

CLIMATE, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON HEALTH.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



THREE years ago, having a press of literary work to accomplish in a given time, which required freedom from care of all kind, and leisure to concentrate, I settled matters comfortably at home, and went to reside at Bournemouth. I did not—so I reasoned—require a bracing air, but quiet was essential, so I settled among the pine woods of the East Cliff. I worked and

worked, pretty hard too, but never with a will; it was all a toil. The truth is, the air was too relaxing; there was nothing bronchitic about me, so I changed over to the West Cliff, where no woods are, but only a wide bracing moorland, which was then covered with heath and heather in richest bloom—a paradise for the bees. I was as much a bee as any of them, and had to work quite as hard. Well, I had suddenly changed from a relaxing to a bracing climate: too suddenly, for I caught cold, so that—though all my own fault—my stay at Bournemouth was one I cannot look back to with unalloyed pleasure. But from this experience of mine we may cull a lesson or two. One thing we should remember is, that there is really no need to go abroad for change of climate, and expose ourselves to expense and the danger of a vile *cuisine*; another, that we cannot be too careful in the choice of a climate; and a third, that we ought not to change climate too suddenly, or without making some preparations for the change. As regards this last, I may say that were a patient to leave this country for Madeira in, say, November, the change would be a gradual one, owing to the long voyage betwixt our island and that; but an invalid coming directly from the high Highlands, for example, from some place about 1,000 feet above the sea-level in Inverness or Ross-shire, and being whirled along in a mail train to Torquay or Bournemouth in about a day, would very likely find the change a dangerous one.

I wish my readers to bear what I have just said in mind, for I know it is only a too common thing for ailing people to come to health-resorts which, theoretically speaking, ought to be just the places to suit their complaints, and find themselves worse instead of better. They at once conclude the place does not agree with them; it never strikes them that the change may have been too sudden, and that no one can get acclimatised in an hour. However, off they hurry to some other spot which some one else has recommended as an earthly paradise; and there are, I happen to know, in this world, a race of roving invalids, who are ever on the move in search of health, never staying long enough in any one climate to acquire it. Now, in this paper I am not going to speak

of particular climates or health-resorts, but simply to give some plain advice that will enable my reader to choose for himself.

It might be asked what is meant by the term "climate." The simplest answer, if not a direct one, would be that what is termed "climate" includes the normal condition of the atmosphere *plus* the soil of any place. The atmosphere would be considered according to temperature, its pressure, its humidity, and its prevailing winds, the soil according to its substance, its clothing (vegetation, including trees, &c.) and its surroundings, whether hilly or the reverse; and I may add, its electric tension.

I have spoken in former papers about the different classes of climates, dividing them, if I remember rightly, into (1) exciting, (2) bracing, (3) sedative, and (4) relaxing, and also into summer and winter climates.

The ailments for which change of climate is to be recommended are, among many others, dyspepsia of almost every kind, disorders of other parts of the digestive canal, as well as the stomach, liver complaints, kidney troubles, nervousness, neuralgia, ennui, hypochondriasis, or low spirits, asthma—which, as I took care to point out in a former paper, is a nervous disease with functional or organic causes; gout, rheumatism, and various ailments of the lungs or air-passages, including consumption.

Now, no one who was of a highly nervous and irritable temperament, or who made blood too fast, and therefore was liable to inflammation, would seek for change in one of the exciting climates. Nor would such an one choose a very bracing climate; but for the over-worked and over-worried, those who wished to re-build a shattered frame, a bracing climate with sea-air would be suitable, while a relaxing climate would do positive injury.

But though climates are thus easily divisible into four classes, we hardly ever find them partaking altogether of the nature their names would indicate. All climates fluctuate; all are in some measure compound. The majority of days, however, will bear out the name; and on those that do not—when the climate seems to change all of a sudden, and the bracing health-resort becomes moist and relaxing, or the sedative one grows exciting for a time—then must the invalid take all the better care of himself.

Are we to study the death-rates of climates before we choose one that we think may suit us? To some extent we may be guided by these, but we must not forget that they are deceiving. In places, for instance, where invalids congregate to a great extent, the death-rate may read high, for we know well—and it is sad to think of it—that many sick people change only as a last resource, and it becomes the last. In estimating the death-rate, then, of any given place, I would rigidly exclude the comers and goers.

Another thing to be well considered before making

up one's mind to go anywhere is the season. I happen to know that many people run down to Hastings, Brighton, Torquay, &c., at altogether wrong times.

"Brighton"—we may imagine some one is saying—"is a bracing place, and it isn't the season now, so it will be cheap; I'll go there, and have a month or two."

Well, I do not say that Brighton is not a healthy town all the year round, but there is a prevalence of cold, raw, north-east winds in March and April that render it somewhat the reverse of wholesome for any one except the really robust, or those once fairly acclimatised to the place. You see, every health-resort has its season; and depend upon it, those seasons are well chosen by medical men who know what they are about.

I mentioned the word "acclimatised;" and there is a great deal more in that than, it seems to me, most people think of, or trouble themselves to think about. I will give an example that must be familiar to many. Take an inhabitant of inland Ross-shire, of fairly good health, and bring him in spring to one of the Southern counties of England; he will hardly be here a fortnight before he will be found wrapping up against the east winds—perhaps even wearing a top-coat and under-clothing; when spring gives place to summer, he gets no harder in muscle, no stronger in nerve, though he sleeps longer of a night than he ever did in Scotland; the heat annoys him, too, and makes him languid and inactive. He gets through the summer, and perhaps a very hard winter comes. "Richard is himself again!" the sky is clear and frosty, there is an honest foot of snow on the ground; he throws aside the top-coat; the blood once more mantles in his cheeks; he will have his cold bath every morning; and should the ice be an inch thick, he will smash it with his brawny fist or with the hard-frozen sponge, but have the bath he will, and is happy in consequence; all his hardiness returns, and his very footsteps ring on the ground as he marches along.

Two extreme cases illustrative of the dangers of a too sudden and extreme change of climate might be thus supposed: Let an Eskimo Indian change places with a native of Zanzibar; it could not be done all at once, but for hypothesis' sake we will suppose the change effected within a week. In less than another fortnight your Eskimo would be sleeping in his sea-laved grave on the beach, and the Zanzibarite would have gone to his long home under the snow.

The most suitable *aspect* for a house in this country would be a southern and western (combined) exposure, sheltered behind either by a ridge of hills, cliffs, or woods.

Our islands afford most healthy all-the-year-round climates, because the temperature is more equable.

The air of most of our large towns and cities is very impure, and loaded with poisonous gases, sulphuretted and carburetted hydrogen, carbonic acid gas, the emanations from sewers and from polluted rivers.

Can we wonder, then, at the inhabitants being, as a rule, puny, pale, and sickly?

"We live in air," says a recent writer, "and this air flows continually into our blood. No marvel, then, that we are influenced by climate, which means the condition of the air. In temperature, however, citizens have some advantage over dwellers in the country."

In villages in England the air is, as a rule, very pure. Around these there may even be marshy lands, but the emanation therefrom is diluted, and even neutralised or blown away altogether, by the fresh pure winds of heaven.

The higher these villages are situated, the more pure is the air; the more dry and bracing it is, and more laden with health-giving ozone.

Villages by the banks of large rivers like the Thames are subject to various influences that are by no means very conducive to health; notably, exhalations from the river itself, from decaying animal and vegetable matter on its banks, from the malaria of low-lying adjacent lands, and from haze and fogs. These are worst in the heat of summer and in autumn.

Houses or villages built near to fens or swampy moors are not to be desired, and the inhabitants are liable to ague or typhus fever, or both.

The same is to be said about dwellings near wet, unwholesome, or swampy woods.

We hear great talk of night air. "A land of meadows," says a reliable authority, "and parks, and ponds, and rivers, and woods is a thousand times more hazardous than all the nights of all the winters that ever were. This is the real night air to be dreaded, even though the grey mist should not rise, or the dew should not fall. To take a pleasant evening walk by the banks of the river or lake, to watch the trout rise at the evening flies; to saunter among wet groves till the moon rises, listening to the nightingale: these, and more of such rural amusements and delights, are the true night air—the malaria and the fever."

Well, I have to add to this, that though the strong and robust may withstand any amount of malarious darts aimed at their life through the medium of this true night air, invalids who frequent such districts ought to be cautious. Yet, is this not a mistake most commonly made—an invalid or delicate person *wrapping up* and going out at night, thinking it is the *cold* alone he or she has to avoid?

Gravel soils are most healthy, and next comes chalk.

Let me conclude this paper by remarking that thousands of city-folks, business and professional men (except medical men, who must remain in town), would be consulting their own interests by living at night out of the city altogether. In these days of hourly fast trains, how very speedily one can get whirled away from the emanation-laden atmosphere of town to pure and salubrious air!

If any one thinks of acting on my advice, he will do well to consider what part of the country around town will suit his constitution best; which an interview with his own medical man will the more easily enable him to do.