

AN
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION

ON
Dysentery
of

Warren & Simpson, Counties, Ky., (1854)

SUBMITTED TO THE
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BY

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OF

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Within the last few years, Dysentery has prevailed extensively in our large districts of Country, in the Middle and Southern States, and has very properly engaged a large share of Medical attention.

Although abler pens than mine have written largely about it, I feel justified in continuing the examination of the subject, from the fact, that there yet, exists the greatest variety of Opinions, as to its origin, nature, and treatment. During the months of June, July, August, and September, (1854) My Preceptors have been actively engaged in combating this formidable disease, and I have had daily opportunities of examining it in relation to its origin, nature, and treatment, and though my opinion may not differ

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from those of the Core of the profes-
-ion. They will form many of the
Journal Contributors of the present
day,- and, if, I give reliable facts,
That may strengthen a proper confi-
-dence as I conceive in the one,
and, lessen that too fatally reposed.
Sometimes in the other, I, shall be
Compensated for my trouble -

I shall only speak of what, I
believe, to be the Cause, and treatment
of that Character of Dysentery, that
I have examined in this, and, the
adjoining County, where it has most
extensively prevailed - In order
more readily to appreciate the argu-
-ents, I shall offer, in Support of
the view I shall give, of its,
Origin and Cause, - It will be -

necessary to premise a few remarks
 upon the topography of the Country
 Season Climate &c— Warren & Simpson
 Counties constitute a part of that large
 Tract of Country in the Green River
 known, once, by the general name of
 Barrens, but, now covered with a low
 growth of Blackjack, Hickory and Post
 Oak.— The surface of the Country gen-
 -erally level, interspersed with districts
 of Considerable extent denominated Flats,
 which receive during the wet seasons,
 the surplus water which falls and retain
 it during many weeks of dry weather,
 but dry up gradually until finally
 the surface of the most watery districts
 are entirely dry, as, during last
 Summer and Fall— The soil of these
 Barrens is a rich regulated loam—

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underlain with an almost impermeable red Clay, into which the Oxide of Iron enters largely. The result of which is, that large and small ponds are formed in almost every sink, or low place, requiring to be drained to prevent their spread. These numerous Ponds which are of such Convenience to the Farmer for watering his Stock, dry up generally during a dry season and expose their filthy beds to the Sun, and become a source of Malignant Typh, of which every intelligent Observer is aware, and so much dreaded, are they. of late years, that, the Farmers submit to the greatest inconvenience rather than have them near his House when he can avoid it. During the Spring and the first half of June the Country was drenched

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With rain, every surface reservoir was full to overflowing, and the most luxuriant crop of vegetation known for many years existed in an almost mature state by the middle of July—

The warm season set in early beginning with May, and continuing without intermission to the middle of September. From the 15th of June to the last of September there was but one rain that wet the ground over an inch deep, with a temperature during the entire time, such as not even the oldest inhabitant ever experienced, ranging from 90 to 103 the greater part of the time—

From these facts I think, the intelligent medical mind cannot resist the conclusion that, Malarial disease in some shape or other must have prevailed, over

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This district of Country, this Summer,
And, the facts in the premises will,
I think vindicate the Correctness of the
Conclusion.—

On the 18th of June, (after the rains)
The weather being very wet and warm,
The Cholera made its appearance in
Bowling Green, and prevailed during
some ten or fifteen days, affecting a
considerable portion of the population
lightly, and a small portion fatally,—
As the Cholera subsided, Dysentery and
Other lighter and affections followed,
and, continued with Considerable force
until the waters were thoroughly dried
from the Earth, in, and about Town.
When the Town, gradually became as-
healthy as usual, It required no great
length of time for the Malarial

Causes to subside. Within and about Town,
 much pains having been taken for
 many years to remove all cause of disease,
 by Macadamising, Paving &c =
 The result was as the Malarial Theorist
 might expect, within twenty five or
 thirty days after the drouth set in,
 the Town and vicinity were thoroughly
 dry, and disease altogether subsided.

The disease made its appearance in those
 parts of the County and neighbouring
 Counties, heretofore described as either
 low and marshy or staided over with
 Ponds, and prevailed with great
 violence during the latter part of June,
 July and August and the first
 half of September. When, the Country
 having become almost perfectly dry
 The disease gradually subsided until

The country was comparatively healthy—
 The decline of the disease began, the
 first of September during the most
 intense heat of the season, and had
 almost entirely subsided by the 20th,
 The weather still being warm and
 dry, showing clearly that it was
 a disease of Malarial origin, subject
 to the laws that control that ~~great~~
 class of affections—

If I am asked why Dysentery, and
 not some other form of Malarial
 affection, was the result; in this case,
 I could answer it by reference to the
 fact, that diseases, universally
 admitted to be Miasmatic, are very
 various under different circumstances,
 probably owing, to some not very well
 understood cause, or to some difference

In the force, or strength, of the Malarial poisons. The various forms of Bilious fevers are ~~not~~ more alike, than, Dysentery and any one of them, For besides the discharge of blood, there is a close family likeness between them all, showing the identity of their cause, — It is not more at variance with the general characteristics of Malarial disease, that the Bowels should be the seat of its effect, as, in Dysentery, than, that, the nervous and vascular systems should be in the production of ague and Fever.

A great variety of Theories, or Opinions, exist in relation to the Cause and nature of Dysentery, which have very naturally led to a great variety, of Modes of Treatments, — One author ascribes it to

Animalcules, which, being inhaled into the Lungs find their way to the Rectum and Colon, This is a Theory upon a mere supposition, without any reasonable or demonstrable facts to sustain it, and would be unworthy of notice but for the fact that, a practice has been adopted to suit it in some sections of the country, which, if not positively injurious, must be utterly inefficent in grave cases, which, indeed has been, proved, during the present epidemic, — It is to be regretted, that, a disease that prevails over so great a portion of the Earth and destroys so many thousands of our race annually should not be well enough understood, by the Profession, generally to have a settled Theory

and mode of treatment, - Thousands
 are annually sacrificed to false theories
 and false practice in part too, by
 Physicians. who understand and treat
 other diseases well - The apparent
 topical nature of the disease and the
 success now and then, in mild cases,
 of simple domestic remedies, as astringents,
 and anodynes, have lead, at times,
 the regular Physician to the use of
 empirical means - The present Epid-
 -emic has been the death of the
 reputation of many Quack remedies
 by failing to be relieved by their
 agency; while a proper treatment
 regulated by those principles deducible
 from the nature of the Cause and
 Pathology have been eminently succe-
 -ssful - I have said that the

Cause of Dysentery is identical, or similar in its essential properties and effects, with that to which we ascribe the Bilious fevers of this, and other warm Latitudes, and the inference I derive from this Theory, is, that, Dysentery should be treated in the main, upon the principles of other Malarial fevers, — In a critical Comparison of the pathological phenomena of Dysentery, and other forms of Malarial fevers we see such a general resemblance, as to leave but little doubt as to their identity in nature and cause, — In the present fatal Epidemic, the first indication of disease in the graver Cases were general lassitude, indisposition to active exercise, heavy, dull aching of head back and

limbs, slightly Coated Tongue, and quick pulse, with the temperature of the Skin more or less increased, these symptoms existed in greater or less force, sometimes for twelve, at other times twenty four hours. before the Flux discharges commenced. generally but not, always there was soreness or tenderness, rather acute pains in the bowels. In the beginning of the attack there was more or less hepatic Congestion, and derangement, with a slight yellow tinge of the Conjunctiva— As the mucous and bloody discharges increased, the pains in the bowels increased, with all the other general febrile symptoms. The pulse full quick and strong, Skin hot, whether moist or dry. perspiration easily induced and generally

Occurring, sometimes during each twenty four hours at this, the second period of the disease, the inflammation of the bowels became the leading or prominent symptom, - discharges, that had been mostly mucous now changed almost entirely to blood, often of a dark and grumous appearance, with constant inclination to go to stool, attended with the most excruciating pains -

As the disease extended upon the bowels the pulse often having been very full and strong began gradually to give way to become weak and quick, the skin that had been hot, whether dry or moist, now became cooler especially at the extremities with cold perspiration, with a little increase of these death closed the scene -

No stimulation could long postpone the event for, the reason that gangrene of the bowels had taken place or that, extent of inflammation ~~and~~ Congestion which was inconsistent with any living function. In many cases the phenomena of Congestive Billious fever were prominent for some days without any indication of Dysentery; but in nearly every case of the kind, in the Flux districts, Dysenteric symptoms were sure to make their appearance, sometimes, after the violence of the febrile symptoms had so much abated that further medicine was thought unnecessary. even, after the patient was Convalescent with good appetite, The Dysenteric symptoms, would set in with considerable violence Confining the patient after many days longer.

It was remarked, in nearly every instance that in those cases of Dysentery, ushered in by a violent Congestive Chill, that there was no return of any distinct chill, whether Quinine was given or not. The force of the disease seeming to be expended upon the bowels.

The tendency this season has been to disease of the bowels the reason why, I leave others to determine. Here is a disease described as it appeared in this section and the points of resemblance to Malarial fevers are so numerous and striking as to establish in my mind at least, their common origin and the propriety of a common treatment, with such modifications as will adapt it to the one, single peculiarity, the inflammation of the

Bowels. The success of the practice of my Preceptors in this disease, during four months, which, I had daily opportunities of witnessing gives me the greatest Confidence in its superiority over the mixed practices of so many of the profession. Their treatment consisted in, the first stage or first manifestations of disease, In. freely opening the bowels with a mercurial and fallap Cathartic which was repeated until free bilious secretions were established, - after this, Castor Oil or Rochelle Salts. were used to regulate the actions upon the bowels, - just as soon as the pulses would bear it, which was generally in twenty four or thirty six hours. The Lancing was freely used and repeated as often as the fever

returned, it was their rule to keep the fever down without fail. as the safety of the bowels depended upon subduing the inflammation that progresses so rapidly in the disease. — Before free bleeding to avoid congestion. from it, the liver was gotten in action. Then, depletion could be carried to the proper extent by the lancet. safely. as it can be in congestive fevers, after the system is under the influence of Quinine. — I think I know of some fatal cases from the too free use of the lancet, in the hands of some practitioners. — When the liver was in a torpid condition, congestion was increased and fatal results followed as a consequence. This will not happen in flux where the liver is under

The influence of Calomel- If There is a doubt about the Condition of the Liver. The bleedings should be left at a time, and be repeated at intervals to suit this view of the case.

The bowels were not harassed by purgatives, but were kept freely open and ~~never~~ suffered to be locked up for any great length of time by anodynes. It being essential that proper actions from the bowels should be kept up to counteract the inflammatory action that was going on there.- After the free use of the lancet purgatives cease to give pain by their actions.- operations from the upper bowels, as the phrase was. always gave relief and were generally easy- Cold elm. or Starch

injections were freely given, both with the view to assist the action of medicine and to cool and allay inflammation of the lower bowels. cups, or leeches were applied over the abdomen in the direction of the Colon. Sometimes anodynes were added to ease and procure sleep. but never when they could be avoided, if there existed fever or inflammatory symptoms, when these had subsided they came in to answer a good purpose. The temptation to give anodynes is very great from the urgent demands of the patient for ease, and my own opinion is, that, many lives have been lost by the use of this seductive remedy, which often lures to destroy, I know that

There is a great deal of importance attached to Opium, as a remedy in high inflammatory diseases. - And - undoubtedly is, a valuable remedy in many diseases of that character.

But in the present epidemic, I am satisfied that I have seen fatal results follow a big dose of Opium. - So rapid was the progress the disease made, that, the patient would be past all hope of recovery before the influence of the anodyne was off. We would not object, to it in the more mild cases, but, believe it to be a valuable auxiliary - But I repeat, when the disease assumes so malignant a character, as the one, I have been endeavouring to describe. The administration of it requires the utmost caution

until the violence of the inflammation has been reduced. Ten hours of ease procured by a prompt anodyne, as the term was, has proved fatal by allowing the inflammation to make progref, while under the delusion that ease was safety.—

The diverse opinions among men of eminence in regard to the efficacy of Mercurials. The lancet & Opium, make it a matter of difficulty, often for the young Physician to adopt a particular practice in Dysentery, with any great degree of Confidence, that it is the best.— In advocating the Mercurial mode of treating this disease, I know that I differ from some of the most distinguished Medical men in the profession.— They say

The Calomel practice is mischievous and often destructive and that, and that Calomel combined with Opium, gives the mineral an additional power for mischief. "But Mercury combined with cathartics often cut the disease short."

There is such a paradox in this recommending and condemning of Calomel that it is difficult to decide whether they are in earnest either way—Calomel alone or with a little Opium will not do but combined with Aloes Scammony and the like it is admirably suited to an inflamed bowel, especially if followed with Opium enough to stupify the brain. How long they permit the bowels to be locked up with this anodyne they do not tell us. But, there is one thing we do know

That 5 or 6 grs of Opium will so
Constipate the bowels that a large amount
of Cathartic medicine is necessary to
Overcome it within the next twenty-
four hours after such an anodyne.

That this Contradictory practice should
be attended with good results is
what we are not authorised to expect
and does not, or ought not to astonish
any one that good medicines lose
reputation, in such bad associations.

When Dysentery prevails without
any symptoms of Hepatic derangement.
I am satisfied that the non Mercurial
practice is better adapted to the treat-
-ment of the disease. - But on the
Contrary when it is complicated with
unmistakable evidence of derangement
of the liver, Calomel, I think is

decidedly indicated. Nay it is indispensable to the proper treatment, in such complications. - When the disease has assumed a low Typhoid Character we would not think of dosing a patient with Calomel, or of curing him with the lancet and purgatives. but would treat it as Typhoid Fever, for it can only be distinguished from genuine typhoid fever, before death, by the history of the case, As to Dysentery, or any of the forms of Intermittent fever running into Typhoid. I do not believe, and the post Mortem examinations bear me out in this assertion - We should be able to make these distinctions. Not confine ourselves to any one class of Remedies