

## **Rheumatism and its cure : non-professionally considered / by a graduate.**

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To the Publishers' compts.  
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# RHEUMATISM

AND

## ITS CURE

NON-PROFESSIONALLY CONSIDERED

BY

A GRADUATE

LONDON

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## PREFACE.

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I HAVE contemplated the present publication for some time, but the dread of incurring unworthy imputations has deterred me. At length I have made my decision, and to those who are disposed to censure I say, Come on! My unkindest critic I shall be glad to see or hear from, if he has the misfortune to be seized with rheumatism, and my utmost shall be done to make him well.

Meanwhile, I withhold my name from the title-page, simply that attention may not be diverted from the facts set forth to the personality of the writer. Who he is matters not, if he has spoken wisely;—if he has not, then both himself and what he has written cannot be consigned to oblivion too speedily. But he claims, as a jury to decide on his system, those who are free from preconceived notions: he insists on the remedies proposed being tested by experiment only. Any communication, addressed “Graduate,” will reach him at the publishers.

With respect to a non-professional person venturing to come forward thus, I may remind the reader that some of our best medical specifics have been discovered by laymen. In the memoirs of Admiral Sir Jahleel Brenton I read, that, when many of the marines on board the *Sybil* transport ship



were attacked with rheumatism in the knee joint, and the ship's surgeon had acknowledged his inability to prevent the progress of the malady, or relieve those who had been seized, an intelligent colonel on board discovered a satisfactory remedy.

What I am about to state I have mentioned in substance to at least a score of medical practitioners, and not one of them has deemed the system unreasonable, while several have promised to make trial of my method in their ordinary practice. When I say *my method*, I do not intend to claim the discovery of anything new; I simply use the expression to denote the system of cure which I recommend.

I would further premise that I do not aspire to treating the subject with scientific precision. Beyond attending a course of physiology many years ago, and having made myself familiar with the best medical works on rheumatic ailments, I am a *novice* in medicine. What I record is the result of experiments entered on with the sole purpose of mitigating suffering; nor do I intend by the observations which are here presented to supersede the physician in any department of his practice. For the medical profession I entertain that sincere respect and admiration to which it is entitled from all persons of intelligence. Medical gentlemen admit that the proper treatment of rheumatism was long entirely misunderstood, and that the present remedies are far from being satisfactory. I trust therefore, that what follows may be found useful both to the medical faculty, and to the general public.

LONDON, *January*, 1867.



# RHEUMATISM

AND ITS

## CURE.

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RHEUMATISM is a diseased condition of the fibrous and muscular tissues, chiefly affecting the larger joints; the heart and diaphragm are also liable to be assailed by it. It is a promoting cause of two forms of heart disease—known as *pericarditis*, water on the chest, and *endocarditis*, the deposit of fibrin upon the heart's valves. The causes of rheumatism are various. Vicissitudes of temperature are the most common; occupying a damp bed for a single night is sufficient to engender the disease. Such persons as blacksmiths, who are exposed to severe changes of temperature are generally victims to the complaint. Miners and persons employed in smelting furnaces are often severe sufferers. There is likewise an hereditary tendency to the malady, which a slight cold will develop.

The principal forms of rheumatism are these: when the joints about the back and loins are affected, the complaint is known as *lumbago*. Pains in the hip-joints are designated *sciatica*. When the muscles of the chest are affected the ailment is styled *pleurodyne*. When the muscles on the side of the neck are affected the name given is *torticollis*.

An attack of rheumatism is imminent when a stiffness is felt in the joints, combined with a dryness of the skin and a burning thirst. The variety of the complaint of which



these signs are the precursors is termed *acute*. The other variety is *chronic* rheumatism. The latter may be described as an aggravated condition of the former, though some persons not only describe them as quite distinct, but introduce a variety between them.

Rheumatism proceeds from a vitiated condition of the blood. An hereditary taint in the circulating fluid may be excited into morbid action by a slight cold, but more commonly the blood becomes vitiated through mal-assimilation and a faulty metamorphic action. The precise principle of the poison engendered has not yet been fully ascertained. It is generally believed to be lactic acid.

To eliminate the morbid element from the system, physicians have adopted various remedies. Venesection and the use of calomel have been tried, but such methods are now nearly altogether abandoned. The use of saline aperients, always safe, has occasionally proved successful. The excitement of the nervous system has been allayed by the administration of opium, digitalis and belladonna. Quinine has been administered with advantage. One of the best of the old remedies is Dover's powder, which, as causing perspiration, may be advantageously used in every case of rheumatism.

Recent medical writers are nearly agreed that the skin is the great eliminator of lactic acid, and physicians are devoting more attention to the application of external remedies. Burgundy pitch, long laid aside, has been revived. Sulphuric, carbonaceous, and other mineral springs are warmly recommended. Turkish baths and the ordinary hot bath are prescribed. Sea bathing in the proper season is advocated. Friction by the flesh-brush is set forth. The use of electric chains, once ridiculed, is extolled; and the galvanic battery is recalled to the surgery and the patient's chamber.



Local applications are uniformly recommended. Two of the latest appliances are these : one is a blister consisting of oil of turpentine, camphor and a portion of rosemary with a small quantity of flower of mustard ; another is a mixed alkaline and opiate solution, into which thin flannel is dipped and applied to the aching joint.

I shall now proceed to submit a *vidimus* of my own system of cure, premising a short narrative of the circumstances under which I was led to direct attention to the subject. About ten years ago, I was led to the study of electro-biology. An entire disbeliever in the system, I attended with a clerical friend the *seances* of a Professor of the science, with the intent of discovering and exposing what I then regarded as an imposture. What I witnessed sufficiently astonished me. Many of the persons operated on I knew personally, and I was aware they were incapable of practising deception.

I now began to study the subject fully, and in the course of a very little practice I found that I could produce the same manifestations as the Professor whose *seances* I had attended. For some months I held weekly *seances* in my own house and on all occasions I was successful.

I began to consider whether electro-biology might be applied as a curative agent. I was informed that some one had used it as a means of subduing the pains of rheumatism, and I resolved to make a trial. I succeeded in all my early attempts, and I believe I have relieved at least one hundred persons through this simple instrumentality.

But cases of long standing I found would not yield to this influence ; I experienced the fact in my own person. I suffered an attack of fever, which was accompanied by acute pains in my wrists and in my knee and ankle joints, with sharp shooting pains in the soles of the feet. The ailment continued some months after the fever had left me, and in



defiance of every appliance, including friction and the hot bath. I was residing in the North, and as the winter was piercingly cold and I was subject to violent shiverings, I resolved to try the effects of the Clifton hot springs, and thereafter to seek the milder climate of Devonshire.

Waiting at Liverpool between the arrival of one train and the departure of another, I incidentally met with a friend, who compassionating my lameness, was informed of the cause. He stated that some years before he had been such a victim to rheumatism, that he had lost the power of his limbs, and could only move about by the use of crutches. All remedies proved unavailing, and his medical friends began to fear that the complaint was incurable. In the midst of those gloomy forebodings, a gentleman from St. John's, New Brunswick, recommended him to carry raw potatoes about his person. He adopted the course, and soon regained the use of his limbs. He had experienced no return of the complaint. I paused in my journey and adopted my friend's cure, though I confess with little hopes of relief. To my surprise, my joints became supple, and within two or three days I completely recovered.

These are the circumstances which have led to my devoting a part of my attention to the cure of rheumatic ailments, and as about one-fifth of the population are more or less subject to such complaints, I would not, I conceive, be justified in withholding the results of my experiments.

Proceeding with enquiries in different parts of the country, I was informed of another remedy, which had largely obtained in rural districts; but which, being ridiculed by physicians, had fallen into disuse. This remedy was flowers of sulphur, administered both internally and externally. Peasants, I found, had worn *flowers of sulphur* in their shoes, and thereby been relieved of severe rheumatic pains.



The late Colonel James Glencairn Burns, son of the Scottish Poet, had a hereditary tendency to rheumatism; he informed me that he had experienced greater relief from the use of sulphur externally, than by any other application. An eminent medical practitioner in Lancashire, told me that he had obtained this mode of cure from an elderly female during his boyhood, and had successfully practised it for forty years.

Since these remarks were written, I have discovered in the valuable work on rheumatism, of Dr. H. W. Fuller, physician to St. George's Hospital, the following passage:—

“Nothing proves more generally efficacious than sulphur applied externally; whatever its mode of operation, the fact remains that, employed in this manner, it often subdues pain which has persisted in spite of all other remedies. In many parts of England the sulphur ointment of the Pharmacopœia is a favourite remedy amongst the poor for the cure of rheumatism, whether affecting the joints or other parts of the body, and brief notices of its virtues when thus employed are to be found sparsely scattered through our periodical literature. But in no recognized treatise with which I am acquainted, do I find the slightest notice of the curative action of sulphur applied externally, and I am indebted to one of my hospital patients for directing my attention to the subject.”

Dr. Fuller proceeds to adduce a series of cases, in which the sulphur cure proved efficacious in St. George's Hospital. It is gratifying that on this branch of my system of cure, I am enabled to quote such eminent medical authority in its support.

From one who has attained the highest eminence in the medical profession, I derived information as to the best means of preventing the formation of lactic or other acid in the circulating fluid. He recommended that as much of the bi-carbonate of soda as would rest on a sixpence should be



taken immediately after meals, dissolved in a wine-glass-full of cold water. I observe that Dr. Fuller has named a similar specific. He recommends an effervescing citrate of potash draught, with an excess of 40 to 60 grains of bi-carbonate of soda, or bi-carbonate of potash, at two, three and four hours' interval. On this mode of cure I may quote another eminent medical authority. Dr. Garrod writes:—  
 “Bi-carbonate of potash alters the blood distinctly, and the coagulation of fibrin takes place more slowly.”

An external mode of cure, practised among the humbler classes, is that of passing a moderately heated flat iron—such as those used by laundresses, over the parts affected. This method in a modified form was adopted by Dr. Day, professor of medicine, at St. Andrews, with decided benefit to his patients. A common mode of attacking the aching joints with a freezing application, I am not disposed to countenance.

Having stated the nature of the curative system, which it is the object of these pages to make known, I shall now present a few cases illustrative of its practical operation. I quote those cases only which have reference to the curative influences of electro-biology, and of the potato. For cases of cure by the application of *flowers of sulphur*, I would refer to the work of Dr. Fuller.

A gentleman in Yorkshire, happened to state in a room where I was present, that he was suffering from severe lumbago. I offered to make passes across the parts affected; I had proceeded only some twenty minutes, when he stated that his pains were gone. I met him about a fortnight after, when he assured me that he had experienced no return of the malady.

At St. Helens, Lancashire, I met a gentleman who was suffering excruciating pains in his ancles and the soles of his



feet. In the course of a quarter of an hour, by making passes over the parts, I succeeded in relieving him. He left, assuring me he was entirely well.

When on a visit to Bath, a person was living at my hotel, who was suffering from acute rheumatism which affected both his limbs. I made passes in the usual manner, and in less than half an hour he said he felt quite well. This individual was restored in spite of a strong predisposition to doubt the possibility of the remedy. I saw him afterwards, and he informed me that there had been no return of the disorder.

I was in a friend's house at St. Andrews, in Scotland. A gentleman who formed one of the company present, complained of a severe neuralgic headache; I offered to try my system of passes upon him, and he reluctantly consented, as he was unhopeful of benefit. I persevered with my method for some time, when he admitted that the pain had left its former seat, and was flitting about in other portions of the head. Within the space of forty minutes he acknowledged that he was cured.

A clergyman in a northern county was subject to *lumbago*. I happened to be with him one day, when he was experiencing a sharp attack of the malady. He was wont to laugh at my curative notions, but agreed on this occasion, to allow me a trial. Within the space of ten minutes after I had begun to make passes, he said that he fancied himself somewhat relieved. In less than half an hour he confessed that he was cured.

By the same method I have relieved sciatica, various neuralgic affections, and *megrin* headaches.

That the principle of this cure is unknown, I need scarcely remark, can be no reason for regarding it with disfavour. I know not that electro-biological influence is more difficult of



belief than is the action of electricity or galvanism ; but these have long been recognized, and animal magnetism has not yet surmounted prejudice.

The rapid advances in chemical discovery justify the belief that ere long the apparent mysteries of electro-biology will be resolved, and some reasonable explanation afforded as to that silent but powerful influence, whereby one individual can affect the physical condition of another.

But electro-biological operations will not, I repeat, cure every form of rheumatic disorders ; for *chronic* rheumatism I should not attempt them. The potato method of cure is much more likely to be efficacious, especially if combined with the use of sulphur.

I may now adduce a few cases of cure by the *potato* method.

In a newspaper office in Liverpool, I found the manager in a state of intense discomfort from acute pains in the back and shoulders. I recommended the potato remedy ; within eight hours he recovered.

A gentleman in London had long been subject to rheumatic gout. At the time I saw him he was lame and suffering more than ordinarily from his complaint. He heard my narrative as to the efficacy of the potato, and obtaining the requisite supply from his servant, adopted the prescription at once. I did not see him again for six months ; he had worn potatoes about him all the time, and found that his complaint had been greatly mitigated.

Another gentleman in London was so severely afflicted by chronic rheumatism, that he had become unable to raise his hands to his head without the most excruciating pain. He had adopted the usual internal and external remedies, but still the malady continued its unabated severity. He was at length induced to try a poultice of potatoes applied to the



joints affected. He now obtained immediate relief. In the course of a few months he entirely recovered.

I might multiply examples, but I shall quote only another case. A gentleman at Portsmouth happened to state in a letter I received from him, that he was suffering from pains in the right shoulder and arm, which had interfered with his rest and nearly prevented his using the pen. I prescribed the use of sulphur and potatoes. In the course of a few months, I was gratified by receiving from the gentleman a letter in the following terms :—

“ MARCH 31st, 1866.

“I have to thank you for your kind note enclosing a recipe for acute rheumatic neuralgia. Sulphur I had tried in vain in various forms, so that I did not repeat it; but the potato method of cure I continued to adopt; it has had a most soothing effect. I have therefore again to thank you for sending me so comforting a recipe. My sufferings are considerably mitigated.”

In a letter received since, the gentleman assures me that he is very much better—nearly well. He is advanced in life.

No pathologist, I believe, will deny that the potato is possessed of curative qualities. Botanically named *solanum tuberosum*, it belongs to the nightshade family, and possesses in its raw condition the narcotic qualities of its race. These qualities predominating in *belladonna*, render the latter one of the recognized medical appliances in rheumatic ailments.

The potato has lately been admitted to the laboratory. Dr. Benjamin W. Richardson, in a valuable paper read to the British Association in 1865, has shown that three important bodies of the amyl series are derived chiefly from the potato. We shall quote some particulars respecting these bodies, and their distinctive qualities, in Dr. Richardson's own words.



“*Amylic* alcohol, the hydrated oxide of amyl is obtained in the fermentation of *potato starch*, or starch of grain. Administered by inhalation in small quantities, it produces in the first instance signs of irritation of the nostril, and then of drowsiness; but there is no anaesthesia; if the inhalation be continued, and the quantity increased, the symptoms of coma or sleep, are more fully developed, but without any insensibility, and with almost immediate recovery on the *animal* being removed. The acetate of amyl is made by distilling together one quart of *potato oil*, two of acetate of potassa, and one of concentrated sulphuric acid. It is quite possible to induce perfect insensibility to pain by this agent. The iodide of amyl,” proceeds Dr. Richardson, “is one made by distilling together 15 quarts of *potato oil*, one of phosphorus, and eight of iodine.” The effects of this compound of amyl are similar to those already mentioned.

In speculating as to the medical use of these compounds, Dr. Richardson considers that they would prove useful as “remedies in certain convulsive and spasmodic diseases, in which the symptoms are obviously induced by morbid sensibility or excitability of the motor tracts and centres of the nervous system.”

Among the humbler orders of society, the potato plant has long been used as a remedy for burns, sprains, bruises, pains in the joints, &c. The water in which potatoes have been boiled is known to be unwholesome in respect of internal use, but it is used by many persons as a wash to heal cutaneous disorders.

It is remarked by Dr. Fuller in reference to sulphur as externally applied to a rheumatic joint, that it acts not only on that particular part, but penetrating into the blood, affects the entire system. A similar influence occurs from the external application of the potato. My friend in Liverpool from whom I derived my acquaintance with this method of cure, has assured me he has cured upwards of an hundred persons.

These observations would tend to show that rheu-



matic ailments may be removed by means which are cheap, simple, and readily attainable. Yet I should most improperly discharge my duty both to the public and to the medical profession, were I not to state emphatically that I have no sympathy with the doctrine, that *every man can be his own physician*. This must not be, especially in an ailment like rheumatism, which, if neglected, may terminate in heart disease. The remedies I am seeking to introduce should be administered in a manner befitting the age of the patient, the duration of the ailment, and the peculiar circumstances of each case.

I have forborne, it will be remarked, from referring to the subject of rheumatic fever. The simple truth is, I have individually had no opportunity of treating any case of the sort. But I can recall to recollection a striking case which happened in my family, but which I had forgotten till this paper was partly printed. A near relative of mine suffered four periodical attacks of rheumatic fever. He was first attacked in his nineteenth year, and thereafter every seventh year, till his fortieth. The attacks were singularly overpowering, though he had the advantage of being attended by a physician of great experience and skill. The scientific modes of cure were tried without effect, till the vulgar remedy of flowers of sulphur was adopted, when the patient was at once relieved. The discovery was not made till the third or fourth attack. The patient survived the fourth attack of rheumatic fever for the long period of forty-five years.

I have been devoting some attention to the adaptation of the same class of remedies in cases of *neuralgia* and *gout*; but my experience in regard to these complaints has been much too limited to warrant any absolute conclusion. In *neuralgic* ailments, the internal use of iron is unquestionably of important service. The malady of gout (a morbid affec-



tion of the smaller joints) is, it is well known, chiefly produced by the habitual use of acetic wines, and the presence of *uric acid* in the blood. Gout produces discoloration of the parts affected, which is one of several indications that external appliances may be useful.

Here I close for the present. What has been written may be sufficient to ventilate my method of cure, and so to extend the course of experiment. On my own behalf I may say this much, that my prescriptions will certainly do no harm, and can be acted on at little expense.

Cynics will doubtless find material on which to indulge a sneer, and they are welcome to their enjoyment. Mr. Banting, when his treatise on corpulency attracted general attention, was met with the criticism that he indirectly desired to add to his business as *an undertaker*. Had Dr. Harvey, to whom he was originally indebted for his system, been the author of the pamphlet, that respected physician had, of course, been denounced after a similar fashion.

Let cavillers note these facts:—

*First.* That the precise cause of rheumatic pains is a recent discovery, not quite perfected.

*Second.* That the alkaline method of treatment now universally recognized has not been employed systematically for more than twenty years.

*Third.* That almost every scientific mode of treatment beyond the period just named has been abandoned.

*Fourth.* That the present curative system is acknowledged to be defective.

*Fifth.* That the remedial system now recommended has been partly acknowledged by the medical faculty.

*Sixth.* Chemical experience has so far testified to its reasonableness, while many living witnesses are ready to attest as to its *efficacy*.

*Seventh.* By a course of experiment only can the question be ultimately settled.