

## THE CURE OF RHEUMATISM.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



CANDIDLY, a very large number of medical men look upon chronic rheumatism and its allied disorder, gout, as all but incurable diseases. So do most people who have the misfortune to suffer from these ailments. "I am subject to rheumatism," a person will tell you. "Anything starts it up; sometimes nothing at all seems to; and I believe it comes and goes periodically, and I shall be a martyr to it as long as I live." Such individuals, however, if they happen to be at all well-to-do in the world, spend a small fortune annually in drugs, alteratives, tonics, cordials, narcotics, &c., which they sometimes candidly confess do not give them any very easily appreciable benefit.

Now, in this paper I think I shall be able to give a word or two of comfort to all classes who suffer from chronic rheumatism or gout; for I may say at once that this ailment gout is more nearly allied to rheumatism than most people think; that its causes are similar; and that its dietetic treatment should be carried out on the same principles.

It is very often the case that an attack of rheumatic fever issues in the martyrdom to chronic rheumatism which shall last while life does. At the time the fever commences the blood is in an acid condition, so are all the secretions; a chill is taken, and inflammation, with or without deposit, is set up in the fibrous sheaths of the joints, in the ligaments of the muscles, and even in the synovial membranes\* themselves. There is little doubt that joints which have once suffered are rendered more subject to future attacks. Be that as it may, there is one thing I wish the reader to bear in mind: viz., this—there *is* an excess of acid in the body at the time one is suffering from rheumatism, however slight; even the perspiration smells more sour; and there is irritability of *all* the mucous membrane, not only of that which lines the digestive canal, but of that which lines every part of the body. We are justified in believing that it is this excess of uric acid which causes the rheumatic symptoms. If so, I ask every one who possesses a spark of common sense, does the chief indication of our treatment not point to means which shall prevent the formation of such excess of acid, and at the same time get rid of that which already exists in the blood?

Now I stretch out my hand, and I pull down a book from one of my shelves. It is an authority, and has been for years, in our medical schools. I do not say that in many things it is not a very excellent work. But listen: the following, among

\* The lining sacs placed between joints, that exude a secretion called synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints and prevents friction. It is the insides of these sacs which rub against each other.

other drugs, are recommended in the treatment of chronic rheumatism:—Arnica, arsenic, aconite, ammonia, and bark; colchicum, cod-liver oil, and corrosive sublimate; sarsaparilla and sulphur; quinine, liquor potassæ, morphia, opium, and chloroform; iodide of potassium, iodide of iron, oil of turpentine, guaiacum, red iodide of mercury, Indian hemp, and ipecacuanha: many of these to be taken internally; and topically there are blisters and liniments, and ointments and plaisters, a box heater, a bladder of ice, and a red-hot button (called the moxa). Over and above all this, residence in various climates at home and abroad are recommended; and last—and certainly not least—attention is advised to be given to the organs of digestion.

Far be it from me, however, to cast obloquy on medicines which may be administered by the hands of the family physician, whether that medicine be for the neutralisation of acid in the system or the relief of pain. But neutralisation of existing acid merely leaves the system *in statu quo*, and narcotics and anaesthetics invariably weaken the nerve centres; therefore, I say that in the treatment of chronic rheumatism, and the prevention of its recurrence, we must depend more on diet and regimen than on anything else.

Rheumatism is, as often as not, caused by over-eating, and especially by over-indulgence in meat, which is certain to cause an excess of uric acid, and render the body liable, on exposure to wet or cold, to an attack. We know that old people are proverbially liable to rheumatism. The reasons for this are not far to seek. One is that joints and ligaments are harder and stiffer, and very often contain deposit—urate of soda. Another is that, as a rule, people up in years eat more than is necessary to support life, under the mistaken notion that they want a deal of nourishment to keep them up. I say that, on the contrary, the wear and tear of tissue is but trifling compared to what it is in earlier manhood, and that far less food is required. Therefore, if an elderly person would live long, and be free of aches and pains, and be calm in mind—for that is a great desideratum—he or she must live abstemiously, more or less.

Chronic rheumatism is far more common than most persons are aware of. It is a disease quite indigenous to these isles of mist and cutting winds; but it is often in character what we may call suppressed—that is, it attacks the internal organs instead of joints and muscles, though these may suffer at the same time. But many a time and oft a person complains of his liver being out of order, or of a fit of indigestion, when the real cause of his trouble lies in the blood, which is for the time being poisoned with uric acid.

I know an old naval captain who says he can always ward off a fit of threatened illness by a day's



"good starvation." Well, it is a strange remedy, but it certainly gives the mucous membrane a rest, and affords the blood time to get rid of its impurities. My friend says he "wakens next day as fresh as a daisy;" and I do not doubt it, though I fear many would consider the remedy worse than the disease it is meant to banish.

As to climate in the cure of rheumatism, much might be said, but what brooks it that one sojourns at Ventnor, Rome, Hastings, or Harrogate, if he goes on manufacturing in his system the very acid or acids that generate his complaint?

No, believe me, it is not in climate alone that you are to look for relief, nor is it from drugs you are to expect a radical cure. We must go to the fountain-head of the evil: we must attend to the organs of digestion, and to regimen calculated to crush the evil in the bud.

But inasmuch as it is all but impossible to live so strictly by rule as we would require to if subject to chronic rheumatism, either externally, in the muscles and joints, or internally, in stomach, lungs, liver, or brain, or all combined, we ought to adopt some rational means to get rid of the acid in the system.

Shall we use or prescribe purgatives? I think not. If any aperient is ever used—and it should be but seldom—it ought to be well chosen and very mild. People cannot go on taking aperients and hope to live long. Seek, therefore, for freedom in the system by taking a judicious amount of wholesome, exhilarating exercise; and do not forget that mixing in pleasant society, in the earlier hours of the evening, has a wonderful power in toning the whole system and assisting digestion. Who has not observed that a dinner or supper could be eaten abroad in cheerful company, where suggestive and agreeable conversation was carried on, without ill-effects, which, if taken at home, would be productive of a restless night, a furred tongue and a heavy head in the morning?

Shall we depend upon diuretics, and remedies that increase the action of the liver? Well, I grant you that such remedies do good for a time. But let the liver or kidneys be the strongest and healthiest that ever existed, they will go to the wall some day if constantly stimulated to action.

No; let us rather be taught by Nature herself. When one is ill of rheumatic fever, the perspiration is profuse and acid. Here is Nature carrying off the poison in her own way. Let us imitate her.

Keep the skin, therefore, in constant good tone and working order. The matutinal sponge-bath will strengthen the nerves, and keep open the pores; the Turkish bath, portable or otherwise, ought to be taken once a week, or whenever an attack is threatened; if even once a day for a time should be deemed necessary, it will not hurt. It is a wonderful prophylactic. I could adduce hundreds of cases in proof of this.

Those subject to rheumatism very often feel tired, dejected, with or without loss of appetite. The body may not ache, but it does not feel fresh. Probably there is a little headache, but more often a fulness in brow or eye-balls, and the patient has but little

heart for his ordinary employment, and things that interested him only the day before, now appear devoid of any value. If he thinks back, perhaps he will remember that for a day or two previously he has not been living quite so abstemiously as he ought. Well, he may call this little illness a mere fit of indigestion, if he pleases, but it is indigestion of a kind that has detrimentally increased the uric acid in his blood. Let him take a Turkish bath at once, if his doctor will permit it, and live by rule again.

The living by rule includes a certain amount of daily exercise in the open air. Without this, no rheumatic person can expect to be long free from aches and pains and wearisome *ennui*—almost as bad to bear as pain itself. As to diet, it will greatly depend on the age. The young require more nourishment than the middle-aged, but old people must *have their little often*, and it must be well cooked and easy of assimilation.

Rheumatically-inclined persons should observe all the rules I have so often explained in my papers on digestion; but there are many things which they cannot eat with impunity.

For *breakfast*, let tea and coffee both be avoided, substituting cocoa or cocoatina, with milk and sugar. Let toast be eaten, or if bread be preferred, it should be brown bread and butter, and the bread should be stale. Avoid meat, except a little nicely-cooked bacon, not too fat. Eggs poached, or mashed, or lightly boiled, not fried, and any kind of fish except salmon, herring, or mackerel.

If hungry about twelve o'clock, a light biscuit or two, with butter, may be taken, and a glass of soda-water and milk.

*Dinner* should be early—say 1.30 or 2 o'clock. Soup the old may take; middle-aged or young people do not require it, and it is apt to get acid with some. Meat may now be taken *sparingly*, say twice a week. Game, fish, poultry, and vegetables, except the stronger kinds, may be eaten every day with dinner. No beer with dinner. Lemon-juice is a good substitute, but ginger beer and ginger ale should be avoided. Light puddings, such as bread, tapioca, or ground rice, may be taken, and a little good wholesome fruit; but this latter is better before breakfast. No pastry; and cheese is poison.

One cup of not over-strong *tea* at five o'clock, and a tiny biscuit.

*Supper* at 7 or 7.30, with a cup of cocoa. Sauces and hot peppers disagree; so do stews, for this reason: no cook lives who can keep grease out of a stew; and moreover, stews and food of that consistency are generally swallowed too quickly, and do not get mixed with the salivary juices.

Salads are also to be avoided.

Now in conclusion, while admitting that a regimen such as I propose in this paper may be hard for some to carry out, still I do earnestly advise those of my readers who are afflicted with rheumatism, even in its mildest form, to try it for a fortnight.