

CREATIVE WORKS

More excerpts from *Endurance and Suffering*

A. C., aet. 19, U.S.: ELEPHANTIASIS

The lower limbs have been enlarged since childhood. Patient had Scarlatina at eight years of age, which was followed by general oedema. From about that time the limbs have been increasing in size. Has been subject to attacks of chills followed by high fever, lasting three or four days. These have occurred at intervals of

three or four months and have been followed by a marked increase in the size of the limbs. On the anterior aspect of the legs there are now (Dec. 1878) several patches of thickened and roughened epidermis. On the posterior surface of the right leg ulceration began about eighteen months ago. Sloughing occurred about a

month ago, and there is now an excavation four inches in diameter and four and a half inches in depth. There are one or two patches of superficial ulceration, oozing a large quantity of clear serous fluid. Since this oozing began the legs have diminished in circumference. The general health is failing.

Do not say to me that she is not beautiful,
that her body does not sing out in choirs
of honeyed promise — unfulfilled — and that,
though so exposed, she is not more modest than you,
that no matter what your life's hard crest,
hers has been more breakered and stinging.
Could she have had any dream that did not plunge
and foam to nothing? Think on her this day.
She could not have known what would have been asked of her,
having once again, as she had since scarlatina,
done as a doctor said do, but this day having agreed
to allow a stranger to witness, to photograph
the secret widths and folds, the tumbling flesh
of her legs and feet, knowing even the kindest eye
would think the huge word, see the lumbering animal,
not a young girl who dreamed no more of dancing.
But he would demand even more. Notice
how hastily she's tossed her dress over her head,
to make a veil, to veil him out and blind the event.
Notice her arms' quick covering of those Biblical breasts
whose sway any Herod or Solomon, merely to watch,
might trade mountains of myrrh, calamus, and cinnamon,
gold or the very neck of prophecy. Notice the timid finger,
how, childlike, she's put it to her lips, standing there
as she never before had been. Who then could not have said,
"Ask of me whatever you will." For such modesty and grace
who would not have granted her temples of wishes,
all smelling of cedar, of myrrh and covenants?
And then you begin to see, from her belly's ripe curve
and the abundant, waiting mystery, that with the power
of such thighs and the will of such legs
she could dance with the thunder of the Mother,
could bring forth all risings and ripenings,
the splitting seed, pomegranates spilling into fortunes,
and all earthly mothers their progress and delivery;
that she as well could dance the moon's cold turns,
their chills and fevers, the sloughings off
and diminishment, excavations and the final failings.
But do not turn away from her.
Lift off her veil. See the three of them
— mother, lover, daughter — move, slowly as seasons,
slowly as a lifetime, into your arms.



O.G. Mason

Unknown Man: SYPHILODERMA PAPULOSUM CIRCINATUM

Syphilis is by no means a disease which invariably acknowledges a venereal origin. ... This patient had a very severe type of disease. There were present nearly all of the usual symptoms, and treatment had little effect. ... October 22d —syphilitic papules; a few on the forehead, and a number of small crusts on the scalp. Closer examination revealed a dark-red patch on the gum, which, according to the patient had been swollen and hard for two months or more. The patient's little daughter, eight years old, had also come to the dispensary with an eruption on her body. She had a large ulcerated patch on the inside of her lower lip. Her health was impaired,

and, according to her father's statement, she did not look or act as she had done before. Here evidently was a second case of syphilis resulting from an oral chancre. I now made a prying examination into the affairs of the family for the preceding year, and learned that about eight months before they had a boarder, a woman, who had whitish sores on her lips. She was accustomed to play with and fondle the patient's little son, two years old, who soon got a sore on his tongue, with lumps in the neck, and afterwards had a copious eruption on the body. Next, the wife and mother, who was pregnant at the time, acquired a sore mouth, with submaxillary swelling,

followed in a month or so by spots over the body. Then the daughter became infected, as already described, and lastly the father. November 21st-- Today the mother came to the dispensary. The baby, five weeks old, was covered with papular eruption, which had appeared suddenly four days before, and had spread rapidly from the head over the whole body. The infant soon died, and what this family suffered, through no fault of their own, but merely from the unfortunate circumstance of having kept a syphilitic boarder, the reader can readily imagine. Scores of such instances doubtless are occurring of which no record is made, no history written.

In solemn outbreaks of the face
the twisting spirochetes move
at blood-speed — microscopic
and silent at their driven,
predestined labors. And soon
their swarm will be elsewhere,
and he will begin to soften
into bits of failing flesh.
But they are not thinking,
"We will soon bring him down."
They move without mind, blind,
oblivious to their purpose.
But soon he will be brought down,
as will the rest of them.
The headaches have already begun,
the pains in the joints; his wife,
his son now have fevers, weight loss,
the pustules; the baby is buried;
his daughter's progress is slower;
who will care for her?
He remembers how glad they'd been
for the rent money, the things
they'd promised her and planned.
There could be no frenzy like this,
no sorrow the equal, or consolation
worth the speaking.

Look at him and tell me anything
benevolent chained us in nature's links.
The Making only cared for life itself.
He and his pain have been gone
a hundred years now. Yet in that dust
once the marrow of his bones,
glowing like tiny, distant galaxies,
the dormant spirochetes sleep,
dreaming of lymph, blood,
the long journeys without meaning.



O.G. Mason

H., AGE 27: KELOID

About eighteen months before the photograph was taken this patient had a severe attack of variola, which left considerable pitting of the face. About the time of leaving the hospital tumors appeared on either cheek, which have slowly increased in size. A small one was excised, but the growth reappeared

almost as soon as the wound had healed. The lobe of the ear, which is sometimes the seat of cicatricial keloid, is unaffected in this case, although it has been pierced to hold a ring. The cause of keloid is unknown. Observation teaches that in the vast majority of cases it develops at some point where

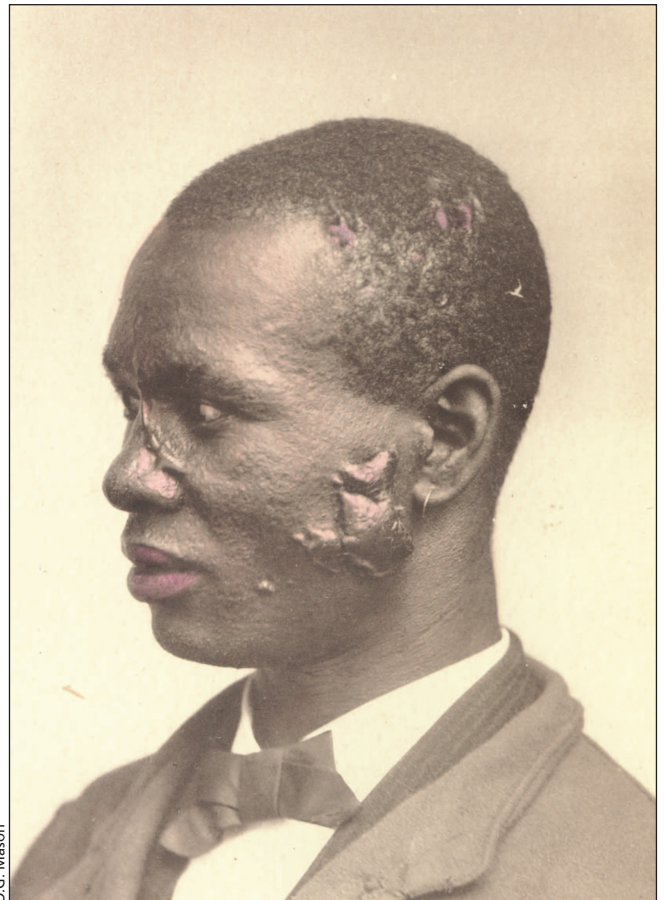
cutaneous injury has taken place. Negroes appear to be more frequently affected by keloid than white persons. Whether this is due to a peculiarity of the race or to the fact that their skins are more frequently pitted with variola, scarred by strumous abscesses, and disfigured by the lash, may be a question.

Transparent — that's what they are, white people. You can tell from the way they look at you they think you've been in brick or razor fights, think old Africa just flares out on hot nights, flaps her lips and calls you home, as once again our thick and wooly blood takes hold, while we, helpless before it, dream of jungles, nose-bones, and human flesh. They stare but see you for what you're not. Were I piebald, had claw hands, a club foot, looked like the Turtle Boy, or were anything like the usual, cute Negro freaks at Barnam's or Worth's on the Bowery, tumbling and laughing, trying to eat with knife and fork, had I about me anything they could have dreamed might ever have befallen them or fear could befall theirs, though unborn, I'd at least had their useless sympathy, unwanted but more tolerable than being seen naked, grunting and jumping around a roasting man. You did notice, I trust, that even Dr. Fox — good enough to tell me he did not believe the phrenological myths, and that what defined was not the shape or size but what was in the head — and I added, "Yes, and in the heart, too," which made him smile — you did notice that apart from "Mrs. B., Scotch, widow," I am the only one in his whole book identified by a single initial, as if I had but a Christian name, no family, no surname, as if I, were some old heathen's boy, I, who'd never known the lash, never been a slave, having been born here in New York, where emancipation came in 1827! But even Dr. Fox, trained in careful and dermatological sight, did not see me clear. He did notice one thing, though, besides keloid and skin color; they all do, and it stops them, holds them a moment, leaves them unsure, unnerved by their lack of certainty, troubled — insecure, even — disturbed by what so ordinary, so simple a thing as a small gold earring could possibly mean.

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Endurance and Suffering is available in North America at www.photoeye.com and in Europe at <http://anamorfose.be/>
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