

## **Observations upon some cases of paralytic affection / by Richard Powell.**

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OBSERVATIONS

UPON

SOME CASES

OF

PARALYTIC AFFECTION.

By RICHARD POWELL, M.D.

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS.



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FROM THE FIFTH VOLUME OF THE MEDICAL TRANSACTIONS,  
PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF  
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*Will<sup>m</sup> Long Esq<sup>r</sup>*

*Observations upon some Cases of Paralytic Affection. By RICHARD POWELL, M.D. Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.*

Read at the COLLEGE, 20th December, 1813.

THE annual number of deaths classed by Dr. Heberden under the common title of fatalities in consequence of apoplexy, palsy, and diseases of sudden\* termination, appear, according to his deductions from the bills of mortality, to have been upon the increase through the 18th century, and to have more than doubled at the close of it, in comparison with the cases of persons destroyed by the same apparent causes at its commencement. Perhaps the arrangement as assumed by Dr. Heberden is too general and miscellaneous, and under the last of these three heads, includes diseases very dissimilar to the two former:

\* Observations on the Increase and Decrease of different Diseases, 1801.

for I am led by my own experience to believe, that a much larger proportion of the class in question, than is generally suspected, may be referred to affections of the heart, which seem to me to have multiplied to observation, much in proportion as they have been more closely investigated and better understood, until they have become at the present period among the most frequent occurrences in the practice of medicine\*.

It is very uncertain upon the operation of what causes the increase of such diseases may depend, but it may be noticed, that the apparent number of apoplectic and paralytic affections has heretofore also increased at particular periods, and that some authors under whose observation they have fallen at the time, have been disposed

\* At the time I am overlooking this Paper for the press, I have six cases of marked diseases of the heart under my care in St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

on this account to consider them as epidemics.

It seems, moreover, that such diseases have not of late years been confined to those periods of life, or particular forms of body, which were thought to be more especially liable to them by our predecessors: for under my own limited experience, many cases, especially of hemiplegia, have distinctly occurred in persons under 30 years of age, and of temperate habits, and in women, and in two instances in children under 14 years of age.

Experience also will, I believe, sufficiently support me, when I state, that a similar or very difficultly distinguishable train of symptoms arises from various primary causes, and justify me in the assumption, that apoplectic affections are not always to be referred to the state of the blood-vessels of the head, and do not constantly depend upon topical congestion therein,

in, or upon actual extravasation of blood or of any other fluid within the skull, or indeed upon any other application of mechanical pressure; but that they may also originate in a peculiar condition of the brain and nerves alone, unattended by any discoverable alteration in their anatomical structure. In some instances, this condition will be produced by sympathy only, either with certain states of the stomach, or other distant local irritations, and I think I may assert, that the existence of such cases is very common. In a practical point of view, it would be most important to be able to establish the diagnostics between those apoplectic and paralytic affections, which arise from different causes, because they require different modes of treatment; but upon such I shall not at present offer any suggestions.

My object in calling the attention of the College to these more general considerations

considerations, is to bring before them a few cases out of a more considerable number which have fallen under my notice, where a paralytic condition of the nerves of particular parts, has been induced by the operation of cold. It seems to me, moreover, that the modification of disease, to which I allude, is well known and often submitted to practical observation; but that writers on medicine have overlooked it, for as far as I have had opportunities of inquiring, it has not hitherto been definitely described.

In the end of 1803, I was desired to see a child, the right side of whose face was relaxed as in ordinary hemiplegia, and who had also lost the power of closing the right eye, so that great inconvenience arose from the overflow of the tears. There was no paralytic affection of any other part of that side of the body, and no swelling nor pain in the face, the pupil of the eye was sensible to light, he had full command over the muscles of the tongue,



tongue, and there was no abatement in the activity of his playfulness, or derangement in his general health. The morbid relaxation of a particular set of muscles, and the loss of voluntary controul over them, was his only complaint; and on investigating its probable origin, I found that he had been exposed at a window on Ludgate Hill, during the exhibition of a city pageant, that a sharp and cold wind blew directly upon that side of the face which was now affected, and that the loss of power was perceived on the following morning. This child recovered very gradually, and the turn of the affected side of his face had not wholly disappeared in three months.

A young lady, of great beauty and elegance, had the character of her face entirely destroyed in a single night, by a relaxation of the muscles of one half of it. The complaint had subsisted, without any diminution, for above a month, when I saw her, by the desire of my lamented friend Mr. Ramsden.

Ramsden. The peculiarity of her situation had excited a considerable degree of mental distress, and there was much hysterical affection; but in every other circumstance her general health was good, and here, as in the former instance, the loss of power was confined to the external muscles of one side of the face only, and did not affect the contraction of the pupil of the eye, or the motions of the tongue, nor was it attended by any local pain or swelling. This affection had been first perceived, and in its full degree, when she arose in the morning; and on the day before, when it was hot, she had sate for a considerable time in a garden seat, exposed to the breezes of an easterly wind which had blown rather sharply upon that side of the face now relaxed. This state of the muscles was removed in a very great degree within the space of a week by the method of treatment which I shall hereafter mention.

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A gentleman had suffered for some time from rheumatic pains which often shifted their situation, but had chiefly affected the muscles of his chest. I considered him as convalescent, when he again called upon me in a state of considerable alarm, and informed me, that on the day before, one of his friends had observed his face to be somewhat drawn to the left side, and that in the course of the night, the affection had very much increased in its degree. He had then lost all power over the relaxed side of the face, and was even obliged to take drink with some caution and management into the opposite side of the mouth. There was no pain nor numbness, nor loss of sensibility in the relaxed part, nor was there any affection of the sight or want of contractility in the pupil of the eye. I could not in this so manifestly, as in the former cases, connect the disease with its cause. He had come to town from  
Highgate

Highgate in the morning of the day, when the affection was first noticed: it was cold and windy, and the window next to the affected side was open the whole of the way; but he did not consider this exposure of consequence enough to excite his particular notice, or as any thing out of the way of his ordinary habits. When I saw him again at the distance of ten days, he had perfectly recovered.

The instances thus adduced, and I could give other analogous ones, are of partial affection of muscles; but I believe that sometimes the same effect of cold is more general and more destructive. I might, perhaps, support this position by a reference to the descriptions given by travellers of the feelings and consequences produced by exposure to intense cold, and its extinction of nervous power; and might adduce as an example, the sufferings of Sir Joseph Banks, and his party, on the coast of Terra del Fuego, dur-

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ing Captain Cook's first voyage, but I have a case which occurred within my own practice in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and will answer the purpose of illustration. A watchman, on quitting his duty after a night of severe cold, was attacked by sudden and violent general pains in his limbs, which soon departed, and left him in a state of universal palsy of the muscles of voluntary motion. He had lost all command over the muscles of his limbs or trunk; but the joints were unaltered in their external appearance, they were perfectly flexible, and it gave him no pain if you moved them in any direction. The sphincters also of the rectum and bladder had lost their usual powers of retention, and he passed both stools and urine involuntarily and unconsciously. His circulation was not affected in any noticeable degree, and his mind retained its usual powers. His voice was not lost. I attempted the relief of this  
unfortunate

unfortunate man by the hot bath, and a variety of remedies, without success. He died, and after death a very careful examination of the brain was made. No congestion, no effusion, no alteration of structure of any kind was discoverable in it.

With respect to the practice which seems to me to be best applicable to cases of this sort, in the two last partial affections of the face which I have related, and in some other similar cases, I have directed the topical application of heat and moisture, by occasionally steaming the face for some time over a basin of boiling water, and covering it immediately afterwards with a dry flannel, which the patient has continued to wear during the intervals. I have also given a full dose of the pulvis ipecacuanhæ compositus, at night, with some warm aqueous drink, so as to excite perspiration; and I have not found this medicine to act generally  
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as a sudorific, although exhibited in doses frequently repeated, without such an addition. When I have compared the rapidity and degree of restoration of power in those cases, where this plan has been adopted, with other analogous ones, where the disease has been left more to itself, I have had abundant reason to be satisfied with its effect.

I should in this recommendation be sorry to be misunderstood, or to be supposed to urge such practice as a novelty, for we have abundant examples in the celebrity of Bath water to prove, that heat and moisture contribute much to the restoration of their lost power to nerves, when their affection does not depend upon any organic change of structure; and where it arises from the topical application of lead, as in the hands of painters, this same remedy is among the most effectual.

I ought to add, however, that I  
know

know some cases of this disease which seem to have originated from cold, where it has continued for many years without much noticeable restoration of power having taken place. I would therefore form a more cautious prognostic, with such cases in my recollection, as to the effect of remedies, than my own observation might otherwise tempt me to do.

THE END.



In the case of this disease, which  
 is attended with a  
 more or less permanent  
 affection of the  
 system, the  
 treatment should be  
 directed to the  
 removal of the  
 cause, and to the  
 relief of the  
 symptoms.