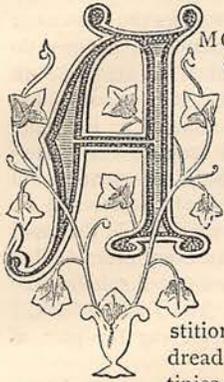


## A FEW WORDS ABOUT RHEUMATISM.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



AMONG the least enlightened portion of the population of Turkey the word *Kismet*, or fate, is one which you hear daily and almost hourly. Hardly, indeed, will a Turk stretch out a hand to attempt to save a drowning friend—"Kismet," he will murmur; "it is his fate." This strong belief in fate is born partly of superstition, and partly of religion and a dread of interference with the destinies of Providence; but it forms none the less a capital cloak for laziness. But this belief in *Kismet* is not altogether confined to Turkey. The uneducated of our own people possess it. I am happy to believe, however, that much of the superstitious belief in *Kismet* or fate is dying out, and that, as a rule, people begin to see that they, to a large extent, hold in their own hands the keys of their life and death. There is, too, a greater desire, or inquisitiveness I might call it, after that kind of knowledge which may be turned to good account. It is not so very many years ago since people were content when they called in a doctor to have him simply give the illness a name. The medical man was much more revered than he is nowadays. He bore wherever he went a scientific halo around his head, and if he could always manage to call troubles by their Latin names, he was doubly admired. *Urticaria*, for instance, is a far higher sounding term than nettle-rash; well, and if a lady had a chilblain, by calling it *erythema a gelu*, the medical man not only raised himself in his patient's esteem, but raised the afflicted big toe into an object of importance and interest, and the lady herself to all the dignity of an invalid and martyr, ready to receive visits of condolence from all her friends.

But *tempora mutantur*. The doctor of the present day, if he be a wise man, likes to explain the *rationale* of the disorder to his patient, and the latter is just as glad to learn it, and so the two jog along together as friends, both taking the same interest in the case. There is one great and lasting good derivable from this method of treating disease: the sufferer, knowing all the outs and ins of the complaint he has been a victim to, will be able to prevent by timely treatment any recurrence of the ailment. He will be able to say to himself at some future time, "Now, I mustn't do this, or I mustn't eat or drink this, for that is what brought on my illness before;" or, "I feel precisely as I did last time when I began to be ill. I'll try to take it in time now."

In no case is the truth of this prevention-better-than-cure argument better illustrated than in that most painful complaint called rheumatism. I assure you, reader, if you are a sufferer from the chronic form of

this complaint I pity you—all the more so because other people will not, and because often, when racked with pain and somewhat peevish, they put you down as cross-grained and ill-tempered. But pity mends no bones, and so I shall go farther, and try to help you.

Acute rheumatism, or rheumatic fever, I shall say nothing about; it is far too deadly a disease to be treated by a patient or his friends, and the cure thereof should in all cases be entrusted to your own medical adviser.

The word rheumatism is a Greek one, and signifies an ailment caused by some evil elements afloat in the blood. So far, that does not help us much, as there are many other diseases to which the term might be equally well applied. However, pathologically speaking, rheumatism is caused by blood-poisoning. There is an over-abundance of acid in the blood, supposed to be that called *lactic*. And there is this characteristic about this particular acid: carried along in the veins it has a tendency to attack and cause inflammation in particular parts of the body—namely, those that are composed for the most part of fibrous tissue, such as tendons or ligaments, and the sheaths of muscles, as also the fibrous coverings of large important organs, and even the tendons of the heart itself.

Rheumatism has moreover a disagreeable tendency to shift its quarters, and take up its abode in new joints not before visited. In the present state of our knowledge we cannot quite explain this fact.

It seems to have a special affection for some of the smaller joints, notably those of the fingers, which in old rheumatic subjects are often swollen out of all proportion. Indeed, the chronic form of rheumatism, although often attacking the young, might with propriety be termed one of the diseases of declining years. One very usual form of the complaint is what is termed lumbago, or back-ache; another is stiff or wry neck; and a third, with which many are only too familiar, rheumatism of the jaw.

The stiffness and pain of rheumatism is often simulated by that caused by any prolonged and unusual exertion, such as climbing high mountains. There is also another complaint which may be mistaken for rheumatism, and concerning which more than one of my readers have written to me. It is in reality a symptom of debility, and consists of pain and weakness of certain muscles, often of the back. In the morning the sufferer feels well enough, but the least fatigue brings back the trouble. For cases like these rest is required, consonant with sufficient open-air exercise; also good nourishing food, for the system is below par. A change of air is often to be recommended, and a course of iron tonics in most cases does good. Chronic rheumatism is often the sequel to an acute attack, but more frequently it comes on quite independently of that terrible disorder; it is constitutional, and those who are inclined to the ailment will most likely find it will seat itself in that group of

muscles, or among those joints, that have been most exposed to cold or damp.

The symptoms are unfortunately too well known to need much describing. The martyr to rheumatism has a miserable life indeed; his days are days of weariness, and his nights, nights of sleepless pain and restlessness. There may not be much constitutional disturbance, or any fever at all, unless it be in what patients call a bad attack, when they may be unable to put a foot to the ground at all, or handle a pen even; but at all times there is enough torment to annoy and to make the victims irritable and peevish. To help them, too, they often fly to stimulants, which only tend to still further sour the blood and prolong an attack; but worse than this is the habit of making a practice of taking night-draughts, such as opium or chloral.

The treatment of chronic rheumatism is by no means simple, but the disease can in nearly every case be greatly mitigated, and in a great number of cases a present attack can be cured, the recurrence of which may be prevented by proper precautionary measures.

First, then, I would strongly advise those who are subject to rheumatism to be very careful in what they eat and drink; if there be any form of dyspepsia, that should at once be seen to. Often rheumatic people are weak in the stomach, subject to acidity and flatulence. The temptation to take antacids for the correction of the acidity is often great, and patients will dose themselves with the bicarbonate of soda and potash, forgetting that these alkalies are very weakening. In severe cases of heartburn the pain and distress must be relieved by a teaspoonful or two of bicarbonate of soda, in a large tumblerful of lukewarm water; soon after, the fauces had better be tickled with a feather, when the offending contents of the stomach will be expelled. But tone ought to be given to the stomach by some such medicine as the following:—Take of the tincture of chiretta four drachms, of the citrate of iron and quinine one drachm, and of water twelve ounces. The dose is one ounce, or two table-spoonfuls, three times a day. The quantity as well as the quality of the food should be studied. Never over-eat, rather adopt the old-fashioned plan of getting up from the table a little hungry; but let what you do eat be of the best, and nourishing. Avoid beer and most wines. Solid food is less apt, in my opinion, to produce acidity, but in winter soups may be used; these need not be too strong, and certainly not clarified. I shall merely mention one—it is made of the broth of boiled fowl (or good stock), thickened with artichokes; it is just the soup, in my opinion, for the rheumatic, and deserves a trial in cold weather; it is very nourishing, easy of digestion, not at all likely to produce flatulence, and it also possesses medicinal qualities of a diuretic nature. Good sleep at night is invaluable to the rheumatic, especially during painful attacks, when sedatives will in all probability be needed; but let the least dangerous be first tried—a mild night-cap. But I am unable to say of what it should be composed; that the reader himself ought to know best; for to people of active minds either wine or spirits would prove an excitative, and keep them thinking all night; and thinking in bed

is most destructive to the nervous system. But mayhap some preparation of henbane, or hops, or even opium or morphia, may be required to ease the pain and induce sleep. Between the attacks the rheumatic subject has a duty to himself to perform: he must do everything in his power to strengthen his system, both nervous and muscular. Exercise is invaluable, because the more acid there is eliminated by the skin, the less will be left to poison and hamper the blood; for the same reason, a Turkish bath occasionally will do good, if there be no affection of the heart, and no tendency to apoplexy; but in no case should the tepid salt-water sponge-bath be omitted every morning before breakfast, following its use with well rubbing the whole body with a rough towel. The Turkish bath, I may add, is often of service in removing the pain of "bad attacks."

Need I remind the reader of the danger of sudden chills, of sitting or standing in draughts, of getting wet feet without soon changing the socks, of going long on an empty stomach; or of the benefits of regular living, wearing flannel, eating good and wholesome food, and last, but not least, of light-brown cod-liver oil?

Of special medicines for chronic rheumatism, the first that comes into my mind is colchicum. It is always worth trying both in gout and rheumatism. It is sedative and laxative, and seems to have a beneficial action on the liver. As pleasant a way as any of taking it is to mix the dose—say, fifteen drops of the tincture—with a tea-spoonful each of sal volatile and compound orange tincture; this to be used thrice daily in half a bottle of soda-water.

Guaiaicum I am more chary in prescribing through these columns, as it is inadmissible where there is a tendency either to fulness of blood or irritability of the digestive canal, but for old or weak people such a mixture as the following may often be given with advantage, two table-spoonfuls to be taken twice a day:—Take of the ammoniated tincture of guaiacum one ounce, tincture of aconite one drachm, gum tragacanth-water and camphor-water, of each eight ounces. I am strangely tempted to give the recipe for the "Chelsea pensioner." I will. Here he goes, the old rascal, and much good he has done:—Take two drachms of rhubarb powder, two ounces of sulphur, an ounce of cream of tartar, and a drachm of guaiacum resin; mix thoroughly, then stir the whole into a pound of honey (it used to be treacle the pensioners got). Now, if a dessert-spoonful of this be taken night and morning till it is all used, it will purify both blood and skin, and most likely scare away the rheumatism.

The *Acetea racemosa* is much extolled in America, and especially for lumbago in women. The dose of the tincture is from thirty drops to a drachm, every three or four hours in a little water until nausea ensues.

The iodide of potassium is extremely useful in many cases; it should be given with a tonic and sedative, thus:—Take of iodide of potassium thirty grains, bicarbonate of potash three drachms, tincture of henbane four drachms, and infusion of yellow bark up to twelve ounces. The dose is two table-spoonfuls twice or thrice daily.