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## Medical.

### PREVAILING EPIDEMIC.

[The following are extracts from a communication, under the signature of Dr. Jas. Norcom, which appeared in the last Edenton paper.]

The causes that have given rise to a predisposition to the disease and have been principally instrumental in its production, are excessive fatigue, great and long continued exposure to cold, violent exercise, sitting up at night, irregularities of living and intemperance of every kind, more especially into *intoxication*: In short, every thing which has a tendency either directly or indirectly to induce debility or to weaken the vital powers. The persons who have suffered most from the influence of this terrible scourge, have been the aged and the infirm, such as have been grievously reduced by lingering and chronic afflictions, the indolent, the dissipated and the poor: Among this last description of people, who have been exposed to innumerable privations and hardships in the course of the present inclement and afflicting season, its devastations have been cruel and irresistible. Hard drinkers have acted a conspicuous part in this melancholy drama. The young and vigorous whose habits have been regular, if their constitutions had not been previously impaired, have either had the disease lighter or escaped it entirely: healthy children can hardly be enumerated among its victims.

In the treatment of the disease much may be accomplished by due and seasonable attention to its symptoms. All the milder forms of it in which I have seldom failed to observe the most manifest indications of a typhoid state, have invariably yielded to anodyne, stimulant and tonic medicines as they are generally used in regular practice; many of the severer cases have ended favourably under the same treatment accommodated to the greater severity and urgency of the symptoms; but in cases of the great violence, the malignity and rapid progress of the complaint have been such as to baffle the most skilful exertions and to defy the most active opposition. Happily for the community the number of these alarming cases has not been very great: not greater perhaps than one in 9 or 10 of those that have been confined; or, if all the slighter affections of the head, throat and breast which appear to be derived from the same source and to partake of the prevailing typhoid character are taken into the account, not more than 3 or 4 in an hundred—of those that have been most dangerously affected perhaps not more than 5 in twenty have survived.

When I have been called upon to prescribe for a patient laboring under the disease, my first attention has been directed to the state of the pulse and respiration, and my first care has been to restore warmth to the system. When I have found the pulse not to exceed 100 or 108 strokes in a minute, regular in its vibrations and not very weak, after composing, with an opiate, any inordinate commotion that happened to exist in the stomach or alimentary canal (which I have seldom thought it expedient to encourage) I have ordered from half a drachm to a drachm of a mixture of volatile aromatic spirit and paregoric every 2 or 3 hours with a cup of warm wine whey or strong snakeroot tea between the doses; and in cases appearing to indicate the necessity of stronger stimuli, I have directed today to be used as constant drink. In a day or two, if the pulse did not become stronger and less frequent, the Bark was added with an additional quantity of wine and brandy. The Bark, with camphor and the most powerful stimulants have in many cases been given with good effects from the first attack of the disease, under the use of these remedies, with the occasional use of anodynes and the judicious administration of nutriment, the patient soon began to mend and finally recovered. Instead of the volatile spirit and paregoric a combination of camphor with the volatile sal ammoniac, in pills, was sometimes given with the same beneficial result. In cases of the disease attended with swelling and inflammation of the throat, not evincing a very malicious temper, a strong volatile liniment with fomentations of hot vinegar and spirit, have been serviceable: blistering added to these has seldom failed, when accompanied with corresponding general remedies, to produce the happiest effects. The same external applications and the same constitutional treatment have been equally successful in cases affecting the breast; provided the breathing of the patient was not convulsive and laborious, a circumstance always imminently dangerous and mostly fatal—Indeed, I cannot say, nor can I learn, that a single cure has been performed, in which that particular state of breathing so characteristic of this form of the complaint has been long es-

tablished. Opium and the volatile alkali with wine or brandy, plentifully administered have appeared in such cases to give the only relief.

In addition to the remedies that have been already mentioned, the warm bath and a variety of warm applications, have been frequently and extensively employed; and, in the first of the disease when it existed in the head with swelling of the face and eyes and superficial coldness not depending on an imperfect or defective action of the lungs, these remedies have certainly been eminently useful; but in many cases where the symptoms of chilliness were the effect of a deficiency or absence of the vital heat of the blood, the application of artificial heat availed nothing: as soon as it was removed the coldness returned, and the disease went on in its work of destruction. Of the advantages of bleeding I have had but little experience: though I have reason to believe that, in the hands of some, this remedy has been mischievous. Whenever it has done good it has been plainly indicated; in doubtful or difficult cases no one has ventured to say any thing in its favor. Purging, I believe, has been equally inefficient; and the whole catalogue of diaphoretics and expectorants have been exhausted in vain. An easy expectoration and a natural diaphoresis are not to be brought about in this disease by such feeble auxiliaries and whoever suffers himself to confide in them will have to lament his folly. They must be produced by medicines calculated to increase and support the vascular action and excitement of the system.—In a state of Typhoid debility, the *Peruvian Bark*, *Wine and Brandy*, are the best sudorifics and expectorants in the materia medica.

The appearances of inflammation which so constantly shew themselves in this fever, are extremely fallacious and illusory; and they have tended I fear, in no small degree, to puzzle and mislead practitioners. Occurring with any grade of Typhoid fever, every inflammation must necessarily partake of the character of Typhoid for I deem it physically impossible, that any local affection can exist, in any case, exhibiting a kind of action different from that under which the system labors. That external inflammations are often cured by stimulants and tonics is undeniable; the fact must be familiar to every reflecting physician; then why not attempt the relief of internal inflammation by the same means, especially when they are so vehemently called for by "the state of the pulse and the condition of the system?"—It is only by delivering ourselves from the erroneous associations that have been so long kept up in our profession by indolent and empirical practitioners, that we can ever hope to arrive at any degree of certainty or satisfaction in the cure of diseases. The connection that exists between the names of certain diseases and the remedies which have been employed to cure them, becomes often as fixed and immutable as the names of certain plants or animals are with the fruits they yield or the qualities they exhibit. But diseases are not like trees which retain their character and continue to yield a similar produce through an infinite succession of ages! Who can undertake to say that the disease he subdued, a week ago, with an opiate and a blister; will appear again in the same form or submit to the same management at any subsequent period? No one surely would be so ignorant and preposterous. Let us cease then to prescribe for names alone, and learn to accommodate our remedies to the condition of our patients; and to the variable and ever-changing characters of diseases. Reason and Experience, uniting together in this great work, shall teach us to surmount the obstacles which lie in our way to the temple of Truth; whilst improvements will be constantly making in our Science, honorable to human genius, and fraught with blessings to future generations.

J. NORCOM.

FROM THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

Easton, (Talbot county, Maryland)  
January 27th, 1815

SIR—In addressing this letter to you, I trust I am actuated, by the same benevolent motives which seem to have governed you, when you submitted a few days ago some observations in the Enquirer of Richmond, on "an epidemic disease which now desolates several counties not far from the Metropolis."

We have been most sorely afflicted in this town and country with an epidemical disease, which carried off great numbers of our citizens during the space of five months, commencing in the last days of December, 1812, and ending in June, 1813. Out of a population of 1500 souls, in that short space of time, not less than 500 persons died.—It ceased with the effects of the cold of the preceding winter, and commenced in November following, and continued from that time until the effects ceased again in the month of June, 1814; though its course was not marked with the same desolation.

I will not pretend to assert that our epidemic was of the same character with the one you have slightly touched upon; but I wish it to be known that all the remedies you have

recommended, such as bleeding at any stage of the disease or purging, not only hastened the patient out of the world, but actually brought on dissolution by death; which could not by all the power of art be prevented, if the disease had been actually formed at the time of administering those remedies.—I shall take the liberty of observing, that, though the disease assumed the type of synocha, or sore-throat, yet that of pleurisy was by far the most common, and the most fatal. It commenced in every respect seemingly like a pleurisy, and exhibited all the symptoms of pleurisy, and yet was essentially different in its course and effects, as you may have an opportunity of seeing in a small essay, which will be shortly edited in Baltimore. Being essentially different from ordinary pleurisy, it required a very different treatment, and such as I would have considered the most absurd imaginable a few months before. But, though there were apparently no difference in the symptoms to a physician, who had never seen this epidemic pleurisy; yet there were some very striking ones to those who attended a number of patients after the complaint was well understood.

To ascertain how far the epidemic near Richmond corresponded with the epidemic here, I shall set down all the symptoms as they really were. As in ordinary pleurisy, the patient was taken with a chill at any time of the day, and not unfrequently in the night, after he had been in bed and asleep. This chill appeared to be succeeded, very insidiously, with a fever, for the face was flushed more than ordinarily in pleurisy, and the patient complained of a violent pain in the head, and nothing else, which acquired the epidemic the name very generally of the *head complaint*; if, nevertheless, the patient was asked, whether he had no other complaint, it was generally in the negative—but if more strictly interrogated, and requested to make a full inspiration, he would always say he felt a pain in his side, with considerable stricture and fulness in the chest; and would then discover an inclination to cough, if he had not done so before. After a few hours he ceased to complain of being chilly, or cold, which every one present would be disposed to think was actually true, because the face was in a flame, as it were, but upon taking hold of the hand, it was cold, and the feet felt more like ice than any thing else, which I have set down as the characteristic symptom of the disease. The pulse was sometimes feeble—more generally full—not quick nor hard, but such as, nine times out of ten, seemed to indicate the loss of 16 or 24 ounces of blood; if the arm was tied up it always put on the appearance of *goose flesh*; and if blood was drawn, the pulse began to intermit, frequently, before three ounces were abstracted, and would cease to beat before eight were taken away!! In truth, the pulse soon ceased to be a guide in the treatment of this disorder, while it was soon discovered, that the disease had *only one change*, and that was the cold stage of fever, and hence arose all the indications of cure which must have been obvious to every physician who could be so impressed, and I am sure, to every one, who has the slightest knowledge of the animal economy. To be brief, when I was called to a patient in this situation, I immediately gave him 40 or 50 drops of laudanum, ordered him to be put to bed, covered up warm, and hot bricks to be applied to his feet and side, where he complained of pain, and hot teas of almost any kind though I preferred that of Virginia snake root, to be given every fifteen or twenty minutes, as hot as they could be drank in quantities, nor less than a coffee cup full; if the symptoms were not mitigated, such as the chill and aching, or spasmodic pains in almost every part, but more especially in the legs, which I forgot to mention as frequently attendant on this disease, I then ordered a spoon full or more of ardent spirit to be used to every dose, which seldom failed to bring on a warm breathing sweat, which sometimes terminated the complaint in 24 hours, more or less. But if the disease had continued for three, or four days, and these remedies had not been used, the patient began to complain of *great internal heat*, while his extremities were cold, thus making it much more unmanageable, and very difficult to promote perspiration by any means.

The sore-throat seldom proved fatal; but in every instance either of this or pleurisy, they terminated by an effusion of serum under the Schneiderian membrane, or that membrane, which lines the whole fauces and lungs internally.

From every circumstance and fact, which came under my notice, I have made up my mind, and trust, that I have proved it in the essay, which is about to be published in Baltimore, that the cause of the *winter epidemic of 1813 and 1814*, was "a deficiency of pure vital air, or oxygen" in the atmosphere, which, from a morbid predisposition in the lungs and blood, incapacitated the animal economy from generating animal heat, which it became necessary to supply by artificial means, such as I have advised above, and such as you may see recommended by the Rev. Matthew Wilson, of Delaware, in 1775, in a letter published in the

Medical Repository of September, October and November, 1809.

This mode of treating the epidemical scourge of 1813, rendered it more harmless than any other disease, which ever came under my notice, while the least deviation from it at once armed it with all its terrors.

There was one symptom or circumstance, which I always attended to as soon as I entered a patient's chamber; and that was to ascertain whether he had a quick respiration—if he had, I considered all was over with him, but if he was altogether free in his breathing, I was almost certain that his life was safe, provided the above plan was immediately adopted and persisted in from day to day, until the return of health took place, which was simultaneous with the absence of the cold stage.

If you are in the practice of reading the Medical Repository of New York, you will there find, that this disease, which I have attempted to delineate, has made considerable ravages in New England and elsewhere, and that, unfortunately, physicians entertain a contrariety of opinion as to the correct mode of treating it, but, be assured, there is only one mode of treating it correctly. "Great is the truth, and will prevail," though thousands may lose their lives by error. I feel an interest in the welfare and happiness of the whole human race, but more especially for my fellow-citizens; and if my mite can be of any use to them in preserving life, I shall be gratified, amply rewarded for the publication of this in some of the papers in the City of Washington, where you will have an opportunity of perusing it. Your humble servant,  
ERSOLLS MARTIN.

Doctor JOSEPH TRENT, Richmond.

FROM THE BALTIMORE TELEGRAPH.

The prevailing Epidemick which has almost devastated many districts of Maryland and Virginia, being in many respects sui generis—has drawn the attention of the faculty—and many pieces have appeared in the public papers on the subject; among others, one from Dr. Martin of the Eastern-Shore of this state, which we present our readers with this day. This has drawn from an accomplished Physician of this city the following elegant reply under the signature of K.

THE PREVAILING EPIDEMIC.

The National Intelligencer of the 9th inst. contains a communication from Dr. Martin, of Easton, (Md.) which I think should not pass without comment.

I have not the pleasure of knowing Dr. M.—but his general reputation as a man and a practitioner, is adequate evidence of the laudable motives which induced him to invite the public attention. His benevolence is entitled to our respect; yet believing that the Doctor's view of the subject he has attempted to illustrate, is erroneous as a general one; that he has misapprehended the cause and general character of the disease he proposes to describe; and dictated a treatment of that disease which, though it may have been locally, must be mischievous in a common adoption and application; courtesy towards the Doctor's motives ought not, in so important a business, to restrain an examination of his opinions.

Diseases existing by the operation of the same general laws, are so greatly modified in their individual character, by incidental and inscrutable circumstances, as to enforce the belief that all attempts at the establishment of a prescriptive or definite mode of treatment, deduced from individual experience, are of unhappy tendency. The man who bottoms his practical conduct upon the presumption of knowledge thus acquired, is a mere machine, which applies the same force to materials of disproportionate capacity. He is a Procrustes who fits his patients to a common measure. But one rule of conduct can secure to society the benefits of the profession; and that is, a cautious regard to the patient's condition. A correct acquaintance with that condition can be derived only from the expressions or indications of each individual case.

Doctor Martin expresses incertitude whether the disease he describes be the same with the epidemic of the Western Shore of Virginia and Maryland. That it is one disease, appears sufficiently clear. The characteristic symptoms which the Doctor has given us, establish their intimate analogy in every important circumstance.

Speaking of the cause of this disease, the Doctor says, "I have made up my mind that the cause of the winter epidemic of 1813—14, is a deficiency of pure vital air, or oxygen, in the atmosphere, which, from a morbid predisposition in the blood and lungs, incapacitated the animal economy from generating animal heat, which it became necessary to supply by artificial means, such as I have recommended above," &c.

This premise appears to me a very wild and baseless postulation. I should like to know what are the experiments which prove that there is a defect of vital air during the prevalence of any epidemic. I have never seen a handful of such experiments, and am unwilling to believe that a thing projected by Infinite Wisdom, and rendered in its constitution es-