A CASE OF SPRUE TREATED BY STRAWBERRIES.

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IN THE LANCET of March 28th, 1903 (p. 873), Dr. Edward H. Young reported a serious case of sprue or psilosis which he had treated successfully by the addition of strawberries to his patient's diet. Considering the obstinacy with which this disease resists treatment I feel it my duty to give a few details of a case recently under my care in the Paddington Infirmary, for though the disease is uncommon in this country the publishing of my experiences may possibly lead to the benefit of someone when the next strawberry season comes round.

My patient was a man, aged 29 years, who was admitted to the infirmary in April, 1905, complaining of diarrhoea associated with considerable loss of flesh. He had been, as a soldier, in different parts of India for about eight years in all, and except for a slight attack of what he termed "slow continued fever" he had good health whilst there. He returned home in March, 1904, at the expiration of his period of service, feeling quite well, and he worked as a painter's labourer until December, 1904, when he commenced to suffer from repeated attacks of vomiting and diarrhoea with progressive emaciation, which continued with varying severity until the time of his admission to the infirmary.

On admission the patient was very thin and had a markedly sallow complexion. The heart and lungs showed no signs of disease. The abdomen was tumid but there was no undue resistance or tenderness in any part; the liver and spleen could not be felt. The tongue was noted to be clean and red; there was no blue line on the gums. The diarrhoea was considerable, there being about three or four stools in the 24 hours, of a brownish colour, liquid, and offensive, but with no blood or mucus. The temperature was subnormal, averaging 97° F., and no albumin was found in the urine. He was thought to be suffering from a rather severe and prolonged attack of colitis and was given a simple diet with chalk and opium for medicine, and with this he improved for a time, he seemed more comfortable, and his stools were reduced in frequency to one and occasionally two per diem, but they remained rather loose and copious and very offensive. Salol, bismuth-salicylate, and other intestinal antiseptics were tried and also the lower bowel was irrigated, but though a change of medicine, salol especially, appeared to do good for a few days, it was soon found that the effect was not lasting and the patient's condition remained about the same until the middle of June, when the diarrhoea increased again to four or five copious liquid motions in the day and for the first time they obviously had a yeasty appearance, whilst the colour was either greenish-yellow or slaty-grey. He complained at this time also of a burning sensation in his throat and of a sore tongue; the former was congested and the tongue had a glazed appearance on the dorsum with small patches of superficial ulceration at the edges, as if the epithelium had been rubbed off in places. The conjunctivæ had a yellow tinge and the patient was much thinner and weaker. It was then realised that his condition was due to sprue and he was ordered a strict milk diet, given in small quantities frequently, amounting to three pints per diem and later increased to four pints, which seemed to be about as much as he could digest. He soon began to improve, the diarrhoea diminished perceptibly, and after a fortnight the stools were not more than one or two per diem; they were more formed, though still clay-coloured and very offensive. The bared patches on the tongue healed and the patient seemed better in every way. By the middle of August the stools were not more frequent than one a day and were generally normal in appearance, though still rather offensive. The patient was of a gluttonous nature and difficult to manage as regards his diet; he now became very restive under the treatment and after much grumbling his diet was increased by the addition of bread-and-milk and subsequently bread-and-butter and an egg; but soon afterwards his stools returned to their previously grey liquid and yeasty state, he rapidly lost flesh, and the ulcers reappeared on the tongue. He was again put on a strict milk diet with a similar result as regards the improvement, the grumbling as he got stronger, and the relapse on increasing the diet.

During the winter and spring following, different drugs and foods were tried, some with temporary benefit, but each relapse left him weaker than the previous one. He was weighed several times and he never scaled more than 81 pounds, which was about half his normal weight.

Having heard of the strawberry treatment for sprue I determined to try it as a last resource, and on June 8th last I ordered him one pound of strawberries per diem in conjunction with the diet he had been taking for some weeks previously, consisting of three pints of milk, a pint of beef-tea, bread and margarine, milk pudding, and an egg as the daily allowance and all drugs were stopped. On the 16th the improvement was marked; he had regained sufficient strength to be put upon the scales and he weighed 70 pounds, his stools were less yeasty, and some small abraded patches which had been present on the sides of his tongue had healed. I increased his daily ration of strawberries to two pounds and on July 2nd to three pounds when he weighed 81 pounds, though his stools were still clay-coloured. On the 20th he weighed 96 pounds; his stools were formed, not unusually offensive and of a light-brown colour. He was feeling better than he had done since the commencement of his illness and I added some boiled fish to his diet. On the 31st some œdema of the feet and legs appeared, associated with irregularity of the pulse, but the cardiac weakness was corrected in a few weeks by small doses of digitalis and squill and in other respects his progress towards recovery was maintained. The supply of strawberries rapidly deteriorated owing to the hot dry weather and on August 6th I discontinued them; he then weighed 120 pounds and his stools were normal in consistence, colour, and frequency. On Sept. 4th he was put on the ordinary meat diet of the infirmary and he took his discharge on Oct. 9th, looking strong and healthy with a good colour and weighing 150 pounds, which he stated was within a few pounds of his usual weight.

This case was an extremely interesting one in that it demonstrated the usual impotency of drugs to affect the course of sprue and also the marked benefit derived from an exclusive milk diet, which I think might have yielded a satisfactory result if the patient could have been induced to submit to it for a longer period. Then comes the question of the strawberries, and from the facts narrated above it is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that they were the curative agent in this instance; they seem to have supplied something which enabled the alimentary canal to digest and assimilate the nourishment provided in the diet, but beyond that I am unable to discuss the chemistry of the subject. Two cases are obviously insufficient evidence upon which to dogmatise but these two remarkable instances point to the conclusion that a case of sprue need not be considered hopeless until strawberries have been tried.

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Clinical Notes:

MEDICAL, SURGICAL, OBSTETRICAL, AND THERAPEUTICAL.

A NOTE ON APPENDICITIS AS A CAUSE OF INTUSSUSCEPTION.

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THE patient, a boy, three years of age, was taken to the North-Eastern Hospital for Children late on the evening of Oct. 6th by his mother, who said that he had "a lump in his stomach which was getting bigger." The history given by the mother was as follows. During the last three months the boy had complained of abdominal pain on several occasions, which at times had been very severe. For the first six weeks the pain was not associated with any other symptom and his bowels had been quite regular, but during the latter six weeks he had vomited frequently and she had noticed a "lump in his stomach"; the bowels had acted freely every day and he had passed some "streaks of blood" from time to time with the motions. During this time he had been attending a hospital where he was treated for colic. On examination the child was seen to be well nourished