

A REASSURING WORD ABOUT CANCER.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

THERE has been considerable discussion lately, both in the medical and lay press, as to the alleged increase in the frequency of cancer. It is generally admitted that the recorded cases are more numerous than they were twenty years ago, but this fact has been explained by some authorities by the greater precision of medical knowledge—a more exact diagnosis of disease being made than formerly—and by the increase in population. A vast array of statistics was dealt with, but before any certain conclusion can be drawn it is evident that further investigation is necessary. There is, however, no doubt that the great recorded increase is more apparent than real.

Cancer is held in such universal dread—this is not surprising when the terrible nature of the disease is considered—and so much misapprehension in regard to it prevails, that I think it worth while to correct a few of the popular impressions which so frequently make treatment difficult and cure impossible.

It has long been thought that cancer is strongly hereditary, and that it is therefore a family disease. This view is supported by numerous instances, but more recent investigation shows that as in other diseases, the influence of heredity has been over-estimated. It was also thought to be a disease of middle age, and though it is true that it attacks most often those in the full vigour of life, no age is wholly exempt from liability to cancer. We know little even yet of its cause. Its origin is often ascribed to an injury: it has been attributed to the persistent irritation of the skin (as in chimney-sweep's cancer, which is produced by the constant irritation of soot). Usually, however, no cause can be assigned. Technically, cancer is regarded as a new growth. Some of the living cells in the body multiply abnormally, producing a degenerate tissue which in time spreads and invades the neighbouring parts. The lymphatic glands may become affected—the disease then ceases to be local, and becomes constitutional. There has been much speculation concerning the cause of this unwonted activity on the part of the cells. It has been suggested that the particular cells which develop into the cancerous tumour are remnants of embryonic cells, which, under favourable conditions—what these are being unknown at present—grow and multiply. More lately, attention has been fixed upon another theory—that cancer is of the nature of a parasitic disease.

The microscopical appearances upon which this view is based are variously interpreted. Even convincing evidence of contagiousness of cancer is wanting, though some have thought that the inhabitants of certain houses are more liable than others to the disease. The use of certain articles of food, *e.g.* tomato, has been supposed to induce cancer, but there is no foundation for this idea. There has also been noticed an excessive prevalence in certain areas—that is to say, cancer has a geographical distribution. An adequate explanation of this incidence is still wanting. On the whole, it is more prudent to abstain from adopting any theory at present. There is one point, however, upon which all observers agree: At first cancer is a local disease, and the greatest danger depends upon delay in treatment. How many people, though perfectly aware of the existence of a tumour or lump, which increases gradually but surely in size, wait for months before they seek advice!! Too often the favourable time is past, and they are too late.

There is no doubt that if treated early, cure is possible in the majority of cases. A few words in reference to treatment. Drugs are absolutely useless. Drug after drug of reputed efficacy has been carefully tested by competent observers and found useless. Occasionally a new "cure" is introduced. "Hope reigns eternal in the human breast," and any temporary improvement is described as a cure, and thus another source of delay is introduced. It must not be thought that medical men condemn drugs without previous full investigation—it is the certainty of their knowledge which makes them so opposed to the fatal waste of time involved in the trial of a drug. If an abscess forms anywhere, it is a matter of common knowledge that it must discharge before recovery is possible. All the medicines in the world will not dissipate it. We apply local treatment to an abscess and to a wen. Cancer must be dealt with in a similar manner. It is essential not to irritate the disease: so that rubbing in irritating ointments and the application of caustics must be avoided. Poultices are of no avail. The only remedy is early removal. There are two methods by which this may be done: (1) By the application of strong caustics which destroy the growth, and (2) by surgical operation. The latter method is to be generally recommended. It is more speedy, more certain, less painful, and more safe.

There is a number of people who live in continual dread of suffering from this disease, and this dread makes their life miserable. I advise them to consult a doctor, who will be able to give their mind ease in that respect. If, perchance, they are so suffering, early treatment being imperatively necessary for success, they will be more likely to recover permanently. I have written hopefully of the result of the early treatment of cancer, but not more hopefully than the evidence warrants me in doing. I repeat that there is only one plan: the early and complete removal of the growth by surgical operation. The tendency of the disease is to spread and to extend. Delay is therefore most dangerous. It will be obvious that I have been considering only those forms which manifest themselves externally, and it is fortunate that these are

most frequent. Recent progress in surgery has rendered it possible for many cases, even of internal cancer, to be relieved, so that we need regard no longer with absolute dismay and despair the occurrence of this disease.

A few words of warning in conclusion. In no other disease is there such a tendency for those who are affected to consult irregular practitioners. In all parts of the country there is someone—generally an old woman—with a high reputation for skill and success in the treatment of cancer. Undoubtedly some people recover under her hands, but they were at no time affected by cancer. Those really affected by the disease derive no benefit, and ultimately return for relief to their old doctor. From what I have already written, it will be obvious that it is vain to expect a cure from dalliance with the disease.



THE SCHOOLMISTRESS AT THATCHAMLET.

“**F**OR the sake of the old people!—for the sake of the old people!”



The speaker was an interesting girl, rendered additionally attractive by her obvious distress; and she muttered the words with eyes full of tears and from between quivering lips, as she came forward into the cold and squalor

of the big room of the village school at Thatchamlet.

She was the mistress of the humble little institution that nestled close within the shadow of the bluff, square tower of the church. She had come to Thatchamlet a year since from the British and Colonial Training College, burning with one great resolve: that of shedding—be it ever so little—sweetness and light around her. Oh, for the wreck in that short time of her fondest ideals! Oh, for the sordid and ugly visages that thrust themselves between her and her nobly-inspired conceptions!

Yet the hardness passed away from her

face, as often and again she thought of “the old folks!” “For their sakes!” brought resignation and even joyousness under circumstances of the most crushing and despairful character.

It was “for their sakes” that Constance Overton hung her head and bit her lip under every new indignity meted out to her at the hands of the brutalised illiterates who called themselves her masters. “For their sakes!” quelled the spirit welling over, and subdued the righteous passion.

Was it not enough that month by month she could call at the counter of the hobbling postmistress and waft to the old people that ray of light and comfort which their declining years and straitened circumstances so much needed?

The supreme satisfaction of the monthly errand blotted out even the memory of those hideous second Thursdays, when the members of her sweetly reasonable School Committee in the little class-room of the village school. To-day it was an irate and masterful representative of the gentler sex, protesting, with arms akimbo, that Miss Overton, or whatever she called herself, should not punish her Mary Ann—to all of which the committee of judgment sat and said “Amen” and “Hear, hear!”

At the last meeting it was a half-drunken bully, who had been recently fined for grossly and persistently feeding his own lazy indulgence upon the puny labours of the scrap of humanity that called him, with unconscious