

ASHMEAD (A.S.)

A possible specific for
beriberi.



A POSSIBLE SPECIFIC FOR BERIBERI.

DR. CARREAU, of Guadeloupe (in a contribution au traitement de la lèpre, Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, 1892), mentions the case of a Brazilian leper, bitten by a rattlesnake. The man succumbed after twenty-four hours. It was observed when he was dead that all his lepromas were enfeebled. Dr. Carreau, attributing this effect to the methemoglobinemia produced by the venom, tried to imitate the intoxication in the case of a very sick leper. He gave him enormous doses of chlorate of potassium, a salt which increases rapidly the quantity of hemoglobin of the blood, and may cause death by this same action. The patient swallowed forty-five grammes of this remedy in three doses, the highest being twenty grammes, in sixty hours. He presented the most pronounced symptoms of intoxication; his blood showed the spectroscopic bands of hemoglobin and methemoglobin. During some days he hovered between life and death. He recovered, however, from the shock, and felt a very distinct improvement in all the cutaneous surface attacked; the leonine face smoothed down, the skin which had lost all elasticity could again form folds. The treatment continued eight days.

I suggest that a remedy which has such an effect—that is, to increase rapidly the hemoglobin of the blood—may also be applied to the treatment of beriberi, a disease whose principal characteristic is the diminution of the hemoglobin.

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