

BRONCHITIS AND CONSUMPTION.

From Dr. Hunter's Lectures on the Progress of Medical Science in the Treatment of Lung Diseases.

The lungs are the great vital centre of the body on which the health and proper action of all other organs depend. If we cease to breathe for but five minutes, we are dead at the end of that time. In rare and exceptional cases the flame of life has been rekindled by artificial respiration, but, as a rule, people sound and well, when suffocation takes place, are dead, beyond restoration, at the end of five minutes. Breathing enables the heart to beat, the blood to circulate and the brain to send forth sensation and motion to the entire body.

The Lungs, the Brain and the Heart, constitute the tripod of life, and while they act we cannot die. The heart depends on the lungs for its power to circulate the blood, and the blood depends on the lungs for its purification. Every moment of life poisonous carbonic acid is being generated in the blood by the action of the organism, and must be expelled by the act of breathing. This is God's appointed way of purifying our blood. When we stop breathing we retain the carbonic acid in the blood, and five minutes accumulates sufficient to poison and stop the whole machinery of life.

Hence all affections of the lungs are serious, because they diminish the freedom of breathing, and in the same proportion injure the general health. Take, for example, a cold, which inflames the air-passages and air-tubes of the lungs, swells their mucous lining, diminishes the size of the tubes through which we breathe, and obstruct them by viscid secretions of mucus. As we cannot breathe through tubes that are lessened in size or obstructed, as well as through those that are open and free, so every cold while it lasts lessens our breathing according to its severity, and in the same degree diminishes the purity of our blood, hurts our circulation, clogs the heart and irritates the brain and nervous system.

All diseases which affect our lungs injuriously begin in the mucous lining of the air-passages—nose, throat and bronchial tubes. This membrane is peculiarly exposed to alternations of temperature, of the air and to smoke, gas and other irritating and noxious matters diffused through it, all of which act directly on the lining mucous membrane at every breath.

Chronic inflammation of the mucous membrane lining the air-tubes and cells of the lungs is a very common disease. It is always a lung disease, because the bronchial tubes ramify every part of the lungs; and are the air ducts through which we breathe. To say that a person has bronchitis and yet that his lungs are sound is absurd and untrue, since these tubes are the seat of every known disease that affects the lungs. All that can truthfully be said is that bronchitis is not consumption, although it is very liable to end in that disease.

The most constant symptoms of chronic bronchitis are cough, shortness of breath and mucus expectoration. Its slight or serious character is shown by the kind of matter raised and the presence or absence of loss of flesh, hectic fever and night sweats. These latter symptoms, when present, show the deep hold it has upon the lungs and how greatly it has already weakened and undermined the general health.

In many cases chronic bronchitis is as fatal as consumption itself, and even more so than some forms of that disease. So long as no organic change has taken place in the air-tubes and air-cells, bronchitis, although resembling consumption in its general symptoms, is always perfectly curable by local treatment of the diseased tubes. But I cannot conceive of the possibility of the cure of any bronchial disease by stomach medication or the general means commonly employed. No local inflammatory disease of any other organ of the body has ever been cured without local treatment, and without local treatment bronchitis is as fatal as consumption. The bronchial membrane in time becomes altered in structure, and pours forth a matter which has all the qualities of pus; hectic fever and night sweats supervene, and the case tends slowly but surely to death.

There is a form of bronchitis especially remarkable on account of the great abundance of the bronchial secretion which exhausts the system by the incessant drain made upon it. These patients expectorate a pint or more of frothy fluid a day, resembling gum water. They are pale-like persons blanched by hemorrhage; generally free from fever—neither quickness of pulse nor heat of skin existing, but the wasting of the body and general weakness is extreme. Examined after death no ulcerations or tubercles are found, nor anything resembling consumption in the state of the lungs. They die from exhaustion through the excessive drain made on the fluids of the body. Such cases are always curable if timely treated by astringents, and antiseptics applied by the inhalation directly to the relaxed and weakened membrane within the lungs. There is still another form, called dry bronchitis, in which the matter expectorated is neither profuse nor watery, nor purulent. It is a glutinous kind of stuff, of a bluish white or pearly gray color. The chronic inflammation which causes it thickens the mucous membrane, thereby narrowing the tubes through which we breathe, and shortening and oppressing the breath. Sometimes tubes of considerable size become completely clogged by this tough phlegm, causing great difficulty of breathing.

There is always a feeling of more or less tightness and oppression in the chest, which is relieved from time to time by coughing up a quantity of the tough, jelly-like matter before described. Sometimes the cough comes on in paroxysms, attended by great oppression and distress, like asthma. On inquiry of a person so affected whether he has any lung trouble, he will almost certainly answer No—and yet during your conversation will hack and raise this jelly-like mucus half-a-dozen times.

Of the many forms of bronchitis the one most alarming of all is that called *Consumptive Bronchitis*. You must not, however, understand from its name that it is really tuberculous in character, or produced by the bacilli which cause true consumption.

In all lung cases I require a portion of the expectorated matter coughed up by the patient to be brought to me, or sent in a small bottle by express, before giving a definite opinion of the disease. If, on examination, I find the tubercle-bacilli present, the case is Consumption; and if no bacilli—Bronchitis. Most of those who die of lung disease, supposed to be consumption, are really deaths by consumptive bronchitis, resembling consumption.

A remarkable instance in verification of this recently occurred. A lady was brought to me in what appeared to be the last stage of consumption. Her physicians had told her husband that she could not live a week. She had a bad cough, puriform expectoration, night sweats, and was wasted almost to skin and bone. Judging by her symptoms and appearance, it was impossible not to fear that she had come too late. On sounding her chest, however, I was surprised to find no solidification by tubercles, and on examining her sputum a total absence of the bacilli. The history, too, of her sickness revealed that it had followed an attack of whooping cough and gripe. So, although her pulse was 120 a minute, and so feeble as to be hardly perceptible, and the wasting of her body so extreme that she could not stand without support, I did not hesitate to pronounce the disease bronchial and give it as my opinion that, if she could live long enough for remedies to act, she might yet be saved. She was immediately placed under medicated air-treatment, with tonics to impart appetite, and digestives to help the enfeebled stomach to transform nourishment into chyle and blood. The healing powers of the body were nearly exhausted before the first inhalation was given, but she gradually acquired more and more strength, and within six weeks was able to take short walks in the open air. She recovered perfectly in about six months, and is alive and well to-day.

Had the true nature of her disease not been discovered just when it was, she would have lost her life through wrong treatment, and been recorded as another death by consumption.

Every form of bronchitis is easily cured by antiseptic and healing remedies applied directly to the lungs by medicated air inhalations, but none of them by stomach treatment. The stomach is not the part affected. The air tubes and cells of the lungs are the seat of every bronchial disease, and unless remedies capable of changing their bad secretions and healing the inflamed tubes are directly applied to them, cure is impossible. To treat bronchial and other lung diseases through the stomach and hold out a hope of cure by such treatment is malpractice, and ought to be punished as a crime against the sick.

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NOTE—Those interested in Dr. Hunter's researches and treatment of lung maladies can obtain his book free by writing to him at the above address.