

THE FEET AND THEIR TROUBLES.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



HOUGH I am far from considering myself either very old or very old-fashioned, I have nevertheless a firm belief in the sageness of some ancient saws, that have reference to the preservation of health. Here is one, for example, the wisdom of which is apparent

enough :—"Keep the feet warm and the head cool." A cool head means cool judgment, and warm feet, nine times out of ten, health of blood and body. But no foot could be warm in winter if encased in a tightly-fitting boot. It does not stand to scientific reasoning that it could be so: for, first and foremost, the blood that contains the essentials of animal heat is squeezed out of the skin; and, secondly, the air-spaces of the sock or stocking, on which the retention of heat depends, are diminished, or rendered almost *nil*. Even a Board-school boy knows, or ought to, that cotton wool or flannel is no warmer in reality than linen, the extra heat the former gives resting in the fact that it contains more blood-warmed air, and therefore conserves that which the latter lets escape.

This paper of mine is not meant to be a sermon on boots and shoes, but there are so many little things connected with the subject which are so beneficial to learn, but so easy to forget, that I hold myself justified in saying a few words more on it.

If the remark were made, that there is nearly as much evil done by the constant wearing of tight boots as by tight lacing, it would at least be going in the direction of the truth. Were the reader to be conducted round the walls of a large surgical hospital, and to witness the ugly cases of deformity, distortion, and ulceration caused by the neglect of the feet, he would not soon forget it. And the worst forms of these are caused by the tight boot. Toes are plaited, bones are twisted, become necrosed, and have to be removed, and lameness for life ensues. But apart from any such painful results as these, the very discomfort alone of having the feet worn in a vice must be great, and certainly does not tend to improve either the health or the temper.

That a nation's sons and daughters should learn to walk well and with some degree of stateliness is, perhaps, more important than it seems. For the *upright* position conduces to the health of every organ in the body. But no man in tight boots ever did or could walk properly, and no young lady with very high heels either. In the last case, the most that can be said for the gait is that it is fashionable; it certainly is not beautiful. It is when young that one should learn to walk. Even the little bear's mother knew that, when she threw him on the ground and told him to be off. Perhaps we human beings know the fact too, but it

would hardly appear so in thousands of cases, for in good society do we not often notice that the poor wee feet of "totties" not ten years old have been cramped into boots sizes too small for them? No wonder such children are sometimes peevish, though they strive to look prim. Their feet may become stunted in size, but the cruelty is likely to stunt their very minds as well.

The wearing of heavy boots is bad for the feet and the health also. The strength of the boot or shoe ought to be in proportion to that of the wearer, if comfort in walking is to be studied, and stateliness of gait acquired. This hint is of the greatest importance when purchasing for children. Deformities of many kinds are caused by too heavy boots on young feet, and the prospects of the little wearer probably spoiled for life.

I do not remember that any one has ever written an ode to slippers. Yet who has not felt the comfort of them and an easy chair after a long day's journey? A good thing may be abused, however. There is a difference between making oneself extra comfortable at the fireside of an evening, and going slip-shod most of the day. The feet need a certain amount of support when walking has to be done, even if it be but in the house.

The word "talipes" may sound a strange one to many. It is expressive enough, however, when we remember its derivations: *talus*, the ankle, and *pes*, the foot. It is used to designate all species of deformities generally known as club-foot, and common among children. The bones of the ankle, &c., may be twisted down or up or to either side. I merely mention club-foot to remind mothers that in nearly all cases it is capable of being remedied if the child is taken early enough to the surgeon; and that the more experience the surgeon has had in this class of cases, the more simple and perfect will the cure be.

If, on the other hand, the ankles are only weak, attention to the health, more nourishing food, Parrish's chemical food in small doses, and sea-bathing will put matters straight. But an indiarubber bandage should be worn round the ankles, in order to give support. If matters do not mend, the little sufferer should be taken to the surgeon.

Sometimes contraction of the sole of the foot takes place in older people, or contraction of one toe. Either ought to be seen to as soon as possible, as, though not dangerous, the ailments lame, and they, of course, get worse instead of better.

Flat-foot, as it is called, is another accidental deformity, which must be taken very early if much good is to be done. It is, unfortunately, too well known to need description. It is simply what it is—a flat foot; the bones and ligaments have given and come down, so that the whole sole touches the floor. It is impossible that much walking without pain can be done by

an individual so afflicted ; but if he or she be young, there is hope. One thing must be borne in mind—if possible, for a time no heavy weights must be lifted. The cure consists in having rounded soles placed in the inside of the boot. These are made higher as the treatment proceeds, but the surgeon must see to this.

While on the subject of deformities, it will not, I suppose, be considered an unpardonable departure from my text if I mention two troubles which afflict a great many boys, and even girls, and which I am very often asked about. I refer to the *bow-leg* and the *knock-knee*. Parents like to see their children growing up straight in limb as well as plump and healthy. When they are not so, it is not only a grief to the former, but often a positive misery to the latter. The bow-leg is caused, as a rule, by a deficiency in the earthy salts of the bone. This simply suggests the cure. The trouble is caused by rickets to some degree or other, and therefore, while splints in some form will nearly always be necessary, the most nutritious diet will become a *sine quâ non*, good milk and cod-liver oil being looked upon as sheet-anchors. There is an idea only too prevalent among parents—namely, that children “grow out” of the deformity, or that, in other words, the bent legs may grow in again. This is all but a fallacy ; besides, it is surely right to be on the safe side and have things seen to.

The dietetic treatment of *knock-knees* is just on the same principle, because this deformity, like the last, occurs mostly in children who are not too strong, though they need not be the subject of rickets. It is really the ligaments of the joints that are in fault, and in every case a surgeon should be consulted. Too much exercise must not be taken, and the soles of the boots should be well kept up. Indeed, growing lads, if weakly, who are always down at heels, need never be surprised if their legs go a little out of the plumb.

It is somewhat strange that in England corns are regarded as quite as much a portion of the anatomy of the foot as toe-nails. Corns are simply thickenings of the skin on any part liable to pressure ; and if

proper boots and shoes were worn, with always care taken that the socks were soft and warm and clean, they would never exist. The cure is self-evident. I ought to say, however, that, as a rule, caustics are dangerous, except in the hands of an expert. Sometimes corns suppurate. They are then exceedingly painful ; but a poultice, and rest, with the cutting of the corn to get off the thick skin and let out the matter, soon put things to rights.

A bunion is a business of another sort, and a far more serious one, and may run on to the destruction of the bone itself and a lifetime's lameness. If one occurs, the treatment must at first be palliative, but a doctor should be consulted, for old-standing cases are all but incurable. Another gentleman who must be consulted is an intelligent bootmaker, for on his skill, as much as on the surgeon's, will your future comfort depend.

A lesser evil that the feet have to suffer from is cold. This is purely constitutional with many, and only a system of hygiene, with now and then medicines which improve the blood, are to be relied upon. The cold bath can hardly be recommended in cases of this kind, because the subjects are usually not of strong recuperative power. Bed-socks may be worn, but I have no great faith in the warm water baby or bed-bottle.

The dangers of damp feet or wet feet are proverbial. They are certainly best avoided, as they give rise to chills and colds. Many people catch cold very easily through the feet.

To conclude : the hygienic treatment of the feet consists not only in the wearing of proper boots and socks, but in the most careful washing, with either warm or cold water, and mild soap. A thick, rough towel should be used, and the drying made a very complete thing, even between the toes. If this is done every day, thickened skin will rarely need the rasp. “A cool head, then, and warm feet,” is the excellent saying I began this paper with, and so let me end.

 THE BEST OF REASONS WHY.

LOVE, my love, I love you,
Not that you are sweet,
Though in you all graces,
All perfections meet.

Love, my love, I love you,
Not that you are fair,
Though in you is beauty,
Rarest of the rare.

Love, my love, I love you,
Not that you are wise,
Though in you all knowledge,
Joined with prudence, lies.

Love, my love, I love you,
Not that you have gold,
Though in large abundance
Wealth to you has rolled.

Love, my love, I love you,
Not that you are great,
Though in you centre
Rank and high estate.

Love, my love, I love you
But for reasons two—
Just because I love you,
Am beloved of you !