"MY POOR CHEST AGAIN!"

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

ONCE upon a time—I could not say how many hundreds of years ago—there lived in Thessaly a great king, whose name was Peleus. By some means or other, the story does not tell us how, he got introduced to Nereus. I cannot give the history of Nereus himself, my memory is not good enough, but he was the son of an ancient sea-god, called Oceanus, and had no less than fifty daughters, called the Nereides. Nereus was to be pitied, but that is neither here nor there. Peleus got married to one of them, and there were thus only forty-nine left. But mighty monarch though Peleus was, he had a son who gained greater honour and glory than he. This boy, whose name was Achilles, joined the army and distinguished himself very much in the Trojan war. Although ever foremost in the fight, he never received so much as a scratch, at which everybody wondered, until told that the captain was invulnerable; that the sea-nymph his mother had dipped him when a child in some mystical river, and every portion of his body which the water touched became proof against dart or spear. But—there always *is* a but—the right heel, by which he had been suspended, had not come in contact with the water at all, and Paris, son of Priam, took advantage of this: he fired an arrow at the captain's heel, and then—there was no more Achilles. Very likely his mother had wished to render her boy immortal, but did not quite succeed.

Well, just like Achilles, we each and all of us have our weak and vulnerable point, however sturdy and strong we may be in other respects.

This is usually some internal organ which, when we happen to get exposed to cold or wet while in a state of temporary debility, from fasting, for instance, is singled out and "determined to."

By this latter phrase, I mean that the chill sends the blood more particularly to this weak organ. Congestion is the consequence, and, if this be not relieved, inflammation may follow. A mere momentary shock of cold will send the blood from without inwards, as in the case of a cold plunge or shower bath. But in people who have plenty of *vis naturæ* this is really beneficial, for the nerves set to work at once, and with the resiliency of the tiny blood-vessels speedily restore matters to the *status quo*. After this we feel the outer surface, if not actually glowing, at least more comfortable than before, while at the same time the mind and whole body feel lighter, for that temporary congestion has stimulated the excretion of every internal organ. Hence the healthfulness of this cold bath to those who are strong enough to take it.

A long-continued chill is quite a different affair, and a dangerous affair as well.

I have not got my physiological gown on to-day. It is a toga that I do not often array myself in, while writing these Family Doctor Papers, for I well know that to most of my readers physiology is a dry-as-dust science; but there is a question which it needs but little very deep reasoning to explain, although it is a most important one to everybody living in this uncertain climate of ours: "How do we catch cold?"

If we only knew what to do to avoid such a mischance, would it not be a blessing? Unfortunately some of the causes of "common colds" are beyond our power of resistance. Certain states or conditions of atmosphere, for example, sudden changes from dry cold perhaps, to moderate warmth with moisture; a moisture in all probability laden with mephitic vapour or unwholesome inhalations from the ground, the grass, or even the trees. These act for evil in at least two ways, for while the malaria poisons or inflames the mucous membrane that lines the nose, eyes, and air passages throughout, the moist warmth debilitates the body, and renders resistance to the evil influences less energetic and effectual, and, according to the amount of malaria, if I may so call the bacteria-charged air, and the degree of change of temperature will be the virulency of the cold one catches. This will also depend upon many other causes. Mr. A—— may escape entirely, Mr. B—— have but a slight attack, while Mr. C—— suffers severely, and Mr. D——'s trouble goes on to actual inflammation of perhaps a dangerous nature.

But the most common cause of cold is a chill. I do not like the word "chill," and only use it in lieu of a better, and because it is understood or supposed to be understood by all. Now, exposure of the whole body to cold would produce universal depression of vitality. Such exposure seldom occurs, but an example of it might be cited in the case of a person who had fallen into the water, and after getting out had remained inactive for some length of time. If one keeps energetically moving, even though wet to the skin, there is an active resistance to stagnation of the blood and congestion anywhere. This should be remembered.

A partial chill on the other hand will, in most constitutions, result in a cold; that is, if it be kept up too long. Now, I have not, strange to say, to go very far for an example, and I always think that one should make use of the simplest illustrations he can find, if they are capable of making clear the meaning he wishes to convey. I am writing these lines, then, in a small ornamental house in the middle of my grounds, and which I call my garden study. It is situated on the top of a high green mound or terrace, and certainly is exposed to plenty of fresh air. Well, it is seldom, even in winter, that I have a fire; but to-day, and for

some days—the month is November—a high east wind has been blowing, and the stove has been lit. Nevertheless, my love for the purest of air has caused me to sit for the last hour close by the open window, and bare-headed. The result is a warning sneeze or two, a little heat of the eyes, and stuffiness of nostrils. These are certainly the first signs of a cold, but I wisely and in time shut this casement and open another, trusting to the vigour of my constitution to ward off evil effects. This is an example of slight chill. Had I sat longer head-on to that east wind draught, a cold could not have been prevented.

But here another question obtrudes itself: Why, in a case like the present, should it be the lining membrane of the nostrils and eyes that is affected? Or why is there no bad effect perceptible on the structures that lie between this membrane and the skin, upon which fell the direct impact of the cold current? It will not do to answer that the irritation of the mucous surface was occasioned by actually snuffing in a cold current; it was not wholly so due, perhaps not even in the most trifling degree. And had my chest been my weak point, that would have been affected, although the air before it reached it would be warmer by passing through the nostrils—I never breathe through the mouth. I should in that case be now coughing instead of sneezing. No; the answer, in best accord with the reasonings of physiology, is found in the fact that the skin which covers the outside of the body, and the mucous membrane which lines every portion and organ of the interior, are one and the same thing, and united in a continuous network of blood-vessels as well as nerves, so that chill, or the deprivation of blood on the skin, results in temporary congestion or over-fulness of blood in the mucous membrane. Now, note that blood is composed of two parts, a watery, clear fluid, and the red corpuscles which form the clot in drawn blood, and if turgidity of the vessels of the lining membrane of the nasal passages or lungs takes place, the watery portion will to some extent exude, while all the million minute glands in the neighbourhood pour out their secretions; hence we have running of the nose in colds in the head, and exudation causing cough in those situated in the lungs.

We usually give the name of bronchitis to lung colds, and it is needless to say they are dangerous owing to the delicacy of structure of these organs, and the likelihood of the inflammation affecting the deeper structures of the lung itself.

Unhappily, the chest is to thousands, nay, but millions of us, what the heel was to Achilles—the one vulnerable spot.

I am not going to suggest means for curing colds in this paper; I do enough, I think, for one day, if I indicate plans or methods of prevention. And I cannot surely better effect my object than by trying to explain when applied cold is dangerous, and when it is merely a bugbear. I have given one example in my own person; the corollary is—beware of draughts. There is danger, I mean, in having one portion of the body exposed to chill, the other portions being warm. Example:—I do maintain and defy contradiction in saying that many thousands of people owe their fatal illnesses to colds caught in bed. For here the front of the chest is kept warm, so are the arms and whole body—the face and head excepted, but they are inured—while the one wee morsel left exposed to chill, especially in those who sleep on the side, is not much bigger, perhaps, than the heel of Achilles, and lies beneath the nape of the neck and between the shoulder blades. Have you never felt cold just there, reader, towards morning of a winter night? Protect that spot. If delicate, there is where the chest should be shielded by a chest protector.

People subject to colds in the chest should do all they can—and that is a good deal—to prevent recurrence of their complaints. We hear people say sometimes, "Yes, I am rather subject to colds, but they don't last long." The warning answer to this is, They do not last long for two reasons: first, you are young or middle-aged and have strength to throw them off; and secondly, the mucous membrane has not yet become chronically thickened. But advancing years make matters worse, and each winter cough prepares the ground for its successor.

Here is another hint: I have spoken of certain warm mephitic-laden and debilitating states of atmosphere conducing to colds, but even in the healthiest of weather it is possible to engender such an atmosphere indoors; and people who "mug" themselves in badly-ventilated rooms, and are afraid of a breath of fresh air, simply do this. Their mucous membrane, aye, their whole bodies, get enfeebled, and they become no more able to bear a puff of cold, wholesome wind than thistledown can stand a thunder-shower.

A person of this sort wants the purest blood it is possible to manufacture. How to do it? Why, begin with food: let it be moderate, nutritious, tasty, toothsome, and solid; coffee and tea only in moderation; healthful exercise to the verge—no further—of fatigue and perspiration; the purest of air outdoors and in, by day and night. As to the baleful effects of night air, it is best to look upon this as a myth.

Next, as to the morning prophylactic. This is the tub. Soap and lather with hot water the whole body, then have a cold sponge bath. When partly dressed take a ten-minutes' spell of the dumb-bells.

As to clothing, nothing is more important to people with weak chests. Let the under-clothing be all wool, but not thick. It must *not* be too warm. The dress should be nearly all wool, and never heavy. The feet should never be damp.

In all habits of life such persons should be most temperate. Diet should not be stimulating, nor should hot sauces be taken, nor anything to interfere with the due action of the liver.

Cultivate the habit of breathing through the nose; do not sleep under a great weight of bed-clothes, nor in too soft a bed, nor too warm a room. Never breathe a dusty atmosphere, nor walk quickly up hill. Obedience to these simple rules, without the aid of medicine—which nearly always weakens—will stave off many a cold, so that from year's end to year's end you will never have to say, "My poor chest again!"