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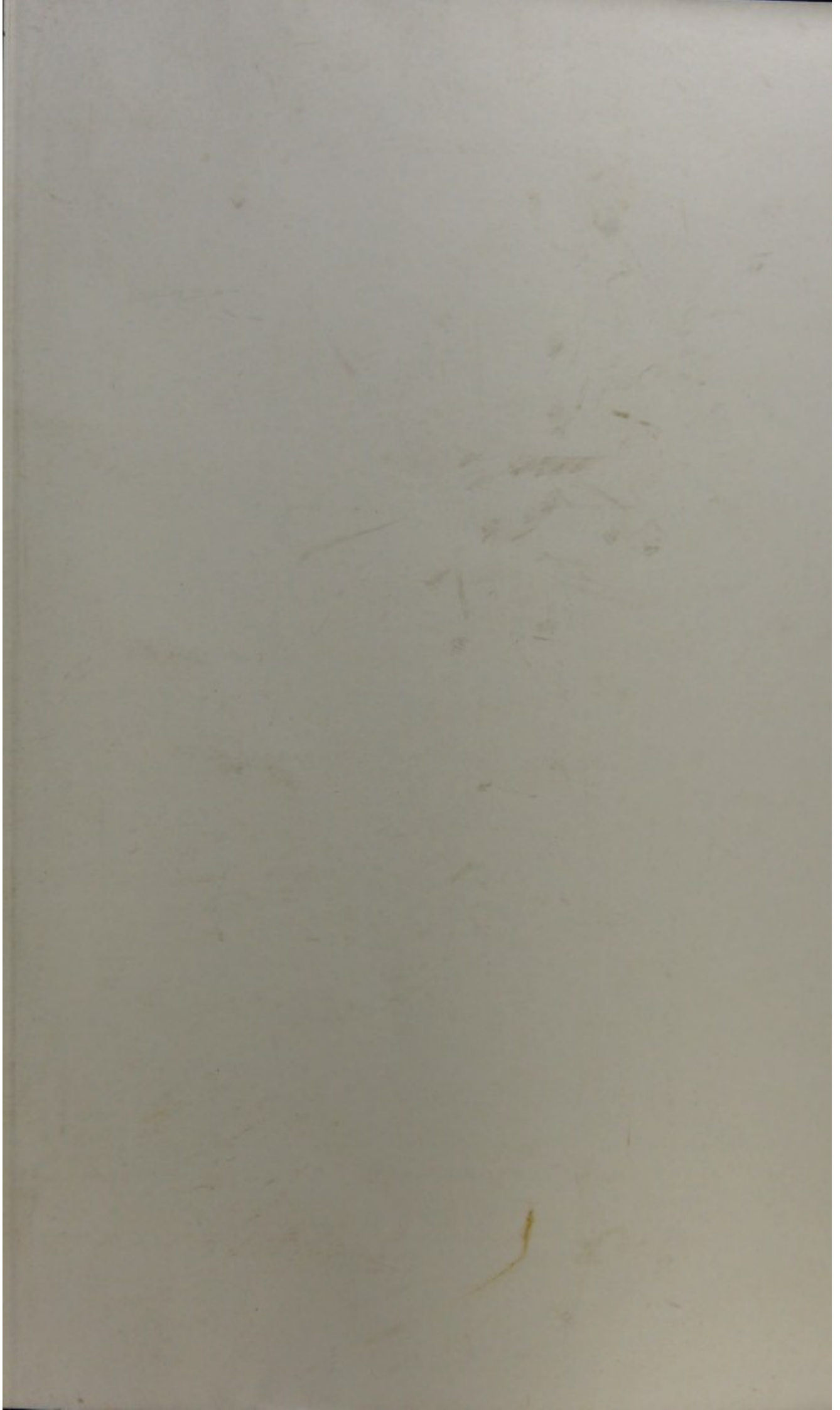
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OPEN-AIR TRAVEL AS A CURER AND  
PREVENTER OF CONSUMPTION,

*AS SEEN IN THE HISTORY OF A NEW ENGLAND FAMILY.*

BY

HENRY I. BOWDITCH, M.D.,  
OF BOSTON, MASS.

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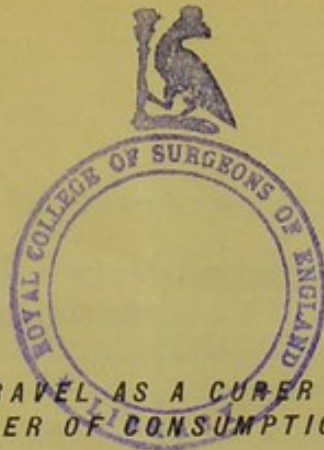
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OPEN-AIR TRAVEL AS A CURE AND PRE-  
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*As Seen in the History of a New England Family.*

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"For my own part, I intend to hunt twice a week during my stay with Sir Roger; and I shall prescribe the moderate use of this exercise to all my country friends as the best kind of physic for mending a bad and preserving a good one."—*Sir Roger de Coverley*, chapter xiii. p. 101, Goldschmidt, Edinburgh, 1889.

It is a curious coincidence that, at the same meeting of the Climatological Association, the President should give you some information gleaned from my recorded cases as to the connection of pleurisy with phthisis, and I should present the history of my father, cured, as I believe, of severe phthisical symptoms by a journey in an open chaise, and by persistent daily walking of from five to six miles during the rest of his life. In connection with this I shall endeavor to show that, by the same persistent open-air treatment of his children during their periods of growth, he was able to prevent the occurrence of the same disease in a large number of his descendants, who, in consequence of himself and his wife being tuberculous, and also first cousins, must have been very strongly *predisposed* to it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I am well aware that, since the brilliant discovery by Koch of the bacillus tuberculosis, some writers deny that phthisis *can* be inherited. But surely this opinion I cannot think true. All my medical experience is directly against it. Moreover, we all admit that a certain deterioration of the vital power of the whole, or an abrasion of a part of the body, is necessary for the life and propagation of the bacillus and consequent production of *tubercular* phthisis. Hence, as far as active out-of-door life tends to the production of perfect health in a person or a family, it would seem, *a priori*, that the course pursued by my father, which undoubtedly was of such infinite service in his own case toward the *cure* of

I have a record of this journey as kept by my father in 1808, when he was thirty-five years of age. I found it recently, tied up in a bundle of old papers, which had been resting quietly hidden for over half a century. It is a very compact, precisely written statement of that journey, showing, indirectly at least, its benign effects upon him.

It is eminently suggestive to me of the proper treatment of certain cases of phthisis, and in the hope that it will be suggestive to others also, I now lay it before this Society. To some sensitive minds it may seem to be of too private and personal a character to be placed thus freely before any public assembly. I have no such feeling when questions of human health and happiness are involved.

In 1808 my father was undoubtedly threatened with consumption. He had cough, hemoptysis, anorexia, diarrhoea, and general malaise, with fever and great debility. On August 29th of that year, when thus ill, he started, with a friend as his companion and driver, in an open, one-horse chaise for a tour through New England. At that time it will be recollected that there were no cars, and travel was had in one's own carriage or in public coaches holding nine persons. These were driven over turnpikes or private roads. There were hotels, more or less comfortable, at which travellers could sleep and get food in every town. This record lets us, more or less distinctly, into the feelings, physical and mental, of every day of the month during which the journey lasted. A glance at the map<sup>1</sup> will show that

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phthisis, must have been of great use to his children as a *preventive*, by making them all robust from their earliest years. By so doing he *opposed any tendency* to poor constitutions, impressed on them from their births, which tendencies, if they had not been counteracted from early life, would, I believe, have made his descendants easy recipients of phthisis.

<sup>1</sup> A large map was shown at the meeting marked by circles on the towns where the nights were passed. These circles were entirely black at first, indicating great depression of mind and body, and they became gradually lighter, as the patient got better. Those over the last half of the journey were not only free from any shade, but were surrounded by a red border, indicating the comfortable feeling of returning health.

the travellers went from Salem, Mass., down into Rhode Island, thence by way of Connecticut up through the hills of western Massachusetts to Albany and Troy, and back through Massachusetts to New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine, and then to the home from which he started. During the trip he traveled 748 miles, passed through 113 towns and cities, and the time spent in this daily open-air exercise was thirty days. During that time he went through all stages of feeling of mental discouragement and of physical weakness up to a real enjoyment of life.

Allow me to refer briefly to these changes. Starting from Salem (black) with the prominent signs of phthisis, he was so much exhausted, and had hemoptysis after a drive of twenty-five miles to Milton, that the landlord of the hotel advised his friend to take him home to die, as he could not possibly drive to Taunton the next day, as proposed. (I derive this last statement, not from the journal, but from family tradition.) The travellers were both of them plucky, and not only made that next day's journey, but the sick man felt somewhat better at evening, and notes in the latter part of his record the condition of the country before arriving at Taunton. His fifty miles since leaving Salem had evidently done no harm, but rather good. Anorexia had gone, as he "dined" (with relish, *apparently*, because he could get nothing else) "on bacon and eggs." Arrived at New Bedford next day, he feels able to visit a friend. He examines a factory. He makes remarks on the inhabitants he met and their employments. Though still having some fever, he feels so much better that much darkness is removed from the circle. Still more refreshed after a night's sleep, and having still less fever, he visits a coal mine recently discovered in the vicinity.

From this time there is almost steady improvement. He visits Newport (109 miles from Salem), admires the harbor, but notices its lack of shipping (to which in Salem with its fleets of ships and their



long, wealth-bringing East India voyages he had been long accustomed). At Providence (141 miles from Salem) he finds friends and has pleasant meeting with them. Nothing is said of illness. On the contrary, he has his "Rosinante harnessed" the next day, with the intention of driving *out of his intended route*, in order to visit the cotton factories at Pawtucket Falls. Arriving at Hartford (195 miles from Salem) he is altogether better, finds good fare and a fine hotel. He meets there the judges in their circuit, and has pleasant and profitable conversation with them at the hotel at which they were stopping for the night.

At New Haven (256 miles from Salem, and twelve days of open-air travel) he calls on President Dwight, of Yale College, and regrets that the eminent Prof. Silliman is absent. He visits the library, and finds it wanting in most of the modern English, French, and German scientific works he had been so long acquainted with, and had studied in Salem. At New Haven he makes, for the last time, any allusion to his health, in the following words: "I have a little pain in my breast, but my appetite and general health are good."

After this date, till he arrived home, his record seems like that of a common traveller. He makes no complaints, but describes brightly the places, friends, and others met, exactly as if he were well and travelling for pleasure only.

At Albany he makes an especial and extra journey to Troy with a party of transiently met friends, leaving his chaise for nearly two days in the former city. He found the trip "very pleasant." On return to Albany from Albany to Troy, he had driven 432 miles in nineteen days.

Starting for home, he appears delighted while travelling through a "picturesque" country and meeting at the various hotels intelligent company whose society he was able generally to enjoy.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> This was not always the case, however, for at one town he met one gentleman, "a member of Congress," who was apparently

visits the village of Canaan, and describes in detail what he saw of the Shakers, and heard an extraordinary sermon delivered *at* him, among others, as one of the "outside mankind." I forbear quoting from it. His appetite was becoming ravenous; they would not give him at one tavern, as he says, "half as much as I wanted for my dinner." Finally, he arrived home at Salem, so the record states, "in much better health than he had when starting."

His subsequent course in regard to himself and to his children induces me to believe that the journey, though benefiting him immensely, had not wholly cured him; but it had proved to him the absolute need he had of regular, daily, physical, open-air exercise. Afterward, under walks of one and a half to two miles, taken three times daily during thirty years of life, all pulmonary troubles disappeared. He died in 1838, from carcinoma of the stomach, one lung presenting evidences of an ancient cicatrix at its apex, both being otherwise normal. He was sixty-five years old—*i. e.*, thirty years after the journey.

Having thus experienced, in his own case, the vast benefits resulting from constant, regular exercise out of doors, he apparently determined that his children should be early instructed in the same course. As soon as we were old enough, he required of us daily morning walks down to a certain well-known divine's meeting-house, about three-quarters of a mile, or a mile, from our home. I remember them very well for the tricks played with my brothers on our way down, and for sundry twinges of conscience, felt even at this moment, at the thought that we sometimes decided that the *sight of the "weather-cock on Dr. Bentley's steeple,"* though seen more than a quarter of a mile from our proper destination, was near enough to our father's directions!

If any of us, while attending school, were ob-

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stupid enough. "He scarcely spoke a syllable during the evening."

served to be drooping, or *made the least pretence* even to being not "*exactly well*," he took us from school, and very often sent us to the country to have farm-life and out-of-door "play to our hearts' content." Once he told me to go and play, and to "stay away from study as long as you choose." In fact, he believed heartily in the old Roman maxim, of a "a healthy mind in a healthy body."<sup>1</sup> In consequence of this early instruction, all of his descendants have become thoroughly impressed with the advantages of daily walking, of summer vacations in the country, and of camping out, etc., among the mountains. These habits have been transmitted, I think, to his grandchildren in a stronger form, if possible, than he himself had them.

You will readily agree with me that such habits are among the surest guarantees against the prevalence of phthisis in a family. Before detailing the actual result of these habits upon our family, I must state the prospective chances of our escape from the malady. My father married his cousin, who, after long invalidism, died of chronic phthisis in 1834. Certainly a consanguineous union of two consumptives foreboded nothing but evil. They had eight children (born respectively in the years 1805, 1806, 1808, 1809, 1813, 1816, 1819, 1823). Two (born 1809 and 1813—*i. e.*, one and five years after the journey) died, one at eleven and the other at birth. All the others either are now alive, or they arrived at adult life and married and have had children and grandchildren, but not a trace of phthisis has appeared in any of these 93<sup>2</sup> persons.

Now I ask the consideration of this question: To what cause can we attribute this extraordinary immunity from the disease which is generally regarded

<sup>1</sup> *Mens sana in corpore sano.*—Juvenal.

<sup>2</sup> The number of their descendants amounts now (1889) to 8 children, 31 grandchildren, 50 great-grandchildren, 4 great-great-grandchildren—total 93. It may be noted that of the two who were born in 1809 and 1813, one died when eleven years old (1820) and the other at birth (1813), while the writer and reader of this paper was born twenty days *before the journey began*.

as showing the influence of heredity and of consanguineous unions more, perhaps, than most other complaints?

If any one can see any other explanation than the influence of this original journey upon the health of one of the great-great-grandparents, conjoined with his wise management of his own health subsequently and his fastening upon his descendants, even to the present day, the virtues of open-air life, I hope he will frankly say so. Truth should be forever our motto, and the man who will convince me of the error of any scientific, or apparently scientific, statement I may utter, and which, if not corrected, may lead others astray, I regard not as an opponent but as my foremost friend.

I submit these facts and thoughts for candid, mature, and *practical consideration* and *use* in the treatment all are called to make of this terrible scourge of all parts of this Union. For my own part I fully believe that many patients now die from want of this open-air treatment. For years I have directed every phthisical patient to walk daily from three to six miles; *never* to stay all day at home unless a *violent storm* be raging. When they are in doubt about going out, owing to "bad weather," I direct them to "*solve the doubt*, not by staying in the house, but *by going out.*"

A cloudy day, or a mild rain, or the coldest weather should not deter them. If the weather be very cold, let them put on respirators before leaving the house and be thoroughly wrapped in proper clothing for the season. I direct them never to stand still and gossip with friends in the open street, as by so doing they are much more liable to get a chill than while walking. Hence, summer and winter alike, my patients usually get plenty of fresh air uncontaminated in a great part, at least, by the previous breathing of it by themselves or by other occupants of the house. This course, I believe, might be pursued in any part of our common country. I am certain that I know of patients who have become

well and able to attend to the business of life under this course. May we not also at times send our patients over short distances in open vehicles, instead of thousands of miles off in ill-ventilated cars to an entirely different climate? Have any of us ever sufficiently tried this open-air journeying *at home*, so to speak—that is, in the region of the country where the patient lives, wherever that may be?

Certainly this proposed course has, at least, two sound physiological principles in its favor, viz.: A gentle exercise, for many hours in each day, of the whole frame, and an almost perpetual change of air drawn in with each respiratory act, as occurs while driving in a carriage, open at the front, and in walking. I have no objection to drugs, properly chosen, and I almost always administer them; but if the choice were given me to stay in the house and use medicines, or to live constantly in the open air without them, I should infinitely prefer the latter course in case of my being threatened with pulmonary consumption.

