



# XVII. A remarkable case of internal pain in the heel, and an incipient mortification, cured by the inhalation of vital air

Dr. Thorton

**To cite this article:** Dr. Thorton (1799) XVII. A remarkable case of internal pain in the heel, and an incipient mortification, cured by the inhalation of vital air , Philosophical Magazine Series 1, 3:10, 213-215, DOI: [10.1080/14786449908676984](https://doi.org/10.1080/14786449908676984)

**To link to this article:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14786449908676984>



Published online: 18 May 2009.



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XVII. *A remarkable Case of internal Pain in the Heel, and an incipient Mortification, cured by the Inhalation of Vital Air : being the Third Communication from Dr. THORNTON, Physician to the General Dispensary, and Lecturer on Medical Botany at Guy's Hospital, relative to Pneumatic Medicine.*

MRS. FRITH, æt. 45, wife of the Rev. William Frith, rector of Kentish Town, for nearly four years experienced the most violent pain in the neighbourhood of the heel, which she could compare to nothing but the burning of a caustic. Various outward applications had been made, and medicines taken internally, without any alleviation. When Mr. Cruikshank, lecturer on anatomy in the school of Dr. Hunter, called me into consultation, there was extended over the heel a wound about the size of a crown, very dark, the edges livid; and the fœtor from it was so intolerable that, when her maid had occasion to remove the dressings, she had always volatiles applied to the nostrils to prevent her from fainting. The countenance shewed a livid paleness, the pulse was quick and tremulous, and the slightest exertion produced faintings. The bark, opium, and wine, were continued. This lady inhaled also six quarts vital air mixed with twelve of atmospheric, and in a few days, as this respectable family can also testify, the livid hue of the wound disappeared, it had a more healthy appearance, and the discharge was so greatly improved, and fœtor gone, that when the smelling-bottle was presented to the servant, she said that there was not the least occasion for it. In a fortnight the sore was completely healed, the appetite restored, and countenance so greatly improved that every friend marked the sudden alteration; the violence of the internal pain lessened by degrees, and the superoxygenated air being continued for a few weeks longer, it altogether subsided; and this lady for these last six months has enjoyed

uninterrupted health, and is able, at pleasure, to walk up Highgate-hill.

As many persons might wish to see the lady's journal in her own words, I here subjoin it, with a few observations.

"September 13. 1798. First inhaled the vital air. Felt acute spasms in the chest, and fainted."

*Observation.* Artificial inhalation is accompanied with increased action of the intercostal muscles, and gives frequently afterwards a sensation of muscular pain, which speedily goes off, and after a few trials does not appear again. The second effect we always see in those very weak, and hence the expression of "*being overpowered by the air.*" Patients labouring under scurvy, if suddenly exposed to a clear air, are killed instantaneously.

"September 15. Felt a most pleasant glow after the inhalation of the vital air. Spirits also much increased, feeling as if a great weight, or oppression, was removed.

"September 16. The hardness about the heel gone, as also the foetor. Has less discharge. The wound looks redder. The glow after the inhalation of the vital air lasts for about a quarter of an hour.

"September 18. The glow, and spirits, after the last inhalation, lasted four hours. Feel wonderfully light, and pleasant.

"September 20. Asked by my apothecary, 'Whether I did not feel, from the inhalation of the vital air, an *uncomfortable heat*?' My answer was, that it produced the most pleasant glow imaginable, not at all resembling *heat*."

*Observation.* Putting the thermometer under the tongue, the sensible heat was not increased. This effect may perhaps be accounted for from the increased sensibility of the nerves; or, does the insensible perspiration raised by the capillaries of the skin being filled by the greater energy of the heart, account for this phenomenon better? I have almost invariably found the inside of the palm of the hand, after,  
and

and during the inhalation, break out in a pleasant moisture, which are parts somewhat remote from the heart.

“October 4. The pain in the heel infinitely more lively. The pain is a *new pain*; but, thanks be to God! it remits for three or four hours every day.”

These are the chief particulars: the nature of your Magazine may not admit of a further detail, nor does the nature of the case seem to require it.

*General Observation.* The change of colour in the wound, so immediately after the inhalation of the vital air, seems to indicate a remarkable change wrought in the blood. It is not, however, the temporary increase of oxygen only in the system, that this partial inhalation produces; for it renders the blood also more attractive of this principle. Hence the continuance for some time, even in London, among people of fashion, of the good looks acquired in the country; hence the pallid countenance of the man lately recovered from suffocation, or drowning; and hence also the return of the breath in patients under this treatment being more and more noxious, from a greater absorption of oxygen. The deterioration of the air inspired, has ever indicated the attractive power of the blood. Hence also it is that substances abounding in hydrogen are called cordials, from their sympathetic action on the heart, through the medium of the blood: but in the superoxygenated air we have a more direct action on the heart, without exhausting the irritable principle, and occasioning indirect debility; and I trust I shall be able to make it evident to the unprejudiced mind, that this is a great desideratum in surgery and medicine, more especially where diseases are remote from the heart; or else, why do we so frequently hear of *fore legs*, but never of *fore arms*? But, however the *modus operandi* of these new powers may be, the observance of *facts* is of greater importance; and I here beg leave publicly to thank those ingenious medical gentlemen who have honoured me with their correspondence on this subject, the result of which will be laid before the philosophic world.