

REMARKS  
ON  
CANCERUM ORIS,  
AND  
THE GANGRENOUS EROSION OF THE CHEEK OF MR. DEASE AND  
DR. UNDERWOOD,  
AND MORE PARTICULARLY ON  
THE EFFICACY OF THE CHLORATE OF POTASH, IN THE  
TREATMENT OF THOSE DISEASES.  
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READ MARCH 28TH, 1843.

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CANCERUM ORIS has been described as a disease, as mild in character as the phagedæna of the cheek is severe. When, however, the former has been neglected, it frequently becomes so similar to the latter, both in appearance and in the extent of its ravages, that they have appeared to me to be one and the same disease, only differing in the degree of severity, but depending on the same morbid condition of the body. To prevent my being misunderstood as to the disease over which I have found this remedy to possess such power, I will briefly describe it.

It commences by small ulcers, either on the inside of the cheek, or at the point of junction of the mucous membrane of the cheek and gums, or in

the gums themselves, separating them from the teeth: they are very tender and painful, and attended with profuse salivation; the breath soon becomes tainted with an offensive smell, not unlike the mercurial foetor: if the disease is neglected, the ulceration goes on to destroy the gums, the teeth loosen and fall out, the alveoli are laid bare; at the same time the brown ragged ulcer spreads rapidly on the inside of the cheek, the integuments over the spot corresponding to the ulcer become hard, swollen, at first white and afterwards of a dull red colour, and shortly a black spot appears in the centre, which quickly spreads and destroys more or less of the cheek; and if the child survive, it is sadly disfigured, and not unfrequently loses the power of opening its mouth, from the unyielding nature of the cicatrix; but more commonly, if the disease has extended its ravages to this extent, it sinks and dies.

In all cases that have fallen under my observation, it has been quite clear that the mortification of the integuments has succeeded to the ulceration of the internal parts; for when my attention has been called to the hard, swollen, and painful state of the cheek, as if that were the only disease, I have invariably found, on examination, the brown ragged ulcer on the inside;—the contrary, however, appears to be the case in the account given of it by Mr. James, in his work on inflammation, for he writes, “that the ulceration of the gums succeeds the swelling and hardness of the cheek,” and Dr. Mar-

shall Hall's description, in the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal, agrees with that of Mr. James ; for he states, " that children are liable to a particular affection of the face, which *begins* with pain, hardness, swelling, and slight erythematous redness, and terminates in the formation of a spreading eschar and ulcer." Whatever difference there may be in the commencement of these diseases, in their advanced and aggravated state they become so similar that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to determine in which of the two ways each individual case had begun. It has been remarked, that these diseases most often occur in winter, and this coincides with what I have seen of them, but I have noticed that they are more frequent at the commencement of the cold weather, particularly when it is both wet and cold : although this may be the general rule, it is not uncommon to meet with cases at all seasons, and the fatal one which will be detailed, occurred in August, during very fine weather.

It has been remarked to me by an old and very experienced physician who first directed my attention particularly to Cancrum Oris, that he had known it occasionally attack several children in the same family almost simultaneously ; and once or twice during a practice of forty years, cases of it were so prevalent in the town in which he practised, that it appeared something like an epidemic ; this, however, never occurred during the sixteen years that I lived and practised there.

The general appearance of the children afflicted with these diseases was extremely unhealthy, they were pale and cold, their flesh flabby and soft, and the secretions very offensive and unnatural. Before giving the chlorate of potash, when it has been possible to induce the child to swallow an aperient, I have given in the first place a dose of rhubarb and sulphate of potash with a grain of calomel; but generally the pain and tenderness of the mouth has been so great that it has not been feasible. I have therefore given the chlorate at once, and have waited a day or two, until the mouth has become less tender, and then have ordered the aperient.

The quantity of the salt that I have been in the habit of prescribing varies from twenty to sixty grains, according to the age of the child, in divided doses in twenty-four hours, dissolved in water; the beneficial effect is often observed on the following day, almost always on the second; the disagreeable foetor soon lessens, the sores put on a healthy reparative action, the dribbling of saliva diminishes, and if there is mere ulceration it very speedily heals, if there is an eschar, it soon separates, and the sore granulates kindly. In no other disease did I ever see the beneficial effects of any medicine so soon manifested, as that of the chlorate of potash in these diseases. It is sometimes advisable, indeed necessary, that the aperient should be occasionally repeated.

## CASE I.

— Hutchins, ætat.  $3\frac{1}{2}$ , was brought to me, having a sore mouth, he was pale and haggard, flesh soft and flabby, the surface of the body was cold, pulse quick and weak, and he appeared to suffer much in his mouth, the saliva continually dribbled away, and the breath very offensive, so like the mercurial odour that I attributed the state of his mouth to the effect of calomel. With some difficulty I was enabled to examine his mouth, the gums were in a state of ulceration, particularly on the right side, and there was a brown ragged ulcer in the inside of the cheek; on the outside, corresponding to it, there existed a hard painful swelling, with a slight blush of inflammation on it, the tongue as well as I could see it was sodden, and swelled, and indented at its edges by the teeth;—the belly was large, and the alvine evacuations very offensive, and the food passed but little digested; the child had been pale and ailing for some time, but the state of the mouth had only been observed three or four days, and was getting rapidly worse. I prescribed the following mixture: *R. Potassæ chloratis* ʒss *syr. simplicis* ʒj *aquæ* ʒxi *misce.*:—a tea spoonful to be taken every hour, or oftener if possible. On the following day the smell of the breath was much less disagreeable, the salivation considerably lessened. On the succeeding day the ulceration of the gums was evidently checked, and the tenderness had much diminished,

so that an examination was made with much less difficulty; the ulcer on the cheek had begun to put on a more healthy action, and the external swelling was lessened. The same remedy was continued, and a grain of calomel, with eight of rhubarb and twelve of sulphate of potash, was ordered for the morning: this cleared out the bowels of offensive stools, and the child appeared in every respect better, the brown ragged appearance of the ulcers had given place to a more healthy surface, which was rapidly healing. The plan was pursued for a week longer, by which time the child was perfectly sound. This rapid progress has been made, without exception, in every case in which I have given this medicine, when there has been no eschar. In those cases where there has been one, more time has been required to throw off the slough, but all have shown almost immediately the power of this medicine in arresting the disease.

*CASE II.*

William ———, ætat. 3, the son of a turnpike keeper, who lived on the top of a hill in the purest air, was brought to me October 5th; he was pale and sickly, and had been out of health for some weeks; he had refused his food for several days, from great soreness in his mouth; the cheek on one side was occupied by an ill-conditioned ulcer, extending to the gums, they were spongy and separated

from the teeth ; the cheek was swelled, hard and painful, of its natural colour ; the child's belly was full and tense, and the evacuations very unhealthy.

I ordered a mixture containing potassæ chloratis  $\text{ʒij}$  syr. simplicis  $\text{ʒij}$  aquæ  $\text{ʒiiss}$ ,—of which he was to take a dessert spoonful occasionally, so that the whole was taken in twenty-four hours. When I saw him two days after, the 7th, the ulceration was arrested and healing. An aperient of calomel, rhubarb, and sulphate of potash, was ordered for him, and to continue the chlorate ; at the end of the week his cheek was perfectly healed.

With the exception of the following case all have terminated favourably ; and in this, the child lived sufficiently long to show the beneficial influence of the remedy.

### CASE III.

In August 1836, I was requested to see a child, a girl between 5 and 6 years old, who had been under the care of another practitioner. I found almost the whole cheek of the right side in a state of mortification, quite black, which was rapidly increasing, with a margin of dusky-red inflammation without the slightest trace of separation ; some teeth had fallen out, and others were loose, the gums having been eaten away by the phagedænic ulcera-

tion ; almost the whole inner part of the cheek was one large foul ulcer, the stench was most foetid—the pulse was rapid and fluttering, and the extremities cold. The attention of the mother had been attracted to the state of the mouth a week before, by the child's complaining of the soreness of it, and by its refusing all kinds of food excepting liquids, and by the salivation. Medical assistance had been called in, but the ulceration continued its ravages, and a black spot had been observed first, four days before I saw it, in the centre of the part which had been previously swelled. Without hope of benefit I ordered the following mixture : ℞. Potassæ chloratis ℥ij syr. simp. ℥ij aquæ ℥iſs misce.—two tea spoonfulls to be taken every hour ; and that as much of the salt should be taken as possible, I ordered two more scruples to be dissolved in a wine-glass of port wine with as much water, the whole of which was to be given during the next twelve hours, or sooner if possible : at the expiration of that time, I fancied there was less disagreeable smell, and the child appeared to have rallied a little ; I therefore ordered the chlorate to be continued in the same quantities : on the following day the smell had certainly diminished, and there was a slight crack between the dead and living parts ; this separation increased so much during the next twenty-four hours, that it showed the disease was arrested. On the following day, the edges of the eschar began to separate, and the internal ulceration had put on a more healthy appearance, but during the following night



the child sank and died. I certainly then thought, that had the medicine been given before the disease had proceeded so far, it would have saved the child, although at the expense of a portion of the cheek. The only external application was a poultice, wetted with a weak solution of the chloride of lime.

That the foetid smell from these sores should be removed quickly by this salt is not surprising, as doubtless in the struggles with the child to oblige it to swallow, the sores were frequently brought in contact with the medicine, when of course it acted as a topical application, and destroyed the smell, as the chlorates are known to do when applied to external sores; but that there should be so speedy an improvement in every particular feature of the case has always struck me with astonishment, and not until many successive cases occurred to me, did I give a full credence to the power of it; but the experience of nearly twenty years, during which time I have again and again administered it, and I may say with almost invariably good result, if given before the child has been much exhausted,—leave me no room to doubt its peculiar value in these and some other analogous diseases. I am also borne out in this opinion by the experience of two or three medical friends, who were induced to try it on my suggestion. At some future day I may, perhaps, be allowed to lay before the Society my experience of this remedy in the other diseases to which I have alluded—when I hope to be better prepared to offer

some explanation as to the manner in which it operates so quickly and beneficially:

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Since this paper was read, the following case occurred in St. George's Hospital, under the care of Mr. Cæsar Hawkins,—to whom I am indebted for it.

Selina Gingham, seven years of age, was admitted into St. George's Hospital May 12th, having suffered from ulceration in the mouth, for at least seven weeks, during five of which she had been under treatment at a dispensary, which had not prevented the disease from slowly spreading; it is probable that the ulcers had existed for some time before they were discovered, as her breath had been observed to be very offensive; she had had measles a year before, but appeared to be in very fair health, and had not suffered from any privations.

The external surface of the right cheek appeared somewhat swelled and stiff, when she tried to act with the muscles of that side, but was not inflamed: on the inside the whole mucous surface of the cheek and lips, opposite to the gums of both jaws, was ulcerated and covered by a thin ash-coloured slough, the ulcer extending from the central incisors to the last molares. The gums of both jaws were soft and spongy, and dark coloured and swollen, and a little loosened from the teeth, and bled slightly when touched, and the teeth themselves were encrusted

with offensive sordes and detached lymph and slough : —the edge of the tongue, where it came in contact with the teeth and gums, was in the same state of superficial ulceration as the cheek. The secretion was very offensive, but the ulcers were not painful.

13th. Having been admitted after my visit yesterday, I did not see her till to-day, and the ulcers had spread slightly since the previous day. The mouth was ordered to be washed with a gargle, containing one-twentieth of solution of chloride of lime ; a powder consisting of three grains of hydrarg. cum creta and ten of rhubarb was given to her, and she was directed to take a scruple of chlorate of potash thrice daily in pimento water.

15th. The ulcer along the cheek was healed, except a narrow line between the teeth, and the tongue was quite healed, and the gums were much improved in appearance.

17th. Only a small ulcer remains opposite to the last molar tooth.

19th. The gums were again inclined to bleed, and were a little swollen, and the tongue was much loaded ; a small vesicle had formed again on the lip. The aperient powder was repeated, and the dose of chlorate increased to half 'a drachm.

22nd. Sore perfectly healed, and the appearance of the gums nearly natural.

The chlorate was continued two or three days more, and the girl left the hospital on the 31st ; and I heard a few days ago that she continued well.

The ulceration in this case was in a form that I have often cured by ordinary means, and it never had any tendency to rapid sloughing; my impression is, however, that the very marked improvement effected in two days was greater than I had ever before seen from other plans of treatment, and I am induced to anticipate much from this medicine, in more urgent cases of this serious and troublesome complaint.

I am, &c.

CÆSAR HAWKINS.

Grosvenor Street, June 21, 1843.

P.S.—The child came to my house on the 5th of July, having a slight return of her complaint, in a small part of the surface previously affected; for this I prescribed the chlorate of potash again, and when she showed herself on the 13th, it was quite healed.

C. H.