

A FRIENDLY GOSSIP ON GOUT.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HE poor fellow is a martyr to the gout." It is a very unfortunate thing that we should so often hear this expression, often about some one we love very dearly.

"Mr. Smith is not at office to-day; he is confined to the house with another attack of the gout."

Well, there is more hope for gouty subjects in this expression, especially when

I inform them that there is hardly a more active man to be found than friend Smith, when he hasn't got the gout, and that his attacks only come now and then, at no regular intervals. This to me seems proof positive that much can be done by patients themselves to ward off, or steer clear of, so to speak, fits of this painful complaint.

Now I am going, first of all, to try to explain to the reader the nature of gout, and I would like not only those who suffer from the disease to peruse this paper, but all my other Family Magazine friends. True, they may not be ill at present, but the enemy may be making strides their way, and it is just as well to know how to avoid him.

The name gout is derived from the French term *goutte*, signifying a drop, as they believed once upon a time that the ailment was caused by a humour falling, drop by drop, into the joints. This is an explanation of the cause of gout which now-a-days would hardly be deemed lucidly pathological. I do but mention it because the nomenclature contains a hidden truth, which the French doctors didn't mean to convey. It is this: the disease is often caused by a humour falling *goutte-à-goutte*, not into the joints (directly at least), but down the throat; hence it may well be called the drop, and the sufferer finds to his sorrow he has had a drop too much. This should be a hint to high livers. Hear, too, what Sydenham says: "Gout kills more rich men than poor, more wise than simple. Great kings, emperors, generals, admirals, and philosophers have all died of it. Hereby Nature shows her impartiality, since those she favours in one way she afflicts in another, a mixture of evil and good pre-eminently adapted to our frail mortality."

I am a believer in the lithic acid theory of the origin of gout, that it is caused by an excess in the blood of this acid; for the same causes that produce gout, and which I shall presently mention, generate also the lithic acid diathesis.

There is one very common error regarding gout, against which people ought to be well warned. I refer to the vulgar belief that an attack of gout is beneficial to the health. This is a highly dangerous mistake, but one not difficult to make, for the first attacks of this complaint are very often succeeded by a marked im-

provement in the general health, and a corresponding exhilaration of spirits. A friend of mine tells me he is always better after a fit of the gout. Now, as a fit of the gout means a painful effort of Nature to get rid of a morbid poison that is afloat in the blood, in which she generally succeeds without the death of the patient, for a time, of course, all the ills which that circulating poison gave rise to will be driven away. In this belief many, by excess of living, try to bring on an attack of gout. But they forget, or do not know, that by so doing they are thus courting death, and playing into their greatest enemy's hands. Instead of boarding his vessel, if I may use a seaman's phrase, they are inviting the enemy to board theirs. They need not be astonished, therefore, if he takes up his quarters there entirely, and they find when too late that they are not strong enough to expel him. They must not be astonished either if, tired of light attacks, he one day assaults the vessel's core, and speedy destruction stares them in the face. No, gout is not a thing to be trifled with; for although after a first attack, of which often the patient is foolish enough to be proud, for the simple reason that it is a fashionable ailment, an attack may not occur again for two years or more, still, if he lives long enough, he will find to his sorrow that the intervals between the fits will each time be shorter and shorter, till at last, except only in the finest of weather, he will never be free from gout. There is, moreover, always the fear of gout attacking some vital internal organ, and fearful suffering if not death being the result. The symptoms of gout are only too well known to those who have had "a touch of it." There are usually some premonitory symptoms; probably for one or two days before the attack the patient will find himself out of sorts, dyspeptic, easily tired, and so peevish that he is inclined to be cross with everything and everybody, and yet will feel sorry and ashamed of being so. This crossness or ill-temper is a symptom of a good many complaints. I think people are never in good health if peevishness exists. There is something wrong somewhere, either with stomach, liver, brain, or blood. It is the same with children. A healthy child seldom cries; a squalling, cross infant seldom turns out a strong man; nor I was going to add, a very good one. I am sure, however, of one thing—if the children of the lowest classes of the population were better fed and better housed, we might turn one-half of our prisons into free libraries, reading rooms, and concert-rooms for the people. But I digress. I have said there are usually premonitory symptoms; on the other hand, the case may be like this: the patient may awake some time in the middle watches of the night, feeling a dull pain in some portion of the foot—generally the ball of the big toe, the instep, or heel. The pain may not be severe, but enough to keep the sufferer awake till morning, when on getting out of bed he finds he cannot place his foot to the ground. After the pain has

lasted for some days, swelling and redness comes on, the lithic acid escaping by exhalation, as it is supposed, from the heated and inflamed surface. This is what might be called a touch of the gout, but more often the pain from the first is much more severe, and from the first there is some degree of fever. The portion that is attacked is so tense and tender, that even the tread of any one going across the room gives agony. The tongue is white and furred, the patient is feverish and irritable, and at the same time exceedingly low in spirits, while there are many other distressing symptoms which need not here be enumerated.

But matters may even be worse; concretions may be formed around the joints, and lameness be the result. This happens most often in what are called chronic cases. These concretions sometimes cause abscesses and ulceration. There are often, too, complications. If I were to describe some of these graphically as I have seen them, I should frighten the reader. I must tell him however that, like rheumatism, the gout has a disagreeable disposition to change its quarters; it may fly to the heart, or the stomach, causing great pain, sickness, and vomiting even of blood. If it flies to the brain, there is here again great pain, and in the stout and plethoric a stroke of paralysis or fit of apoplexy would probably be the result. I will add no more. I hope I have said enough on this head to prove that gout is not a thing to be trifled with.

Now for the treatment, and I shall begin with that proper during an attack. The object, of course, is to assist nature in eliminating the poison, and thus cut short the attack. We must also try to ameliorate the pain. Well, to assist us we have three great emunctories—the bowels, the kidneys, and the skin, and it seems to me we do well to act on them all. But the aperients we give must not be violent in their action. I will let the reader choose his own laxative; he may take rhubarb or aloes pills, or compound jalap; or glauber salts, two drachms, with three ounces of dandelion juice—this before breakfast every morning; or in place of this, and at the same time, a claret-glassful of Pullna or Friedrichshall water. Or again, if he puts faith in old-fashioned remedies, let him take the following pill:—Of calomel, colchicum extract, aloes, and ipecacuanha, each one grain.

The directions are these:—Take six pills at regular intervals the first day, three the second, two the third, and one every night for some time after. But it is better, before beginning the use of this pill, to take a good glass of Pullna water to well clear the bowels. For the kidneys we may employ ten grains, three times a day, of acetate or bicarbonate of potash. If the colchicum pill I give above be not taken, this dose will be found invaluable in other forms. As good a plan as any is to give one large dose—from one to two drachms—of colchicum wine, and afterwards ten drops in soda-water thrice a day. Stay! a dread thought strikes me as I write. I have many readers in Scotland; what if any of them should mistake the meaning of the word “drachm!” No, my northern friend, a drachm of colchicum wine is a tea-spoonful, not a gill, as is a dram of whiskey, the wine of the land of my sires.

The medicinal remedies used by the general practitioner are far too numerous to be even mentioned here, such as iodide of potassium, colchicum, with citrate of potash, or blue pill, or some form of ammonia, or henbane, &c. &c. Henbane is valuable as a sedative, because it does not, like opium, check the secretions; but opium, if given in conjunction with belladonna, often does good, as in this pill:—Extract of opium, a grain; extract of hemlock, three grains; and one quarter-grain of belladonna extract; the dose being one every four hours.

Cotton wool covered with oiled silk should be wound gently round the gouty joint, or, if it can be borne, some relief may be obtained by covering it with a soothing linseed-meal poultice, which has been smeared with extract of belladonna. Cold applications are highly dangerous, as they may cause the gout to leave its seat and fly to some more important organ of the body.

The patient should keep in bed for a few days, at all events, and keep the limb well raised. As long as there is any feverishness no animal food must be allowed, but give afterwards as nourishing aliment as can be borne until the strength returns.

We will now suppose we have pulled our patient through, and have him well again; the question now is, can we prevent a return of the disorder? In most cases we can, especially in the younger class of sufferers. Then how? By regular and rational living. The gouty patient just recovered from an attack must always remember there are rocks ahead, and that he must sedulously and earnestly try to avoid them. To do this he must learn to exercise self-control and be master of himself. I do not wish him to starve, but let him beware of rich living, and let him learn to look upon wine and strong drink as diluted gout. The diet should be mixed, containing a due proportion of wholesome vegetables.

Exercise is to be enjoined, but it must not be in spurts; it must not be violent exercise; walking or riding on horseback is the best kind, because it employs nearly all the muscles and keeps the whole body in heat; a gentle heat is produced, which aids in every way the elimination of the lithic acid which, in gouty patients, is always present in greater or less quantity. The exercise, too, must be taken with great regularity. Regular hours are greatly to be recommended, with warm light clothing and flannel.

You perceive that if my *rationale* is right—and I believe it to be—my treatment of this terrible malady is simple enough. But is there no medicine to take in the intervals? you may ask. If you take the above advice to heart, and carry out my treatment, I hope the intervals will be few, for you will be well and the gout will not return. But I append a preventive prescription, which for once in a way, and for reasons which would be patent to the eye of a medical man, I give in Latin.

℞ Tinc. quinzæ Tinc. rhei. Syrup aurant. Spir. vin. gall.	}	ā ā ʒj	{	Dose: A tablespoon- ful in a little water about din- ner-time.
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