as the liver of a sound animal. In this case, the liver itself was considerably inflamed, and the eyes and flesh universally were tinged with yellow, though I did not observe any thing obstructing the biliary ducts. In other instances, I have also observed the eyes looking yellow.

The above is a description of the disease in its severest form; but in this, as in the diseases of the human body, there is every gradation in its violence.

There is also another affinity to some human diseases, viz. that the animal which has once gone through it, very rarely meets with a second attack. Fortunately, this distemper is not communicable to man. Neither the effluvia from the diseased dog, nor the bite, have proved in any instance infectious; but as it has often been confounded with canine madness, as I have before observed, it is to be wished that it were more generally understood; for those who are bitten by a dog in this state, are sometimes thrown into such perturbation, that hydrophobic symptoms have actually arisen from the workings of the imagination. Mr. John Hunter used to speak of a case somewhat of this description in his lectures*. Having never, to a certainty, seen a dog with hydrophobia, I am of course unable to lay down a positive criterion for distinguishing between that disease and the distemper, in the precise way I could wish; but if the facts have been correctly stated, that in hydrophobia, the eye of the dog has more than ordinary vivacity in it, and as the term implies, he refuses to take water, and shudders even at the sight

* A gentleman who received a severe bite from a dog, soon after fancied the animal was mad. He felt a horror at the sight of liquids, and was actually convulsed on attempting to swallow them. So uncontrollable were his prepossessions, that Mr. Hunter conceived he would have died, had not the dog which inflicted the wound been fortunately found and brought into his room in perfect health. This soon restored his mind to a state of tranquillity. The sight of water no longer affected him, and he quickly recovered.

of it, while in the distemper he looks dull and stupid, is always seeking after water, and never satisfied with what he drinks, there can be no loss for a ready discriminating line between the two diseases.