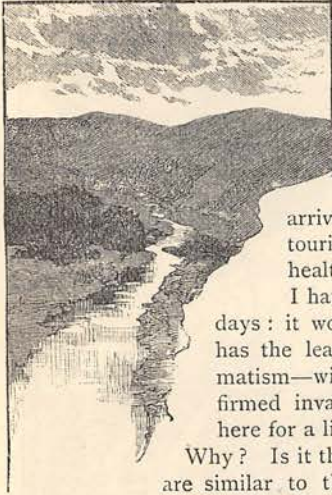


THOUGHTS SUGGESTED AT A YORKSHIRE SPA.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



I DO not think that I ever fully realised what a fearful affliction rheumatism or rheumatic gout is to individuals, until I happened to arrive, during my summer touring, at a pretty little health-resort in Yorkshire.

I have been here but two days: it would do any one who has the least tendency to rheumatism—without being a confirmed invalid—good to sojourn here for a like period.

Why? Is it that the waters—which are similar to those of Harrogate—and the baths would in that brief period act like a charm, and restore the visitor to health? No, I do not mean to say they would, beneficial and all though they may be. The effect would be a moral one, and the good would accrue in this way:—

The visitor—bearing in mind what I have said before: that rheumatism is a blood disease, intimately connected with, if not depending on, disorders of the digestive organs—would see such sights as would cause him to regulate his system of living, and give more attention to what he ate and drank, and to his manner of eating and drinking, for the future.

Here, passing my gate—for I am writing these lines at the watering-place I mention—are dozens of invalids—not scores, for the season has not yet sufficiently advanced. Last evening the rain came down in torrents; the sky was as dark as clouds could make it; a mist rose up off the troubled lake with the force with which the rain fell on it; and invalids could only gaze gloomily out at the scene from the windows of their hotels or apartments; but to-day the sky is bright and beautiful, and a gentle breeze is blowing: hence our invalids are crawling abroad.

Yonder goes a poor lassie one feels pity for. She is well-dressed and comely; perhaps she is well off in a worldly way, but she is painfully limping on a stick.

There goes a poor soul on crutches: his is a bad case, perhaps incurable; but he has been hoping against hope, and has come here with hope in his heart.

Yonder are three matronly ladies. They may or might be sisters or cousins, so like are they in face, in hair, which is white, and in dress, which is black. They walk slowly and with difficulty; they would scorn to use sticks to lean on, but they use their sturdy umbrellas, nevertheless.

You see here people in every attitude of pain and

weariness, which speaks volumes to an observant medical mind like my own. The stiffened joints, the slow and laboured gait, the half-bent neck, the unstraightened back, with one supporting hand placed upon the spine: all speak to me in a language that cannot be mistaken.

I could guess at the life-history of many of these.

That poor young lady, for example—why is she so early afflicted? Not through any excess of living, of course; she very probably inherited the idiosyncrasy. The rheumatism might have been kept at bay with care until, out of her teens, her heart strengthened by years, her constitution might have defied the foe; but exposure to wet and a draught, either in driving or in a boat, brought on an attack, and happy may she consider herself if, having recovered, she has future immunity from the distressing malady.

To some extent we might suppose that either the girl herself was to blame, or her guardians; for, knowing she was delicate, flannel underclothing should undoubtedly have been worn both winter and summer.

Flannel underclothing—or call it woollen—is not a cure for chronic rheumatism, but it is so sure a preventive that I am justified in urgently recommending its use. Nay, further: without holding extreme views like the German doctor, I would advise patients who are subject to rheumatism or rheumatic gout to adopt the woollen system of clothing almost entirely, both *by night and by day*. There is no reason at all why the sheets of the bed should not be of wool, pillow-cases alone being linen. If this plan were adopted, there would be but little chance indeed of catching a chill in bed.

Once adopted, so great would be the comfort obtained and the safety insured, that the old linen or cotton sheets would be very soon discarded. I must here warn the invalid, however, against neglecting to have these woollen sheets or thin blankets regularly washed.

I would carry my scheme of woollen day clothing so far as to permit neither linen next the skin nor, except on particular and unavoidable dress occasions, linen anywhere; and the same rules should be carried out summer and winter.

Of the feet and limbs particular care should be taken. The shoes or boots—boots are best—ought to be strong, of the best leather, and roomy enough to admit of warm worsted socks or stockings being worn. These should be soft, and on no account should they be worn after they become damp with perspiration or otherwise. Those who suffer from chronic rheumatism have often weak right hearts; the blood does not find its way back from the feet with celerity, and heat and perspiration are the results. Thousands of people not only catch cold, but positively catch their deaths through the feet. Why will they not be warned? Socks and stockings are cheap enough, yet I know

many who spend pounds on their backs and begrudge pence on their feet. Two pairs of stockings or socks a week! This is not enough, reader. If you are subject to rheumatism, or have an idiosyncrasy that points that way, or if you are ever troubled with acidity or heartburn, change the socks once a day, and if damp, twice or thrice a day. If you do, you will live to bless the "Family Doctor" for giving you this hint.

Persons of the rheumatic diathesis who do not wear woollen clothing are very liable to chills from damps and draughts, but even those who do dress as I advise should not expose themselves rashly.

If I were now to guess at the life-histories of those matronly ladies who lean as gracefully as they can on their silken umbrellas, I should say that their trouble, if not hereditary, arose from dietary errors and want of sufficient exercise. They have been busy people, perhaps—busy at some kind of business which took up all their time; they did not require exercise, they thought, being always on the move, one way or another—with only the walk to and from church on Sunday to count for relaxation of mind. They forgot, or they did not know, that moving around at the duties of business is not exercise in its proper sense; that exercise must be pleasurable to be of any avail; that mind and body must both have a change. Probably the digestion began to fail before a twinge of rheumatism took place; they had little appetite for breakfast, except for that cup of tea and toast. They often felt weary before the day was half over—*tired*. I emphasise the word "tired" because this feeling is universal at the onset of chronic rheumatism. Sometimes their backs ached in so weary a way that even appetite was interfered with, and depression of spirits caused them to take very gloomy views of life indeed. Cordials would be suggested. Ah! these cordials, what a deal of misery they have to account for. Giving but temporary relief, requiring to be taken oftener, and still more often, as the taking of them becomes a habit, injuring the digestion, producing irritability of temper and restless nights, they never fail to increase the troubles they are meant to quell, and shorten life itself.

Behold those three old men yonder. They are really not old in years, but no ancient Chelsea pensioner ever walked more stiffly. They are only chance acquaintances, but a fellow-feeling makes them wondrous kind. They talk not of politics, nor of the general news of the day, but of hot baths and sulphurous waters, and they compare notes, and each takes some small degree of comfort in thinking that he is not alone in his rheumatic misery, and that there are others quite as ill as he.

Now, one mistake that many such as these make when at watering-places like this, is that of taking stimulants to banish their pain and weariness. The temptation is great, but medical men will tell them that this plan only makes matters worse, because it weakens nerves and digestion.

I may tell you at once, reader, if you are rheumatically inclined, or actually a sufferer, that a residence

and course of treatment at places of the Harrogate type will do good if the diet is judiciously regulated at the same time. If you have not the will and the power of mind to do this you may save yourself the expense of coming to any spa whatever.

It is truly a matter of the greatest regret that so many people are ignorant of the true nature of rheumatism and of its intimate association with the economy of digestion. They come to spas, they drink the waters, they use the baths, they live regular lives, and avoid excess; they enjoy quiet and freedom from business, and lo! their pains and stiffnesses and wearinesses leave them; they are young again, and almost forget they ever were ill.

But away they go back to business, and perhaps to pleasure, perhaps to unbridled licence in the luxuries of the table; and, alas! back comes the foe with a rush, and in mind and body they are worse than they were before.

The same holds good as regards a course of treatment taken without going to a spa.

You take any of the hundred and one medicines vaunted as complete cures of rheumatism; you take also a course of Turkish baths; and one way or another you manage to drive the acid on which your trouble depends out of your system. And all would be well and good if stricter attention were paid to the rules of correct living, and errors of diet most carefully avoided.

The worst of rheumatism is that every attack leaves the sufferer more liable to another: that changes take place in the sheaths of tendons: that deposits occur around joints: that the smaller arteries—the minute, hair-like ramifications that supply the sinews and joints—become ossified: that capillaries may lose their elasticity and become ossified, and liable to burst even in vital parts; and that hope, which is often a cure in itself in other diseases, is the worst friend a rheumatic person can have if it flatters him, and blinds him to all sense of danger.

Leaving spas out of count, therefore—leaving medicinal treatment on one side—this paper will not have been written in vain if I can only get those of my readers whom it concerns to remember that this heart-breaking disease, rheumatism, depends upon an acid condition of blood and system, which, though it may be palliated by medicine and a course of waters, baths, &c., can only be held in check by most careful attention to diet and clothing.

Most people will do well to reduce the diet by even one-half. All will do well to live most abstemiously, and to abjure stimulants, or let the doctor prescribe them, because he will tell you that they must only be taken *with* food.

Woollen clothing, then, regulated diet, avoidance of everything likely to cause acidity, regular exercise, the cold bath before breakfast, open-air exercise—not violent—and an annual and complete holiday: these will do more good in quelling a rheumatic tendency than medicine or anything else.

Pray think of it.