

## 284. LONDON MEDICAL AND PHYSICAL JOURNAL, OCT. 1822.

Art. I. *Remarks on Tar-Vapour, as a remedy in diseases of the Lungs. Illustrated with cases treated at the General Military Hospital, Fort Pitt.* By JAMES FORBES, M.D. &c.

The object of Dr Forbes in this paper is to show from numerous trials with Tar-Vapour in the treatment of diseases of the lungs, what its real worth is in these diseases,—to show where it has been useless or injurious, and where it has done good.

Dr Forbes tried Tar-Vapour in nineteen cases of Phthisis Pulmonalis. It cured none. It improved none. It had no effect on eight, and it produced bad effects in eleven. He tried it in thirty two cases of Chronic Catarrh. It cured eight. It improved six. It had no effect in eighteen, and had bad effects in none. It would give us much pleasure to give our readers the whole of Dr Forbes' paper. It is however too long for this. We shall therefore first extract the two cases of Phthisis, in which the effects of Tar-Vapour are displayed, with some connected remarks; and then three cases of Chronic Catarrh which were also submitted to this remedy.

'Case 1. Simon Burton, æt. 23, of strumous diathesis, has laboured under pectoral complaints for nearly two years; breathing very much oppressed; cough frequent, with copious purulent expectoration; pulse 120, moderately full; perspires copiously at night, and his bowels are generally constipated; tongue clean; appetite pretty good. He is much emaciated; his symptoms undergo considerable exacerbation in the evening, and he is hetic to an extreme.

'April 29th.—Ordered the tar-vapour.

'30th.—Passed a restless night; breathing more laborious, and cough more troublesome.

'May 1.—Respiration continues to become more difficult; cough undiminished; complains much of thirst; pulse 132.

'Three o'clock, same day.—Since last report, his respiration has become extremely difficult; the cough almost incessant; and there is anxiety of countenance and general inquietude. Removed immediately to another ward. This patient, on his removal from the tar-vapour ward, became in every respect easier; respiration was performed with comparative freedom, and the cough and other symptoms suffered considerable abatement. I have little doubt that, had the use of the remedy been persisted in, he would shortly have died by suffocation. He died on the 21st of May, and the lungs were found much tuber-

culated: most of the tubercles in a state of ulceration, and strong adhesions between the pleuræ.

‘Case II.—William Taylor, æt. 22, has laboured under pulmonary affection for eleven months. Respiration hurried and laborious; cough frequent and severe, accompanied with purulent expectoration; pulse 120, of good strength and fulness; occasionally perspires profusely, and his bowels are prone to constipation. Emaciation and debility considerable; tongue clean; appetite indifferent. Towards evening, his breathing becomes more difficult, and the other symptoms also suffer considerable exacerbation. The pulsation of the heart is widely diffused, and is best felt at the epigastrium.

‘April 29.—Put under the use of the tar-vapour.

‘30th.—Had a restless night, and his breathing is rather more oppressed; the cough more distressing, and there is general inquietude; pulse 124.

‘Three o’clock, same day.—Respiration much more impeded, and the other symptoms considerably aggravated. He anxiously desires to be removed to another ward.

‘The tar-vapour obviously did harm in this case, as in the other. The patient died about eight days after his removal. He was often heard piteously to lament his ever having tried the “tar-smoke,” as he had “never recovered the breath he had lost under its use.”

‘On dissection, the lungs were found a complete mass of disease, much tuberculated, and containing many small vomicæ. The diffused pulsation of the heart led to the opinion that there existed some disease of that organ: after death, however, no morbid appearance of it was discovered. This is a circumstance worthy of notice, as such an appearance is calculated to deceive many. I believe it is frequently met with in emaciated subjects.

‘In the other four cases, the disease followed its usual progress, and, on dissection, they were all found to have tuberculated lungs. In one of them, a large vomica occupied the upper part of the left lung; in another, several small vomicæ were found. In these the tar-vapour did not produce such distressing symptoms, but yet their complaints were considerably aggravated; and so much so in two of them, that it became absolutely necessary to discontinue the remedy; and, in all these cases, the pulse became more frequent during its exhibition, the cough and dyspnœa more urgent, and the expectoration diminished, which last effect seldom failed to render the breathing more oppressed. One appeared at first to improve somewhat under its use; but latterly, and as his complaints became

worse, (for they were never obviously retarded by its employment,) it certainly did manifest harm, producing the same distressing effects as in the cases detailed, which did not cease for several hours after exposure to the vapour. The quantity of expectoration was occasionally diminished by its use; and, though his symptoms were not at all times aggravated by this change, yet they generally were so, and he always experienced an alleviation of the dyspnœa, and was otherwise considerably benefited, by the return of a free and copious expectoration.

‘From the unsuccessful results of the cases above mentioned, I had nearly given up the hope of the remedy affording any advantage. I was inclined, however, to think that some of its injurious effects were to be attributed to some imperfection in the process by which the vapour was produced. After various trials, the mode already described was adopted; and since that no case has occurred in which the symptoms were so much aggravated as in those of Ruston and Taylor.

‘In not one case, out of nineteen submitted to its action, has the tar-vapour given evident proofs of its power either to arrest or to ameliorate the symptoms of the disease. It is true that several patients, during the two or three first days, have expressed themselves benefited by it; but these very patients have in a short time after, either suffered so much from its effects as to request their removal to another ward, or have entirely denied their having received any benefit from it. It is well known that phthisical patients, in general, judge very erroneously respecting their complaints, and from day to day return the same answer, “I am better,” when in fact they are daily getting worse. It may be observed, farther, that such patients not unfrequently over-rate the good effects of medicine, and are sometimes apt to bestow unbounded praise on the most inert remedies. It has often appeared to me, that whatever is capable of interrupting, or changing in any degree, the protracted and monotonous progress of phthisis, is to the patient a source of gratification. This I apprehend to have been the case with many patients admitted into the tar-vapour ward, who, perhaps, sanguine in their expectations of its doing them good, do not, for the first day, (during which it gives little inconvenience,) make any complaint, but perhaps give to it some praise. They, in a short time, however, either make loud complaints, or cease to allow that they have been benefited.

The most direct and obvious effect of tar-vapour is to diminish the quantity of expectoration. This, in catarrhal affections, is followed by no unpleasant symptoms: on the contrary, the cough and dyspnœa, but more especially the former, un-

dergo a corresponding diminution ; but in phthisis nearly the reverse of this happens, for, in proportion as the sputa become diminished, so does the cough become more frequent, and the difficulty of breathing greater. We have observed, however, that some phthisical patients may remain for a considerable time under the use of this remedy, without experiencing any unpleasant effects ; but, in the generality of cases, it has produced the bad effects already mentioned. It has appeared that, so long as the tar-vapour does not suppress the expectoration in any considerable degree, it may be found, in some cases of phthisis, a grateful remedy ; and we have reason to infer this from the circumstance of some patients, in a very advanced stage of the disease, expressing their partiality for it : but, unfortunately, this has only been observed during the first days of using it, for, in every instance in which it was continued for any considerable length of time, it has invariably occasioned a scanty and difficult expectoration.

‘ In all cases where the disease was far advanced, the tar-vapour aggravated the symptoms, and coughing has taken place sooner or later, according to the greater or less extent of disorganization ; and these effects have, in every case, appeared to arise from a diminution in the quantity of the expectoration. Patients with diseased lungs, as above mentioned, may remain for a considerable time under the remedy, with little or no inconvenience ; but, as soon as any considerable deficiency takes place in the expectoration, the cough, which before may have been moderate, now becomes much more frequent and distressing ; and, in most cases, this has been accompanied with increased difficulty of breathing. It may here be necessary to remark, that to an inattentive observer, and even to the patient himself, the expectoration in some cases would appear to be increased, or at least not diminished in quantity ; but, when carefully examined, will be found to be much less purulent than before the use of the vapour,—to have assumed a frothy appearance,—and to contain a much larger proportion of mucus and saliva.

‘ In one or two cases of incipient consumption, in which the tar-vapour was used, though its bad effects were not evident, yet no good apparently resulted from it. Indeed, I am sorry to say that we have not yet seen one unequivocal case of the disease in which it appeared to be of the smallest benefit, but several wherein it could hardly be said to have produced any bad effects, excepting slight head-ach and thirst ; symptoms which most patients experience on commencing the use of the remedy.’