

## CURABLE AND INCURABLE DISEASES

THE grand inquiry most interesting to the afflicted, very often regards the curability or non-curability of their particular maladies. The question they most pointedly press upon the physician is, "Doctor, can you cure me?" This inquiry is a very natural one, but one that very often haunts the invalid to his harm. It prevents his recovery in two different ways: First, he decides the question for himself in the negative, and refuses to adopt the only measures adequate to his cure. He has tried so many suggestions, dosed himself with so many different drugs according to the prescriptions of so many learned doctors and so many quacks, and all to no purpose, that he no longer has any faith in measures, nor confidence in men. He looks upon any suggestions of a hygienic cure, only as another humbug; and however rational and consistent the theory may appear, he cannot be persuaded to take the first step towards putting the thing in practice. Secondly, Having begun a hydropathic course, he is continually haunted by the ghost of his fears. He sees death staring him in the face at every turn. The skeleton form of that king of terrors is continually before him in both his sleeping and waking hours. Reason him into the belief that his case is fair and promising one hour, and he will be back hugging the old delusion of his morbid imagination the next.

I propose in this paper, for the benefit of all whom it may concern, to draw a few outlines of those principles upon which this important question is to be decided; and upon which the true physician makes up his prognosis in any given case.

There are two and only two grand points in this consideration: First of all, the physician is to make up his mind with regard to the condition of any particular organ or organs. On these two points alone, it might almost be said, hangs the entire prognosis in the case. There are, nevertheless, minor considerations which not unfrequently become controlling influences, determining the scale adversely to the patient, over which, alas! the physician cannot always exercise control; and which he cannot always (though sometimes he can), clearly foresee. For these influences the patient is sometimes himself responsible—sometimes his friends.

Primarily considered, it may be truly said, that *all* diseases are curable in their nature. Heretical as this statement at first sight may appear, I see not how, upon a full investigation, it can be rationally doubted. Diseases have crept upon the human race stealthily and gradually. In the beginning, notwithstanding the fall, men lived entire centuries, dying at last of old age, disease being almost entirely unknown among them. Through continued transgressions, however, diseases have become not only numerous but frightful in their forms. They, or their effects, have been transmitted from

father to son, and from mother to daughter. Hence, we have hereditary maladies, or in-born predispositions to disease. Now, these hereditary maladies, or continual shortcomings, are the terrors which underlie the incurability of so many of our diseases of the present day.

Are these hereditary diseases, in their nature, incurable then? By no means. Hereditary diseases may be just as curable as any other. Why not? But the means and manner of their cure, and the time allotted to this end, must be commensurate with the manner and time of their production. Hereditary diseases are not produced nor transmitted in a day, nor a generation, and cannot be eradicated speedily. The human system, nevertheless, has recuperative energies. It may ascend in the scale of health and life as well as descend. In the course of generations through continuous transgressions and abuses, it degenerates and runs out. Many of the individual cases become utterly hopeless and remediless. Stopping inside the point, however, of absolute degeneracy and corruption, why may it not rise again in the scale of regeneration. The father, by living a dissolute and corrupt life, may degenerate and enfeeble the constitution of his off-spring. The son may commit the same folly, continue and increase the same error. But the grandson, through greater wisdom and prudence, may improve his own health, prolong his own life, and transmit a better organization to his off-spring than his own. The scale ascends or descends just as a man chooses to make it. In the course of generations hereditary diseases may be cured, just as in the course of generations they are produced. There is a point, however, from and beyond which they cannot be recovered, just as there is a point in any transitory or acute disease beyond which recovery is impracticable. Laying aside, then, the consideration of hereditary diseases for the present, we come to consider more transitory affections, such as affect us for a day, a month, a year, or half a lifetime. We will consider now what are the conditions upon which these affections are curable, and upon what incurable. We assume, then, according to our previous statement, that every sort of disease is in its nature curable under certain circumstances;—that there is a time, a point, at which, or a condition in connection with which it might be made to succumb. It only remains for us, then, to determine what this condition or point is. It is true the wisest physicians must and will confess that they cannot always absolutely determine it. They have occasionally been disappointed both ways; or if not, they have found many cases in which they could not give a positive judgment. Yet, after all, the matter in general is reduced in this day to a very great degree of certainty. The intelligent physician, who has kept up with the progress of the age, can, in general, very accurately determine the capabilities of his patient. It does not follow, however,

that every patient he pronounces curable will recover. Patients are sometimes selves responsible for a failure; and sometimes extraneous influences control all vital resources to their ruin.

What then, are the principles upon which the physician makes up his opinion of the curability of a disease? I repeat—the condition of the system at large, the condition of specific organs. One may have a serious disease of the lungs—may recover, while another may have slight affection of these organs which terminate in his destruction. The difference lies not in the primary or supposed affection, but in the condition of the system at large. A severe affection of the stomach, liver, or heart, may be recovered from in one case, while a disorder of these organs may become chronic malady, and end only with the death of the patient, in others. One man is naturally greater constitutional capacity than another, and the same man has got more or less, under different conditions of the general health. We take these as the principle, or starting-point in our prognosis of the natural constitutional capacity in connection with the amount of vitality present. Where these are fair, almost any disease may be pronounced curable. The exceptions lie in that class of cases where, notwithstanding the present strength of the patient may be considerable, yet some part of the organ is so seriously injured as to preclude repair, and finally bring down the general health. Fortunately, these exceptions are not near so common as they are supposed to be. The recuperative energies of the human system are very great. To sustain, or restore if need be, the digestive and nutritive forces, and very many of the supposed hopeless cases can be made to live and recover. Herein lies the grand secret of the Hygienic cure; and herein may be found the sure explanation of those marvellous cures which have so astonished the world. Innumerable cases of chronic disease will always be hopeless until they be found some way powerfully to aid the natural elimination of morbid matter from the body, and quicken its nutritive forces. Drugs never do this; they never can. In acute cases digestion and nutrition are often ready to assume their functions so soon as the more violent or active symptoms have disappeared. Hence the patient's recovery. His recovery, however, is perfect and safe just in proportion to the minuteness of the dosings of the remedies that have been practiced upon him. It is well established that drugs are the true and only cause of many of those chronic disorders which follow so closely on the heels of an acute attack.—*Dr. Fisk.*