A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO

Extracted from an early issue of *The Practitioner*

CASE STUDY OF A MAN WHO CAN WALK 1,200 MILES IN 30 DAYS

CORRESPONDENCE TO THE EDITOR FROM DR AUSTIN FLINT JUNIOR OF NEW YORK

I HAVE REFLECTED UPON YOUR COURTEOUS and appreciative remarks in *The Practitioner* of Dec 1870, upon my observations in the case of Mr Weston, the pedestrian, who walked one hundred miles in little less than twenty-two consecutive hours. I would like to state that the data upon which the conclusions in my paper were based were by no means so exact as I would have wished for reasons outside my control.

The difficulty in experimenting upon an important physiological question on a person not absolutely under the control of the observer is evident. Despairing of ever having a better opportunity, I deemed it my duty to put forward the facts for what they were worth. Had I supposed that I would have had the advantage of controlling my first experiment by others of a more satisfactory character, I would not have published them as they appeared in the *New York Medical Journal*.

I think that you will agree with me that the extraordinary and prolonged muscular efforts made by Mr Weston, if they could be made the subject of thorough investigation, would develop important physiological facts.

It was with this conviction that I have instituted a second series of observations.Without forestalling the results of those new experiments, I may state that they will meet all the objections that have been made to those already published. A few words on Mr Weston before I describe the experimental method for the series.

The remarkable endurance of Mr Weston

Mr Weston is an extraordinary man. He has accomplished the most wonderful feats of endurance, always without having gone through a regular system of training. These are followed by no soreness or nervous depression.

Some facts with regard to his physique are noteworthy. He presents extraordinary development of the muscles which move the thighs upon the pelvis, but elsewhere his muscles are small. His hips are so broad that he cannot chafe between the thighs. His muscles are never hard, even when in his best 'condition' and after his longest walks, and he never has cramping, which so often occurs in long-continued exercise.

He walked, a few days ago from Portland to Chicago, a distance of about 1,200 miles in thirty consecutive days, resting four Sundays, and this in the early winter, through mud, rain, and snow; and he is apparently as well after such efforts as before.

In endurance he differs from other athletes. While many can excel him in a walk of twenty-five or fifty miles, but as a long distance walker he seems, at the present day, to stand alone.

Mr Weston has an ill-judged contempt for training. He takes no regular exercise, and does not restrict his diet before his greatest efforts. About a week after his hundred mile walk, he walked fifty miles in less than 10 hours. The night before the attempt, at 2 A.M., he was eating pork and beans preparatory to going to bed. His failures, which have been numerous enough, have been due, I think, to want of attention to diet and preparatory exercise. He stops because of vertigo and nausea, but not from fatigue. When he begins a great walk without having accustomed his nervous system to the extraordinary strain, and without preparing his digestive organs for food in the form in which he must take it while actually walking (for he seldom stops to eat or drink), his success is a matter of chance.

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Method for new series of observations

The following general plan for the new series of observations is summarised briefly here.

Mr Weston proposed to walk 400 miles in five consecutive days, and on one of the days to walk 112 miles in twenty-four consecutive hours. He made the attempt in November last, and actually walked 324 ½ miles in five days:
Day 1, 80 miles; **Day 2**, 48 miles; **Day 3**, 92 miles; **Day 4**, 57 miles; and **Day 5**, 47 ½ miles.

I had associated with me a number of scientific gentlemen, so that, if possible, nothing of importance should be omitted. We decided upon the following plan before the attempt:

A trusty person was with Mr Weston, day and night for 15 days of the walk, and five days after the walk. We did not interfere in any way with the diet or exercise, only observing and noting all facts. Every article of food and drink was carefully weighed. The amount of exercise noted. Each day the weight, pulse, respiration, and temperature were noted. The urine and faeces were collected for each day and examined. Every other circumstance of interest was noted during the entire period.

I and Professor Doremus carried out the investigation. The high reputation he has long enjoyed as a teacher and a practical chemist is a sufficient guarantee of the accuracy of the chemical examinations.

We have now all of our data complete. Mr Weston ate what he pleased and consequently we had more than forty different articles to examine, which has caused some delay. When our records and tables have been completed, we will have before us the exact quantity of nitrogen taken into the body, as well as that discharged.

We will certainly be able to ascertain the proportion of urea to the nitrogenized elements of food during exercise and during comparative repose.

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