WILL SHE GROW OUT OF IT?
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The first part of this paper at all events may be supposed to be addressed to young mothers, rather than to young girls, but I have no doubt that the latter will have a peep at it just to see if there is anything in it which concerns them. I shall not tell them whether there is or not. Let them read on and see.

My main difficulty in writing it I feel will be one of condensation. The subject of inherited ailments and congenital malformation is one of such importance that it is a book thereon I should publish, and not a single paper. However, if it leads young parents to think, thinking is sure to lead to action, and with the hints I shall give, and of course the help of their family doctor, many a young life may not only be saved, but children may grow up strong and bonnie, who through neglect or ignorance might have anything but happy futures, and lives so weary that their brevity must be looked upon as a blessing.

I must say a few words at the outset on the terrible scourge of these islands, which most people call consumption, and the medical profession plagues. The question "Is it hereditary?" puts us in the face at once whenever we think of it, and it is a somewhat difficult one to answer. I myself do not believe in heredity in the ordinary sense of the word as applied to disease. A beautiful young shoot of wood may spring from a fast-decaying tree, and if this be transplanted into good soil, it will grow as well as any other. What holds good as regards vegetable life cannot of course be shown to be quite true as regards animal, nevertheless there is a certain analogy. Consumption we believe to be infectious; if so, it is caused by a disease germ. Now your old-school hereditarians would tell you that this germ descends from mother to child. In some cases it does or may, but the child very soon succumbs to tuberculosis, or some other terrible infantile disease. A germ will do one of two things: it will either assert itself very speedily, or be killed in the system. Nature sets about at once getting rid of these organisms, and amongst the viscera is the time of birth. She brings, among other organs of relief, the absorbents and glands into play; there is a struggle for life, in which nature often fails, because these very glands become overladen and diseased, tubercle being formed and multiplied within them. Nature does her best, but she is beaten—another proof of the struggle between what we call evil and good, which is constantly going on in this world.

Well, on the other hand, if the child is born of delicate parents, but free from germs, it has, if carefully fed, nursed, and tended, a very excellent chance of growing up well. It is difficult to conceive of a child having germs of, say, consumption in its system and these lying latent or dormant until she is a certain age, and then sprouting suddenly into life after she has suffered from some exposure and caught cold in the chest. There are easier theories than this by far and away to account for the children of consumptive parents dying of the same disease in their later teens. Besides, that word "latent" may be convenient, but it is a shockingly meaningless one. I remember my father buying for a good round sum a few grains of wheat that were said to have been in the grasp of a mummy for a thousand years. The wheat when sown grew most certainly. It may never have been in the hands of a mummy at all, but it may have been. If so, it was surrounded by dead matter, it was
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hermetically sealed against any influence that could cause it to germinate. Life was latent or dead, and human beings may have no chance of dominating, for so constant are the changes, that everything is constantly getting shifted, and by the time a man or woman is ready, she or he may have used up a score of bodies.

However, there is this to be said concerning the children of consumptive parents: they are born delicate, and therefore far more likely to fall victims to the scourge than others:

May they grow out of this delicacy of constitution? Yes, and that is the question I am now coming to. But I must examine another one, and it is one, too, that strikes at the very root of society:—should consumptive people, or those suffering from other so-called diseases, be permitted to have children? They are, if they do so, guilty of as great a crime as many a felon who leaves the dock with the dread sentence of the judge ringing in his ears. It is sad to have to answer the question in such seemingly cruel words, but nevertheless I believe I am doing my duty in giving that reply.

There are two ways in which a young woman can give herself to God in this world, and both are honourable. One is by marrying the man she loves, if he be healthy in body and pure in soul; and the other, if God be the will of his heart, and energies to do good to her fellow beings without hope of reward in this world.

There is a charm about a woman like this (for I am firmly convinced that if one is something of an astronomer, and being so of course—to some extent—a doubter, but I do most sincerely believe that the good in this weary wicked world will ultimately prevail, and those who help it onwards will not go unrewarded in a future life whatever that life may be)

is to lay down a few simple rules for the treatment of weakly children whether born of delicate parents or not. Will she grow out of it? The answer to this question is a hopeless one for the mother as you choose to make it, young mother.

There is one stumbling-block of which I am not aware at the very outset of your girl-child’s life: It is the haggard ‘cold.’ That young children need warmth is very true. They are for the time being little hot-house plants, but the sooner you recognise the truth that they are not intended to remain so, the better it will be for yourself, and for the child as well. Those wee things have to be hardened off because the world is hot-house, and they have got to like hardy, healthy, and therefore happy lives, in spite of the many and daily changes of this changeable climate of ours.

If you desire the wee lassie to grow up as tender as a mushroom and perhaps die just as soon, comparatively, then all you’ve got to do is to permit her to sleep night after night in a baby hood, from birth to nine months.

The verb “to plot” is essentially Scotch, but as applied to over-coddled children or young children in any case a most suggestive one that has been contributed to the English language. The mother is sweating to death, it is exceedingly expressive. Many of the Scotch words are derived from the French as, in olden times, the French were the lords of the country. It is been a going little out of the way perhaps to seek its derivation from sur le plat, on the plate, as an egg when poached. A pig is plotted when boiling water is poured over it in order to get off the bristles easily, the coat plots herself when she gets a splash of hot water over her hands, a boy or man is said to be plotting his life and his chances of becoming a grown man, is known to us, if we have a strong enough imagination, as a game of the fiddly, not to say the iniquity, of treating a tenant infant as many do. Here lies the merit at the mercy of a mother who may be wise, but who may be cruel to the same extent as her arch-enemy, death. Pray do not misunderstand me: I do not mean to say it is dying, only from the very day we begin to live we begin to die. We are all doomed, all alike, to one. Well, however nice a poached egg may be, poached baby looked at from a doctor’s point of view is very unsatisfactory.

Now we are left with that little question: “Will she get over it?” I am glad to answer in the affirmative, only that nasty wee word “it” comes in—if the case be scrofula either crude or chronic, for this may ensue, or inflammation of the mumps itself, and then there is great danger. And bear this in mind; the child that has been treated simply for health, and then for no other reason, not “plotted,” over-coddled, or over-crammed, as food, has by far and away the greatest chance of getting over this ailment or scrofula.

Scrofula.—When this becomes epidemic in small towns and badly-drained villages, the Angel of Death has indeed spread his wings over the bleakest of all levels.

If there is scarlet fever or scrofula (the milder sort) about, and your little girl begins to fall from all no apparent cause, suffering from loss of appetite and cheerfulness, if she has chills alternating with flushing, hot skin and uneasy sleep, with a little headache and maybe some sore throat, with a high temperature and purplish tongue, having little red papules showing through—the “strawberry tongue”—then in all probability she has an attack of scrofula. We shall hope it is to be a simple one. Cure if possible, but if the little patient may be guided through it.

The doctor is the man to trust. But there is one thing you can assist him in most at this stage: the patient is completely isolated from the rest of the house, for the simplest cases in one child may generate the worst in others. It is a most dispiriting mind that, until the doctor gives a clean bill of health, and the skin has entirely peeled, no other child should be allowed into the room. This is not the success of care but the fear of spread that will force on careful nursing, and isolation will prevent it spreading. Disinfectants must of course be used—but the doctor will tell you all this—and it is in the patient’s hands to help or hinder. The medicine must be properly attended to, and all rules obeyed which the doctor shall lay down. The digestion and the teeth must be seen to, with abundance of fresh air and non-exciting exercise and recreation. The both often do wonders—tempid, of course—given in a warm room. There are certain kinds of methodical drill which, moreover, do good, and many kinds of tonics. But cold-water or marred is perhaps one of the best, as it is a food. The doctor will give for each case the necessary tonic. Dear me! what thousands of thousands of lives might be saved if we could only act up to the physician’s instructions. I must bid the young mother be care of quick medicines, and of all such dangerous drugs as chlorides, bromides, and phenoxylin, etc. In the hands of the physician these are useful; in those of the uninitiated they are very like razors grasped by infant fingers.

There are three ailments or more which hope to treat in of papers succeeding this. Our present concern is for fever, another rickets and sandy legs, and a third scrofula, a disease of the glands, but, of course, from constitutional causes. Scrofula is a disease called KJH, with one suffering therefrom may do much good by strict adherence to the laws of health, medicinal advice should in all cases be sought for.