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## THE CASE OF A LADY IN A SUGAR-HOUSE, WITH APHONIC, HÆMORRHAGIC, TUBERCULAR PHTHISIS IN THE SOFTENING STAGE.

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[Communicated for the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal.]

IN the autumn of 1853, before the disappearance of the terrible epidemic yellow fever which afflicted the inhabitants of the lower Mississippi so severely, although it had nearly disappeared from the city, I received a note, stating that Miss S., formerly of Philadelphia, and a patient of Dr. T., of Ohio, wished to see me at the Franklin House on Canal street. The first glimpse of the patient was sufficient to convince me that she was in the second or softening, if not in the last stage of consumption. She could not speak above a hoarse whisper, and used a white slate to communicate with those around her. There was well-marked flattening under both clavicles, showing that chronic changes had occurred in the apices. She was much emaciated, particularly about the muscles of the chest and arms, and had lost about one fourth of her weight, as was subsequently ascertained. She had pain and distressing sensations within the thorax nearly all the time, and occasionally intercostal neuralgia was superadded thereto. She had a distressing cough, particularly in the morning and evening, with expectoration—sputa viscous, containing white spots, and she said was sometimes dotted red instead of being pearly. For about eighteen months had had a permanent weakness and hoarseness of the voice—respiration jerking—pulse frequent. For many months had had streaked or tinged sputa—bloody matter, as she called it. This had been preceded by several attacks of copious hæmoptysis of florid blood. The hæmoptysis, she informed me, did not occur until after the first auscultation, and was preceded by yellow expectoration. Dulness under the clavicles and dry crepitant rattle were the physical signs when first auscultated. She said the doctor compared it to the crackling of sparks of fire when dry brush is burning. It was heard in the summit of both lungs. It is scarcely necessary to add, that it indicated unsoftened tubercle, and had nothing to do with the passing of air through mucus in the bronchial tubes, as this sound is produced external to the cells. There was no humid crepitation until after the occurrence of the hæmoptysis. She said she had always been subject to a slight cough on exposure; that for some years preceding her chest

complaint she had had chronic diarrhœa, and would have supposed that checking it had caused the pulmonary disease, if a considerable interval had not elapsed between the cure of the one and the attack of the other. She did not know that chronic diarrhœa, without evident cause, occurring in a young person, is regarded by Louis as an evidence of tubercles.

Taking all the symptoms together, the diagnosis was consumption with tubercular softening. The prescriptions of her former physicians—counter-irritants to the chest, prussic acid, cod-liver oil, and the like—plainly showed that they regarded it as a case of confirmed phthisis. They also told her so. One of them thought the last stage had come. None of them favored the idea of her leaving home with any expectation of getting well. Her mental faculties were clear, and yet she was so hopeful, that notwithstanding every discouragement she set out for the South, determined to try the sugar-house cure. On arriving at Memphis, the company with her would go no further on account of the reports of cholera and yellow fever in all the lower stem of the Mississippi. She resolutely concluded to come the balance of the journey alone—had tried on the way to get into a sugar-house, without success. She spoke French and had letters of recommendation from eminent persons in Philadelphia, Ohio and Kentucky; but being unknown to the French planters, where she happened to stop, they availed her nothing. She had left home under the mistaken impression that there were boarding-houses on or near some of the sugar-houses, where strangers could board and inhale the vapor. She desired me, if possible, to procure her a situation in one, if there were any such. I knew of none. I also gave her to understand that her case was not one which came within the class of those in which I had any certain experience of the good effects of the inhalation of the vapor of boiling cane-juice.

Having come so far, she said, she was determined to try it, at any rate, if she could possibly get admittance into a sugar-house. I explained to her the difficulty of procuring a suitable place; that the planters were generally in a state of alarm for fear of yellow fever and cholera—regarded by them as contagious—and were disinclined to receive strangers on that account. I finally recommended her to a boarding-house on Lake Borgne, kept by a very quiet and respectable woman, who was well acquainted with the neighboring planters living on the road from Lake Borgne to the city, about twenty-eight miles, passing through the battle-ground and over the territory occupied by the British army in the winter of 1814 and 1815, while their ships lay at anchor in the mouth of the Lake. Thither she went. Soon the elderly matron, who kept the boarding-house on Lake Borgne, got very tired of having to put on her spectacles so often to read the notes of the Philadelphia lady, who had become a boarder in her house. As she could not talk above a hoarse whisper, she had to communicate her wants and wishes to the landlady by writing. The landlady getting out of all patience, implored a neighboring planter to take her boarder to his sugar-house. I had informed her, that if she *would go* into a sugar-house, she was to be the *doctor* and I would be the *pupil*, and expected her to give me lessons.

I heard nothing more from her for five weeks—not knowing what plan-

tation she had gone to. On inquiring of her merchant, to whom she had brought a letter of credit, he could give no information—but supposed, from what the landlady said, that she had sunk under the disease, as he had heard nothing from her for more than a month. Ascertaining that she was at Mr. W.'s plantation, I wrote to her by special messenger, as there was no intercourse with the city, and no other means of communicating with her—no post office facilities—and soon received her reply. She said she thought she must be at the “jumping off place,” from the impossibility of communicating by letter with her friends—mine being the first one she had received for five weeks. She proceeds to say:—

“I think I could make you *hear me speak now*, for I am talking as loud as anybody, and without pain or effort at the time, though I feel soreness *after speaking*, if I make too free use of my newly-recovered power. As to my cough, *it has left me entirely*—save a little backing, when the cold air comes too suddenly in contact with my lungs. Just this little hack, occurring very seldom, puts me in such mortal pain that I take much care to avoid it. Had my cough continued longer, I could not have been so well as I am now, if alive at all, for it was like tearing away my lungs. My first bleeding came on after a twenty-four hours incessant coughing. The blood had in my mouth a hot taste. For the first few days I tried the vapor, I brought up very freely and without the least pain a quantity of frothy and other indescribable matter—but have scarcely had an expectoration for above two weeks. Occasionally a little yellowish spit reminds me of the contrast between now and *what has been*. As to the process of *inhaling*, it is the most heavenly, earthly delight I ever knew! The vapor is both most deliciously penetrating and most penetratingly delicious; hot and searching; and it forces its way, or seems to, through all the bronchial tubes, opening and giving them new life and action. It is my nature to be thorough in everything I do, and to do it with all my might. I could not get the vapor strong enough, standing or sitting by the side of the boiling juice, and so I had a little *cuddy* (I can think of no better term) cut out by the side of the battery, up high, and into this I crawl up, and there stay sometimes half, and sometimes the whole day long. Having nothing to guide me in this matter, no past experience or medical advice, I follow my own inclinations about it, and very probably do not manage it as I ought. The efforts to keep myself in as comfortable a position as possible, and yet to hang over the kettle as far as I can, without falling in, give me plenty of exercise, notwithstanding the small space I have to take it in. I can bear almost any degree of heat. The thermometer stands by my head at 110° and upwards. Yet it is none too warm. It takes that degree or more to open the pores of my skin, which is hard and dry as parchment. All my physicians have tried in vain to produce moisture upon it; but the vapor in its greatest intensity makes a sweat like rain. I get all it is possible to do in a sugar-house on my throat and chest, and think if one could take a regular bath of it, like any common vapor bath, it would cure almost any complaint. It makes me *sleepy*—is the best opiate I ever took—and the night after my first day's toil in my sugar-bath house, I slept more soundly for several hours, than I have for years; but was

awakened by a pain as great as if every limb had been racked, and the next day could scarcely bend my limbs; and sharp pains continued all over me for some time. But they passed off by degrees; and though I have ridden my sugar-hobby horse as faithfully as before, I have not been so afflicted since. But for the continued pain in my breast, around my right collar bone, the pit of my stomach, and between my shoulders, I should think I was getting well fast. This pain is not so severe while I am under the influence of the vapor. I feel it, but it is not (to speak paradoxically) painful—it is, as it were, *over-mastered*, *smothered*. At other times it is very sharp and lancinating—comes and goes suddenly. When it is on me, I feel as though it is foolish to think I shall ever be free from it, and while feeling so it is gone. When I am free from it, I almost forget that I ever had a pain in the world; and while enjoying this oblivion, back it comes again. Thus it has been for eighteen months. Yet all this time, except when prostrated by hæmorrhage from the lungs, *I have never lost my strength*. The vapor weakens me for a short time; but after a little rest, strength returns. I do not perceive that I either gain or lose flesh.”

This letter speaks for itself. The Italics, points, language and everything are all her own. Her description of intercostal neuralgia—a frequent attendant on tubercular phthisis—is drawn from nature and to the life, although she does not seem to know that it is not a part of the other pain she speaks of, as being felt nearly all the time, which is evidently pulmonary in its origin, but a superadded pain in the intercostal nerves. As she did not perceive whether she gained or lost flesh, I requested her to be accurately weighed from time to time. The discovery was subsequently made that she gained at the rate of a pound of flesh every five days. She said her healthy weight five or six years ago, when in the best health, was from 120 to 124 pounds.

“Then,” says she, “my collar bones were covered with flesh, and were not at all visible. My collar bones are still like hills in valleys, but not so protuberated as when you saw me. Blessed be the sugar-vapor.”

She was below her minimum healthy weight when she went into the sugar-house, as nearly as could be ascertained by comparing the rates of gain, some thirty pounds; and the week before she came out, she had got back about half her lost flesh—having gained some fifteen pounds. As she had adopted the extraordinary expedient of getting into the *vapor-chimney* to inhale the vapor from the boiling cane-juice in the kettles below, I asked for a particular description of her method of inhaling it. I would premise, however, that the vapor-chimney is a wide cone with its base downwards, reaching within a few feet of the tops of the kettles, to conduct off the vapor arising from the boiling cane-juice, to prevent its filling the room and obstructing the vision. Formerly there was no such contrivance—it was introduced by the American planters. On those plantations having no chimney, the whole house is full of vapor. In such my first observations were made. But where there is a vapor chimney, it is necessary to stoop over the kettles to inhale it, or to put a board or two in the flue to throw it out from the chimney. The

boilers are from four to five in number, each about six feet in diameter, and distinguished by different names, the last one being called the battery. Being disappointed in finding no vapor to inhale without leaning over the kettles, the patient had a closet or cuddy made in the chimney above the boilers—the floor of the closet being a little above the boiling juice.

*The patient's description of her method of inhalation.*—"I cannot say I ascend to my room by marble steps, but I manage to get up to it very well. The floor of my room has a carpet (a negro blanket), hung around with tapestry (coffee bags), sitting and kneeling cushions as many as it will hold. The dresses I wear were invented and made as occasion requires. I wear on my head a veil which falls in many folds around me—is now inflated and spread out in its fullest extent—now contracted and drawn in." "I will tell you how I wear it, and how it is made. Its form is circular and closed at the sides—is quite full, being four feet in width. I put it over my head entirely, so as to protect me from the dripping of the roof. I leave a little opening just large enough to take a peep through when I wish to. I can let it drop to the very kettle's brim, and receive from under it a column of vapor just as hot and as strong as I can possibly bear. The degree of heat depends greatly upon the way the wind blows and fills my sails. I learn something new every hour I sit or stand in my little prison house. The top of the board which protects me from the hot juice is about three feet high. I get on my feet and bend over the kettle. Behind me is the box containing the sugar-juice thrown out of the battery." [She means the *strike-box* where the hot syrup from the last kettle is thrown to crystallize into sugar.] "I get the benefit of this also. The two meetings of the vapor are most intensely penetrating. I wonder how I bear it. I find the more perspiration passes off, the more heat I can bear. I have every variety in my sweats. The moistening dew, the gentle shower, the heavy rain, and the stormy, perhaps the destroying deluge. *Certain I am there will be no medium to my case. It will be either kill or cure with me, and I mean it shall be.*" [The spirit of Andrew Jackson must surely still hover about the scene of his glory, and moves the *Maid of the Mist*, as the patient is called; for she utters the same sentiment that he uttered on the eve of the great battle, and almost in the same words. A great battle is going on between the all-conquering, full-grown, hæmorrhagic, tubercular phthisis gnawing at the lungs of the Philadelphia lady, and the saccharine cloud, charged with the elements of nutrition to warm-blooded animals, and destruction to the cold-blooded and the horrible beings of the microscopic world, which in all its concentrated power she has invoked to her rescue. All manner of poisonous, unhealthy and irrespirable vapors and noxious substances, in every form, have been directed against phthisis tuberculosa, but the disease being of a deadly, poisonous, irrespirable nature itself, it has flourished under them so greatly, that the more learning the less faith physicians have in any measure whatever to arrest its fatal progress.] "Sometimes I get so weak I can hardly get to my bed—not faint, exactly, but so like sinking down. There for an hour or more sometimes do I lie, seeing before me all the boiling kettles,

and feeling as though I should burn up alive. I do not lose my consciousness. Still I feel as if enveloped in mist that burns instead of melting, and everything is dark and cloudy. Yet after this has passed away, I am well and strong as before. By means of my veil I am able to let the vapor reach the whole surface of my chest, under my arms, and my arms themselves their whole length. My pains have greatly lessened, but still continue—less between my shoulders now, but higher up than they used to be. I think the left lobe of my lungs has healed. I have but little pain in that side now. My most pain is around and just below the right collar bone and close to my shoulder.” \* \*

“You ask if time hangs heavy? I answer, no. When the sparkling *sirup* is full of bubbles, and the scum in each kettle is all passed off, then the loud laugh begins and the ludicrous song, and the cry is given to *fire up*—the skimmers are laid by, and all hands heave the bucket together. Think you that the Maid of the Mist, peeping out from the clouds around her to gaze on the sublimity of the terrestrial scenes below, and then retreating as the thick rising waves enfold her in their sweet embrace, feels time hang heavy? I have to work hard and fast to keep the perspiration well wiped off.” \* \* “The vapor smoke does not smut, but makes my face and skin shine like a mirror.”

*The mode of drinking the hot cane-juice.*—“I have my own way of drinking the cane-juice, and I practise with this as with the vapor. I take it from the flambeau”—[the kettle next to the battery, there being no *prop* in that sugar-house.] “I sour it with lemon juice—use two or three a-day. I drink from a teacupful to a pint in ten or twelve hours, and take it before retiring to rest.”

*Her diet.*—“I use what I like best—live principally on sweet potatoes, for which I have a most unromantic craving—eggs, milk, rice, oysters, wild duck and fish; but my great stand-by is the potato, which I never take a meal without, besides keeping a sort of general munch at them all day long. I am living utterly regardless of system; nobody meddles with me. All do pretty much as I do—follow their own wills. So (to use a favorite expression of the darkies), I have a *first-rate* time in getting along.”

*What Uncle Harry, the black sugar-maker, says.*—“The black sugar-maker says he sees the *blood-grains* coming in my face every day, and that it does him good. Please admire this expression or term, *blood-grains*. It is expressive, technical, full of meaning. You know they test the syrup to see when it comes to the sugar point, by dipping in a ladle. When grains appear on this—granulous drops I suppose I should say—the moment has come for taking out the juice. Now what could be better than his idea of *blood-grains*? The rosy tinge of the novelist and poet is nothing to it—that phrase is surfeiting—’tis original. Once I was foolish enough to correct the phraseology of the blacks—to change their *fotch* and *brung* into bring and brought; I have a purer taste now, and like to see everything in keeping. I have every help in the way of kindness from all around. The white sugar-maker is very sweet in his way; but the black is chivalrously devoted—seems to connect my recovery with the reputation of the plantation—says he shall be *ashamed*

if I do not get well. I gain flesh, and my arms are more solid." \* \* "That stricture in my breast is all gone. I can throw my arms back now where they belong and used to stay before my illness. They have life now; they hung like aching weights before."

*What Aunt Susan, the asthmatic woman, says.*—"I took the phthisical woman up to breathe the vapor. She dislikes it very much—says it is harder work than cutting corn in the field." [In asthma the lung is already too thin and expanded; in consumption the lung substance is more or less condensed. Hence the vapor, so useful in expanding the compressed tissues and enabling the air to permeate and expand the contracted parenchyma in consumption, causes a sensation of great fatigue in asthma.]

*A little girl cured of a croupy cough.*—"I cured a little black girl I have in my room to keep the ghosts off of nights, of a croupy cough, by making her inhale the vapor. Cured her in half a day, cough and all."

*The sugar-house vapor causes the expulsion of the tubercles from the lungs, transformed into crystals of cholesterine, perhaps.*—"La voila! The awful, awful hot vapor, I described to you, has dislodged and brought up from unknown depths little rice-like and other very hard, irregular-shaped particles, that from their antique appearance look as though they might have taken root in my lungs as far back as the cradle. They are probably what remained when I had not strength to raise all that ought to have come up. I can only state facts, and tell what I think is the cause of them."

*Her opinion of Physicians.*—"I had the best. They gave me due warning of the state of my lungs before they set up their flaming-red banner." [She alludes to hæmoptysis.] "I have spent a good portion of my life with those of your profession, and have friends and relations who are doctors, and my whole existence, in short, has been so connected with them, that some how I have got to think that I am half a doctor myself. Then they understand a body so well, too, and have such liberal views of men and things; they are the easiest people in the world to get along with, though they are apt to disagree among themselves." \* \* "They told me that besides the revelations of auscultation, there was evidence enough that my lungs were deeply implicated." \* \* "Do you know Dr. Hunt, editor of the Buffalo Medical Journal? Though not my doctor, he stethoscoped my lungs." [Dr. Hunt is remembered as one of the most polite and good-natured of those, who hastily confounded my advocacy of a great truth—the Willardian theorem, that the chief motive power of the blood is located in the lungs and derived from respiration—with the Willardian theory or hypothesis that caloric, generated in the lungs, circulates the blood—an hypothesis built upon another hypothesis, long since exploded, that respiration is a veritable combustion. The progress of physiology has put out the fire in the lungs from which Mrs. Willard derived her caloric to circulate the blood, and while utterly demolishing her hypothesis every foot of its progress—the doctrine of cell life and an active circulation in embryos before the heart is formed—is tending to demonstrate the great truth first announced by her, the American *Filia nata Jovis*, that it is not the heart, but respi-

ration or rather oxygenation, from which the chief motive power that circulates the blood is derived. Much merriment, at my expense, has been indulged in by writers in the medical journals, and even in the National Intelligencer, attributing to me the folly of being an advocate of Mrs. Willard's untenable hypothesis, because my experiments on alligators had demonstrated the truth of a most important physiological principle, which she had been the first to announce. Prof. Theophilus Thompson, of London, has, in a recent work, not scrupled to appropriate Mrs. Willard's *practice*, founded on her *theorem*, to himself, without giving her credit for one or the other. See his work, "Clinical Lectures on Pulmonary Consumption," page 216, where he says "*I cannot but think that some of the evils incident to intense study might be obviated by occasionally pausing to practise breathing.*" He surely ought to know, what nearly every intelligent physician of America knows, and what the weaker brethren have been laughing at, that Mrs. Willard has for many years been putting in practice on her numerous pupils, and recommending in her writings, the very thing which he suggests. If he knew it, he ought to have given her credit for it; and if in doing justice to a woman, he brought on himself a storm of ridicule, as has been my lot, he ought to have stood and took it.]

*How goes the battle between the sugar-house vapor and tubercular phthisis?*—Let the Maid of the Mist proclaim the victory. "To-day I take my last vapor inhalation, and shall feel when leaving the cuddy in the chimney as though I were leaving my last, best and only friend. I passed yesterday in making flags and banners for the row [ball] at the brake up. I am going to try my hand at fancy cooking for the darkies—to help get them up a supper. I AM CURED! Yes, even I, the given out to die. All around tell me of the great improvement in my looks. I do not hold much intercourse with a mirror; but I have an inward glass in my feelings, which gives quite as true a report. I could tell you of *test-acts*, infinite in number, proving that I am cured. First, of an accidental one. I got into a boat to see if I could row myself. I was making fine head way, when I lost my balance and fell splash into the water—had a complete immersion. A black woman took me out, and though I had to drag my wet garments quite a distance, yet *I did not take a bit of cold.* Lately, instead of going to bed after inhaling the vapor, as I did a month ago, I go immediately out and exercise actively in the open air, and feel better by it."

*The ball.*—"The neighbors were invited to the ball. It rained, and they had to stay all night. I sat up and paddled about all night from the house to the ball-room (an open barn), and to the kitchen, in the wet and rain. I felt well."

*A week after the ball.*—"Half the blacks on the place have been made sick by the unlucky rain on the ball and supper night—have sore throats and cough. I have been indisposed myself in the same way, but am better than the sick black ones."

*Two weeks after the ball.*—"I am remarkably well—no pain—no cough—no expectoration—no sore throat, and have the use of my voice—which becomes a little hoarse, however, after much loud speaking."

*Last account, Sept. 11th, 1854.*—Patient reports that she continues well, and resigns her place in the sugar-house to a consumptive friend—not intending to return. She says, after much loss of rest in nursing the sick and exposure, she expectorated a little yellow matter, and thinks it came from a small spot in her lungs—retains her voice, which only becomes a little hoarse after much loud speaking—has spit no blood, not a drop, since last winter—has been free from fever, pain or cough, and has her strength. She concludes her letter by saying that, “No inward medicine, no outward appliances, have the effect of the vapor in removing pain and oppression from the chest.”

*Canal st., New Orleans, Sept. 28, 1854.*

## MEDICAL CASES AT THE MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL.

REPORTED BY R. M. HODGES, M.D.

**CASE 1.**—*Puerperal Convulsions two months after delivery. Under the care of DR. M. S. PERRY.*—H. M. Irish. Married female. Entered Hospital, Aug. 2d, and was unable to give any account of herself. It was learned from a friend that she was confined two months since. The delivery was easy and natural, and her previous health had been good. She got up in about one week and put her hands into cold water to assist in washing; was taken with fever the next day and has kept her bed ever since, being delirious most of the time. Has had several attacks of convulsions lasting four or five minutes; but none for the last two weeks. Lochia persisted five weeks, gradually diminishing. Bowels constipated. Urine light colored.

Aug. 3d.—Nurse reports her to be sleepy, but easily roused, lying apparently insensible except when spoken to. Skin natural. Pulse feeble, 60. Pupils contract under the influence of light. Respiration 24, and no unusual fulness of abdomen. Was ordered a cathartic and Hoffman's anodyne.

Aug. 4th.—After apparent improvement since previous visit, she had a severe convulsion lasting two or three minutes. She had had no dejection since entrance, nor passage of urine. She was therefore ordered an enema of soap suds and turpentine, and catheterism. R. Hydrarg. sub. mur., grs. ij.; ext. cicutæ, gr. j. M. Every four hours. If the convulsions returned she was to have ten leeches to temples. The head is to be kept cool and the feet warm.

5th.—Has had one convulsion. Now lies stupid and breathing stertorously. Skin hot. Pulse 60, full. Pupils more dilated. Cannot be roused. Swallows with difficulty. Having had no free dejection from the enema, is to have two drops of croton oil every three hours until free catharsis. Continue the pills and apply a blister to back of neck, and cataplasms to feet.

6th.—No convulsions; two free dejections after four doses of oil. Not quite so stupid as yesterday. Breathing less stertorous. Skin still hot. Pulse 84, soft and full. Pupils more contracted. Does not answer