

"IT IS THIS DREADFUL WEATHER!"

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



"IT is this dreadful weather!" This is a plaint we seldom or never hear from the lips of the young or the robust. They can afford to defy the weather, whether the wind blows from the blustering north, or the more dangerous, because insidious, east. But the delicate of all ages, and

the old, if not the middle-aged, are often painfully sensible of the fact that the state of the weather has a good deal to do with that of their health and comfort.

But many may tell me, and many have told me, that life to them would be no longer worth having if they were compelled to live by rule. But this living by rule is not such a terrible tax upon the powers of self-government as many people imagine. The truth is that we have all been brought up to disregard the commonest laws of health, or—what is just the same thing—in our young days we were not taught to obey these laws, nor were they ever explained to us. Physiology has never yet been taught in schools: it is most erroneously supposed to be too dry, or too deep a subject for the young mind to grasp. The education of the present day is lacking in utility, and in much that is needful for success in the battle of life. A school-boy of the present day may be able to tell you the exact geographical bearings of Timbuctoo or the Fiji Islands, or write you *sine errore* an epitome of the history of the dynasties of China; but can he tell you anything about the effects of cold or heat upon substances in general, or on the human body in particular? I doubt it. Most young people are turned out into this world without an atom of useful knowledge, as to the qualities of those influences that are for ever warring against health and life, and with only a very hazy notion that they are mortal at all. It would not, as some may imagine, damp their young spirits or their youthful ardour to know just a little about the mechanism of their own frames, and the best means of preserving health. As it is, it is only when the precious boon is slipping from one's grasp that he begins to study the rules for retaining it. And at first it seems hard to him to have to obey the laws that he has all his life totally disregarded, but habit soon becomes a second nature, and renewal of health, comfort of living, and consequent happiness are his rewards.

It is not my purpose at present to discuss the general laws of health; the reader knows the value of regularity and care in diet, of regular exercise taken day after day in the open air, of pure water, of perfect ablution, and healthful sleep; my object is to show briefly how far different conditions of the atmosphere are to be accredited with many of the ills that human flesh is heir to, and to give some general hints for protection against the evil influence of wind and weather.

It has long been well known to medical men that each season of the year brings along with it its own special class of epidemic ailments. In the spring months the physician has to contend with colds and coughs, with diseases of the air-passages of every kind, often amounting to acute inflammations; and as the season advances, with erysipelas, dysentery, and fevers of various kinds, including typhus. And the spring winds—that is, the winds that are most regular in the months of April, May, and June—are northerly and easterly at first, then southerly and westerly. For the next three months—the summer of the astronomer—the prevailing winds are westerly or from the south. Even they bring their troubles, and fevers and dysentery, and sometimes even cholera, rage; and in autumn, if the change be sudden from extreme heat to cold and wet, these diseases will be on the increase, instead of showing signs of abatement. The wind in autumn wears more round to the north and the east again, and throat complaints, chest ailments, and fevers are rampant. In winter, rheumatism and gout are added to the list.

Most people fear northerly and easterly winds the most, and with good cause. It is well to remember, then, that the months during which these blow with the greatest regularity are March and April.

Extreme cold is fatal to many, especially to the aged, from the fact that it checks the excretions of the skin; this results in a mild form of blood-poisoning, with depression of all the vital powers, and congestion or inflammation of internal organs may take place, such as liver and kidney disease; and in the plethoric, or those that make blood fast, there is also danger of apoplexy during very cold weather. If cold, then, checks the skin exhalations, we ought to do all we can to guard against it, by wearing warmer clothing, keeping our bed-rooms up to the proper temperature, and having our beds themselves the acme of comfort; and not only should we attend to these matters, but we should, by a judicious use of the bath and friction with rough towels or the flesh-brush, keep our bodies in a condition to defy the lowering effects of cold. Unfortunately, it is just in winter and in the coldest weather that people fight shy of the bath, and endeavour to keep themselves up to the mark by sitting close by the fire, by eating highly-seasoned food, and taking stimulants, thereby poisoning blood which is

already impure from the effects of imprisoned secretions.

Now, though certain ailments are more prevalent at certain seasons than all the year round, so extremely variable is our climate, that whosoever values health will do well to study the weather, and not the seasons. But here is a mistake which delicate people—I do not mean those suffering from actual disease, but those who are constitutionally not strong—are very apt to fall into: they are inclined to let the amount of exercise they take depend entirely upon the state of the weather or atmosphere. And thus, on the very days when exercise would do them the most good, and a brisk walk banish the *ennui* and depression consequent on the peculiar state of the air, or the wind that is blowing, they remain miserably in-doors. You often hear a person saying, “I feel that I should like to take a good long walk to-day;” if he feels like this, I beg to assure him that he needs the walk less than if he felt so low and depressed, that he did not think he could summon up courage to walk at all. The spirits—or minds, if you like the word better—of delicate individuals are very much affected by the amount of ozone in the air. When this is abundant, they are full of vitality; when deficient, it is all the other way with them; but they ought to remember that if ozone is only present in small proportions out of doors, it will reach the minimum inside. They ought to go out, therefore, in order to breathe it, else they will blanch more and more; the blood will lose its strength, the muscles get flabby, and a day may come when it will be no longer in their power to take exercise in the open air.

Understand, then, that while counselling the doing of everything that may tend to counteract the evil influences of wind or weather, I wish to warn the reader against the mistake of ever looking upon either as a bogle or a bugbear.

I am of opinion that most people in England, if not in the North as well, are far too easily frightened at rain and snow. Neither should interfere with exercise, for both can be guarded against; if you dress properly, the rain need not wet nor the snow chill you. Exposure to high winds, or to a depressing atmosphere, is far more to be feared.

Let me say a few words about the winds and their effects on the health. No one who is at all subject to any affection of the chest should expose himself to high wind. A high wind is always more or less cold; and, on the other hand, no matter how low the temperature is, exercise may, as a rule, be taken with benefit and comfort if there be no wind. The nervous, too, should avoid exposure to high winds, else headache will be the result, and general depression of the whole system will follow. Cold wet winds, especially those that blow from the north and east, seem to possess a peculiarly disturbing effect upon the mucous membrane of the digestive canal, which may result in a fit of dyspepsia, or in diarrhœa or even dysentery. It

is these north and east winds that render the early spring months in this climate of ours so risky to the invalid, or those pre-disposed to consumption and various other complaints. But the east wind is more than any other to be dreaded by people liable to chest complaints; nor can any amount of care in clothing defend them against its evil influences.

But there are times when calm days are just as much to be dreaded by the delicate and invalid as the stormiest winds that can blow—days when the sky is overcast, and the atmosphere hot; when the gloom is general, when in towns evil vapours float low on the ground, and in the open country the exhalations from the earth’s surface lie thick and stagnant thereon, poisoning the air we breathe. Such days are hard upon even the healthy, and it is no wonder, therefore, if the weakly suffer. Night air is greatly dreaded by many, and sometimes with good cause. There is not only always the danger of catching cold or receiving a chill—which is often even worse—but of breathing malaria or miasmata; and this danger is greatly increased if there be mist or fog, or even dew. It ought to be generally known that pasture-lands, woods, pleasure-grounds, and small lakes of water such as we have in our most beautiful parks, all send forth malaria to some considerable extent, and that the delicate do wrong to walk in such places, even in the most delightful evenings of summer.

How best, then, are the more tender among us to shield themselves from the evil effects of bad weather and baneful atmosphere? The answer to this question, I think, is this: we are to clothe ourselves in such a way as to be proof against cold and wet, and at the same time do all we can to keep our bodies as near to the disease-resisting standard of health as possible. Exercise must on no account be neglected, but it ought not to be exercise of too trying, or even too exciting, a kind. We ought to study the kind and quality, as well as the quantity, of food we eat, not forgetting that people are all apt to err on the side of eating too much. It is the food which is digested with comfort that supports life.

Whatsoever lowers the nervous system renders us more susceptible to atmospheric changes, and *vice versâ*. Healthful sleep should be procured at night, therefore, but only by rational means; and daily and complete ablution is imperatively necessary. People who are subject to colds should be particular to have their bed-rooms well ventilated and comfortable, and the bed-clothes warm, but not heavy. I am quite convinced that colds are caught as often in bed as out of it, and those with weak chests would do well to wear a chest protector at night as well as by day. The part of the body most frequently unprotected at night is that between the shoulder-blades. Many a one takes every care to wrap up well in bed, but leaves this door open for illness to walk in; and many a fatal illness might be traced to colds thus caught in bed.

