

DERBYSHIRE NECK: ITS CAUSES AND CURE.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



THE peculiar ailment which forms the subject of my paper for this month is one from which, happily, the majority of my readers are free, while many may never even have heard of it. Nevertheless, one must sometimes write for the minority, and I have the best of reasons for believing that the complaint is painfully prevalent in more than one district into which our well-known yellow-covered MAGAZINE monthly finds its way, both in India and England. In

a back number, while writing on the care and culture of the voice, I mentioned the existence of a peculiar gland called the thyroid, which lies in front of the windpipe. Well, for some reason or other, not sufficiently explained by even our best physiologists and most skilful practitioners, this particular gland becomes in some people enlarged, and the enlargement goes by the name of goitre, or, more commonly, Derbyshire neck.

Than this unsightly ailment, nothing perhaps is more dreaded in the districts in which it is apt to prevail.

The swelling begins gradually on the front and lower part of the neck, and for a long time may be little else except a sort of fulness, which some have gone so far as to characterise as graceful. It is a sad gracefulness.

The disease is not, as a rule, a painful one, nor does it give rise to any constitutional symptoms, but it is a deformity if it reaches any size, and, if it gets very large, a great inconvenience as well. It is not unusual for the neck, at the part where the goitre is, to measure nearly two feet.

It is very much more common among women than men—in the proportion, it is said, of twelve to one—and is often larger on one side of the neck than on the other.

The grain—if I might so call it—of the gland gets bigger, its blood-vessels are enlarged, and the whole organ filled with a thick viscid fluid. The swelling may be soft, or firm, or even hard.

One of the worst and most trying features of a case, consists in the fact that the goitre may continue for quite a long time, years indeed, of a size that may be little short of the so-called gracefulness, then begin suddenly to enlarge to an enormous extent.

I have said, as a rule, the tumour is painless, but it may give rise to symptoms that are in themselves very distressing indeed, if not absolutely dangerous.

The least disagreeable of these are caused by the weight of the tumour, which is in some cases a terrible drag. It may also impede the passage of the blood from the head, and thus cause feelings of fulness

therein, singing and noises in the ears, and even deafness. The teeth often decay, probably from the same cause.

If, along with the goitre, there be anæmia, or poverty of blood, the symptoms consequent on that state of system will be much increased, and we may have throbbing of the veins, palpitation of the heart, distressful dyspepsia, lowness of spirits, and sleeplessness.

While, however, a very large tumour may exist without giving rise to any symptoms of a very urgent character, a small one may be so placed as to cause feelings of suffocation, or great difficulty in swallowing, or it might even encircle the trachea so as to make swallowing impossible.

There has been no lack of skilful investigation among medical men of the causes of this deformity, and many facts have been elicited that are not only interesting in themselves, but which aid us in our attempts at giving relief or actual cure.

Here is one, and I make no apology for quoting it, because it may serve to bring hope to some afflicted one who reads this paper: Dr. Edmund Parker thinks it is certain that the water of goitrous districts contains large quantities of lime and magnesia, being derived from limestone and dolomitic districts. During the ten years 1843—53 the water used in the food and drink of the prisoners at the Durham county gaol contained large quantities of sulphate of lime, carbonate of lime, and chloride of magnesium. The men in all classes, whether on low diet or otherwise, suffered extensively from goitre. The pumping machinery of the well, however, got out of order, and the water (filtered) of the river Wear was temporarily introduced for the use of the gaol. The effect soon became apparent on the health of the prisoners, and the affections of the neck speedily subsided. So marked was this result that the water of the well was analysed by Professor Johnson, who condemned it as unwholesome and unfit for use.*

Mr. M'Clelland, in his sketch of the climate and soils of Bengal and the North-West Provinces, believes with Dr. Parker; and the evidence he brings forward is highly conclusive, for the result of his personal experience is that goitre never prevails to any extent except in villages situated upon or close to limestone rocks. The natives themselves ascribe the prevalence of the disorder to the use of limestone water; and in the districts watered from slate or green sandstone rock, goitre is almost unknown.

However, as if to shake our faith in these statements, a French surgeon mentions the fact of two villages divided from each other only by a glen, both standing on the same kind of soil, and both watered from the same sort of rock, and both on the same level, and goitre prevailing in one and not in the other. An important part of the Frenchman's state-

* *The Edinburgh Journal of Medicine*, 1885.

ment is this, that *there is iodine in the water of the village exempt from the disorder.*

After all it is probably the most sensible plan to believe that while the water has a very great deal to do with the production of goitre, other causes combine with it to generate the disease, notably the marshiness and unwholesomeness of the soil and the peculiar habits of the people.

There is a still more distressing kind of goitre, which I cannot do more here than simply mention. It is exophthalmic bronchocele, and is characterised specially by three sets of symptoms—enlargement of the gland itself, protrusion or bulging out of the eyeballs, and palpitation of the heart.

This is sometimes called Graves's disease.

There is usually short-sightedness, no doubt arising from the changed shape of the eye, which is sometimes so large that the eyelids cannot cover it at night. There is also a pulsation and thrill felt in the tumour if the hand is placed over it. The pulse is easily excited, the heart itself may be much enlarged, and the general health much disturbed, the appetite either gone or capricious, the patient subject to attacks of vertigo and fainting, and usually sleepless.

Now for the *treatment* of ordinary goitre. What I have said about the water of the district being, seemingly, a common cause of the disorder, gives us hope. It was quite wonderful, indeed, how soon the gael patients recovered, after the filtered water of the Wear was substituted for that of the well impregnated with both lime and magnesium.

The fact that the soil, if unwholesome, or the district generally, has a tendency to induce goitre, points to the very first and most important indication of treatment—removal of the cause; in other words, the patient who has goitre coming on, goitre in its incipient and most "graceful" form, must seek an immediate change.

As females suffering from goitre are usually afflicted in other ways, they should not only change their residence to a more healthy country, but put themselves under the charge of a medical man for a time.

But cases may be in existence, and doubtless are, where a poor patient finds it impossible to change his residence. He may turn to the advising doctor and say—

"It's all very well to recommend change of residence. How am I to be sure of getting work to support my family in another part of the country?"

Well, to such as these I would reply—There still is hope if you do this: Boil, soften, and filter every drop of water you use, either for drinking purposes or for cooking; and, if it be possible, distil it.

Is there medicine for the cure of goitre? Yes, assuredly there is, but you *must* see about the water.

And our sheet-anchor in the therapeutic treatment of this unsightly disorder is undoubtedly iodine in

some shape or form. The iodine must be taken internally, and employed externally as well. The simplest form of iodine treatment is that by iodide of potassium. This may be adopted at home without even consulting a doctor. Suppose it is an adult, the following would be a useful formula:—

R.	Potass. iodidi	grs. ʒo.
	Vin. ipecac.	ʒ ij.
	Succi tarax.	ʒ i.
	Decoct. sarsa. co. ad... ..	ʒ viii.
		M.

Label, one-sixth part thrice daily after meals.

At the same time, either iodine liniment is to be smeared over the tumour, or it may be painted as often as the patient can bear it with the strong tincture of iodine.

A better or stronger form, in which to take the iodine internally, is to commence with three grains of the iodide of ammonium, in an ounce of the infusion of bark, thrice daily before meals, and gradually increase the dose up to ten or twelve grains. Consult your physician first, however.

The iodide of iron may be tried now and then, but most cases will yield to the above treatment. A modification of the somewhat heroic treatment of Major Holmes of the Indian army—he was killed in the Mutiny—will often do good. It is simply the rubbing in, every alternate night, of an ointment of the red iodide of mercury, fifteen grains to an ounce of lard. The neck must not be blistered, however, or bad constitutional effects may follow.

This, then, is the main part of the treatment I recommend. To epitomise: it is simply either the removal of the patient entirely from the insalubrious district, or a radical improvement by means within the command of all of the water used, *plus* the use of iodine internally and externally.

Can nothing more be done? Nothing to aid this treatment? Yes, a good deal. If you have incipient goitre, you must look upon yourself as in the clutches of an enemy, and leave nothing undone to get clear away.

Without weakening yourself by such a course, you may take a warm bath every third day. This will tend to keep the blood pure, and get rid of obnoxious matter. But the blood must be sufficiently rich as well as pure; take, therefore, four grains of the citrate of iron and ammonia in a bitter bark decoction, thrice a day.

Now and then a fortnight's course of quinine will do good—the citrate of quinine and iron. The system must be kept free by an occasional aperient, by fruit in the morning, and oatmeal porridge. The bath must be taken daily. The diet must be nourishing, and an extra amount of exercise taken in the open air.

If, then, in this brief paper I have made the state of the case plain to you, and given you hope, I am happy.

