

Paper on the treatment of chronic rheumatoid arthritis : read before the Yorkshire Branch of the British Medical Association, at Bradford, on the sixteenth of June, 1880 / by J. Fletcher Little.

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Publication/Creation

Leeds : Richard Jackson, 1880.

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PAPER ON THE TREATMENT

OF

Chronic Rheumatoid Arthritis.

READ BEFORE THE

YORKSHIRE BRANCH

OF THE

BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, AT BRADFORD,

ON THE SIXTEENTH OF JUNE, 1880.

BY

J. FLETCHER LITTLE, L.R.C.P., L.R.C.S., ED.,

PHYSICIAN TO BEN RHYDDING.

LEEDS:

RICHARD JACKSON, COMMERCIAL STREET AND BRIGGATE.

—
MDCCCLXXX.



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PAPER ON THE TREATMENT

Chronic Rheumatoid Arthritis

READ BEFORE THE

YORK MEDICAL SOCIETY

ON THE

15TH MEDICAL SESSION AT BRADFORD

ON THE 27TH OF JUNE 1888

BY

J. FLETCHER, M.D., F.R.C.P.

BRADFORD

PRINTED AND SOLD BY

W. G. AND SONS, BRADFORD

1888

LONDON

PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY AND COMPANY, LTD., BUNGAY, SUFFOLK

1888

PAPER ON THE TREATMENT
OF
CHRONIC RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS.

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :

I have the honour to lay before you a method of treating CHRONIC RHEUMATIC GOUT, or, as it should be more correctly termed, *Chronic Rheumatoid Arthritis*, which I conceive to be rational and scientific, as well as successful.

As practical men, you have all from time to time been confronted with such cases as these I am about to describe, and have found the utter uselessness of all remedies in their treatment.

I have searched in vain the standard works on the subject, and have been struck by the tone of despair that pervades all their suggestions as to treatment. I have also made enquiry amongst a large and extended circle of medical friends and acquaintances, and they have been all but unanimous in admitting their failure even to relieve this terrible disease. Occasionally a more hopeful answer has been returned ; and I have been told in one case by an eminent Cambridge professor, and in another by a scientific Yorkshire surgeon, that they have each cured a single case,—the one by Cod-Liver Oil, and the other by the subcutaneous injection of

morphia. That cases are occasionally benefited, I have no doubt; but so rarely, that like all exceptions, they only prove the rule.

I may here remark, that notwithstanding the researches of my old teacher, Mr. EDWIN CANTON, and others, some haziness still exists as to the pathology of this disease; and I have seen cases that have been declared to be Rheumatic Gout, which have been either Rheumatism, Gout, or simple Arthritis.

I have also repeatedly met patients who have complacently told me that they were suffering from Rheumatic Gout, when the very hue of their cheeks, the colour of their lips, and the contour of their bodies, plainly told me that they did not know the meaning of the words they were using.

There will in the future be no excuse for this want of accuracy, as the Lectures now being delivered by Mr. JONATHAN HUTCHINSON, at the College of Surgeons, will prevent the least possibility of confusion on this subject. I will, therefore, without further referring to the pathology of the disease, proceed to lay my cases and their treatment before you.

The first case is that of Mrs. A——, a patient of Dr. MERRIMAN, of Kensington, 51 years of age, who came to Ben Rhydding on the 18th of August, 1879.

She had always enjoyed good health until five years ago, when, after a railway accident involving much exposure, she suffered from congestion of the liver and jaundice. The latter symptom continued from November, 1874, until March, 1875.

Although there had been a great deal of exposure at the time of the accident, and a long illness afterwards, my patient apparently recovered entirely, and was able to take several long and fatiguing tours.

This state of good health continued until three years ago, when a severe domestic affliction occurred; and three weeks afterwards symptoms of Rheumatoid Arthritis manifested themselves.

The first thing that attracted attention was the appearance of chilblains on the fingers of both hands, chiefly the right; and after a slight injury to the right hand, the forefinger became blue and livid in a marked degree, and this symptom was followed by pains in the same hand.

Heaviness in the feet and difficulty in walking were soon observed, but not sufficient to prevent locomotion. After this, pains came on with great severity, and whilst in the Engadine, in the month of August, 1878, a sensation as of walking through water was felt, making locomotion difficult.

An attack of tightness across the chest now came on, and was relieved by the acid salycilate of soda, and there was no return of the pain for many weeks.

In the beginning of August, 1878, she was unable to walk, and was compelled to lie on the couch, and could not leave the house from that date until she came to Ben Rhydding, in August, 1879.

At Christmas, 1878, an attack of bronchitis, and in February, 1879, an attack of neuralgia occurred. In

April of the same year, the right knee began to swell, and became painful. In a fortnight afterwards, the right ankle also swelled, and pains were felt in both. General neuralgic pains also came on in the back, face, &c., so that a feeling like tetanus was experienced.

For thirteen weeks these symptoms were so urgent that she was entirely confined to her bed, and afterwards could not get up or sit down unaided.

The following is a list of some of the remedies employed during her illness:—guaiacum, iodide of potassium, citrate of lithia, colchicum, cinchona, quinine, salycilate of soda, bromide of potassium, black drop, chloral hydrate, tincture of opium; and each of these in full doses, and for a considerable time: for example,—the salycilate of soda in fifteen-grain doses, every two hours for forty-eight hours consecutively, and still no relief was obtained.

So great and continuous was the pain for twelve months before coming under treatment, that she had never slept a whole hour at one time.

No medicine of any kind was taken for a month before coming to me, and no improvement in the symptoms took place.

On arrival at Ben Rhydding on the 18th of August, 1874, she could not stand without intense pain, and was just able to walk a little, with the assistance of one person, on the level ground, *but not up or down stairs*, and required the help of two persons in rising from a chair.

The swelling in the right hand was great, causing

the characteristic deformity, in a marked degree, in the right knee and ankle. It was immense, and I regret that I did not take accurate measurements at the time; slight in the left knee and great in the left ankle.

TREATMENT.

The treatment pursued was the administration of the Russian Vapour Bath daily for six weeks, and then every other day.

This bath was administered in the following way: Mrs. A. remained in the hot vapour chamber for fifteen or twenty minutes, and the temperature was kept at 110° Fahrenheit. If it was let down to 100° it was found to be too cold, and no good resulted.

She was then well rubbed all over by means of a soft bath-glove with soap until a good lather was produced (but was not shampooed), and was then placed in a rain bath, which was at first 100° Fahrenheit, and then let down to 80°. After this she was douched with water at the same temperatures (100° to 80°); she was then placed on a couch, enveloped in warm sheets and covered with a blanket, until she had cooled sufficiently to dress. The whole bath lasted about one hour.

A mustard foot-bath (temperature 110° Fahrenheit), containing two tablespoonfuls of mustard, was administered each night before going to bed.

This last remedy afforded great relief to the feet and ankles, which soon began to feel less heavy and more supple.

After the first Russian Bath she expressed herself as feeling warm for the first time for many months.

When this treatment had been followed for a fortnight, great improvement was manifested. The pains became less and less, the swellings diminished, rest and sleep were more readily obtained, locomotion became much easier, the appetite increased, the spirits, which had been greatly depressed, rose, and the general tone likewise improved.

If this stage of improvement alone had been reached the result would have been gratifying and satisfactory. I now, however, resolved to commence the use of Galvanism in conjunction with the Russian Bath treatment.

For this purpose one of Mr. GRIGG's machines, similar to that before you, was employed, and the results were immediate and most encouraging. The galvanism was first applied by the direct method—that is, to the muscles and joints affected—by means of sponges, and also by means of the galvanic foot-bath.

This treatment from the first afforded relief, and was shortly afterwards followed by the general (dry) treatment, which was applied by means of Mr. GRIGG's ingenious appliances,—that is, the “spinal plate” and “seat-piece.” The *positive* pole was always connected to the spinal plate, and the *negative* to the seat-piece. The treatment lasted at first for half an hour, and then for an hour, twice daily.

A remarkable result, and one that is very interesting, followed the first application of galvanism. The skin over the right shoulder and arm, which had never perspired, even in the Russian Bath, now broke out into profuse perspiration, and the pain in this region, which had never before yielded to treatment, was quickly relieved.

Lithia water, containing five grains to the half-pint, was again taken once a day, beginning on September the 18th.

On the 8th of October, 1879 (just before leaving for London), Mrs. A.'s state had so much improved that she could rest without any pain whatever; was able to get refreshing sleep; could eat and enjoy a fair amount of food; *and could walk for an hour over rough and undulating ground without stick or support of any kind whatever.*

The right hand had almost recovered its normal size and appearance, the only swelling apparent was in the first joint of the forefinger.

The left knee was quite well; the right knee only slightly swollen in one place, just above the upper tibio-fibular articulation.

The left ankle was considerably swollen, but nothing in comparison to what it had been; and the right ankle was only slightly puffy.

This happy result had been achieved after seven weeks' treatment.

Mrs. A. left for London on the 9th October, 1879, and was to carry on the treatment at home.

I have never lost sight of Mrs. A. from the date of her leaving until now, and can mention the latest result.

I saw her on the 20th December, 1879, and found that the improvement continued. She was able to be down to breakfast every morning, and did not go to bed until the family retired at night. Slept and ate fairly well, *had no pain*; could knit, sew, and write; walked out

when the weather permitted to call on friends in the neighbourhood, *and was able to go up and down stairs without assistance.*

I heard from Dr. MERRIMAN in March last, and he reported to me steady and continued improvement.

Mrs. A. is now at Ben Rhydding for a few weeks' stay, and I am happy to be able to state that the cure appears to be a permanent one. The joints are supple, there is no pain, and the general health has so much improved that life is now a pleasure instead of a burden.

The second case is that of Mrs. B——, a patient of Dr. BRADY'S, of Sunderland, aged 35 years.

The illness began before marriage with pain and swelling in the ankle joints. She suffered severely during her whole married life, especially since the birth of her first child fourteen years ago.

The symptoms became still more aggravated in 1873, after the birth of her last child, when the right arm became shrunken and completely helpless, so that she was unable to dress herself, and could not walk without the aid of a stick.

In 1875 she went to Montreal, and whilst there suffered from acute attacks of what appears to have been *metastatic gout*, and had to return to England in consequence.

Since her return to England, she has not suffered from any acute inflammatory attacks, but the hands and feet have become sadly deformed, and at times almost useless.

On arrival at Ben Rhydding on the 15th of April last, both hands were very stiff and greatly swollen; and I never saw a better example of the characteristic deformity.

The wrists were both immoveable, and the hands could not be closed into fists owing to the rigid and swollen state of the joints.

The elbows were swollen, and masses of deposit could be felt and seen.

The shoulders were very painful; the ancles swollen, and the right knee greatly deformed by the masses of deposit that surrounded it. Locomotion was so difficult that Mrs. B. could only walk a very short distance, and had not walked a mile during any day for years. The gait was very peculiar, and there was a remarkable bobbing motion when she walked.

The treatment employed was the rubbing in of olive oil, galvanism by means of GRIGG'S machine, and Russian Baths.

On the 8th of May (just before leaving for home), and after treatment for the very brief period of three weeks, the following was the state of the patient:—

The hands had greatly improved, and could be closed firmly into fists. The *carpo-metacarpal* joints were so much better, that the hollows between the knuckles were becoming deep and distinct.

The wrists (one of which had not been moved for seven years) were now quite moveable, and the swelling and puffiness had greatly subsided. A troublesome spasmodic closure of the middle, ring, and little fingers had quite disappeared.

The deposits on the elbows had greatly diminished, and the pain was no longer felt, even on pressure.

The shoulders were perfectly well—no pain—no stiffness.

The knees were much smaller in size, and the knob-like deposits greatly diminished; their flexibility had greatly increased; there was no pain, and only an occasional aching after fatigue.

The ankles were much smaller—almost normal; slight pain was felt after great exertion. There was still some difficulty in rising from a chair.

The great toe no longer flexed spasmodically. The feet were now so much smaller that it was unsafe to walk in the boots that had hitherto been worn.

She could now walk upwards of four miles a day without difficulty, although, as I have said, she had been unable to walk a mile a day for years before coming under treatment.

The appetite was keen, the digestion good, and the sleep perfectly restful, and lasting through the whole night.

I may here mention that this lady has been seen by several medical and scientific men—some of them staying at Ben Rhydding during the treatment.

The third case is that of Mrs. C——, of Leeds, sent me by Mr. PRIDGIN TEALE, on the 1st of June, and has been under treatment for the last fortnight, with the satisfactory results I am about to relate.

She is 67 years of age; suffered from Rheumatic Gout fifteen years ago, and was treated at Malvern so effectually that it has never returned until fifteen months ago, when the present illness commenced.

The joints of the fingers of both hands first became swollen and painful. The shoulders next became affected. The ancles and knees then were attacked, and also the head and neck, which have given great pain and trouble all through the illness.

Mrs. C. has always been able to go about, although at times very ill.

The condition on arrival at Ben Rhydding was as follows:—The hands could not be closed by at least an inch and a half, and the joints were very painful, and the fingers could not be straightened without a painful effort.

The wrists were swollen and painful; the veins large and distended in both hands. The elbows were quite well.

The shoulders at the tip were very painful when the arms were put behind the back. The feet and ancles swollen and painful. Both knees were painful, and the right one swollen on the inner side.

She could walk as much as two or three miles in a day; could go up and come down stairs unaided; need not use a stick or support, but does so for safety. Sleeps and eats well.

Mrs. C.'s present state is as follows:—

The hands have greatly diminished in size, the left has almost become normal; the pain was greatly re-

lieved; they could both be closed by a little exertion, and the fingers could now be straightened without any pain whatever.

The veins of the left hand had become greatly diminished in calibre, and those of the right in a lesser degree.

The appearance of deformity in the hands was no longer so painfully evident, and the pains in the head and neck had almost disappeared: in this case oil-rubbing was a most efficacious aid to the treatment, and I found that neat's-foot oil was the most useful for the purpose.

In those cases where Russian Baths cannot be conveniently obtained, the ordinary vapourizing lamp-bath might be tried as a substitute,—care at the same time being taken that sufficient water is vapourized to produce abundant steam, and that the attendant uses every precaution to prevent the patient being chilled.

GRIGG'S machine, that I have used in all three cases, I shall give a demonstration on after reading this paper; and I only wish now to point out two facts that I consider worthy the attention of the profession in connection with this machine.

The first is the electrolyzing power of an interrupted current from a primary coil; and secondly, the large size of the electrodes: a point which I believe to be of great importance in treating cases in which electrolysis is made use of.

I will now briefly sum up the facts to be gleaned from these cases.

First, they were all cases occurring in women, and all of them were married. One was aged 35, another 51, and the third 67. One had suffered for fifteen months, another for three years, and the third for twelve years.

In all, the grating in the joints was most distinct. All were in comfortable circumstances, but they all had gone through severe mental suffering. All shewed—by the silvering of the hair, the anxious appearance, and the evident decrepitude,—that decay had set in and must be stopped. And yet all of them improved without any drawback from first to last, under the oil-rubbing, the galvanic current, and the Russian Baths.



They were all cases occurring in women, and
all of them were treated. One was aged 25, another 31,
and the third 47. One had suffered for fifteen months
and then for three years, and the third for twelve years.

In all the patients the diagnosis was that of
All were in favorable circumstances, but they all had
gone through severe mental suffering. All showed—
the absence of the hair, the various symptoms, and the
extent of the disease—that they had not in any way
improved. And yet all of them improved without any
treatment, from first to last, under the oil-rubbing, the
galeon ointment, and the liniment.

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