

THE COMMON ILLS OF LIFE.*

By GRACE PECKHAM MURRAY, M. D.—No. 5.—NEURALGIA, GOUT AND RHEUMATISM.

Neuralgia, gout and rheumatism are three conditions closely allied in one great, common, ever-present symptom—that mysterious sensation, the great torturer of humanity—pain. The crowning touch in a picture of the Heavenly bliss of a future life is this, there will be no more pain. Possibly this Heaven may be realized on earth, for in no others have such strides been made towards the alleviation of human suffering as in this trio of widespread ailments. Frightful neuralgia is still to be found, to be sure, but it is the result of outraged endurance, the sharp reminder that the owner of the nerves has overstepped the limits. The strain and endeavor of human life, the mad rush for preëminence is so great that the groan of humanity takes the form of neuralgia—"the cry of the nerves for nutrition," as a modern writer has aptly styled it. The old-fashioned attacks of gout have become almost unknown, and the inflammatory rheumatic fever has become an uncommon disease. Instead of gout, we have goutiness: instead of rheumatic fever, we have rheumatism. When the causation of these troubles is thoroughly understood the pain which accompanies them may be avoided. At present the theories concerning gout and rheumatism are by no means limited, and the more the diseases are investigated the less seems the possibility of arriving at definite conclusions.

THEORIES AND PROBABILITIES

In order to help or cure a trouble one must know the cause. For centuries these diseases have been the subject of study and investigation, but, as one writer hopelessly expresses it, the solutions of the problem are as far away as ever. Can gout and rheumatism, they ask, be due to a germ, as has been proved in malaria? If so, the micro-organism remains undiscovered. They are due, other great authorities say, to the nerves that prevent the proper assimilation of food and the proper elimination of chemical products from the body, but this can be no more easily proven than the germ theory. The chemical theories are quite numerous and present the most complex problems. For a long time it has been held that the presence of uric acid in the blood has occasioned rheumatic gout, and that the presence of lactic acid has caused rheumatism, because in the two instances these acids are found in the blood in a greater abundance than in the state of health, and the greater the quantity of the acids the more severe the attacks and the greater the pain. Moreover, these acids have been introduced into the circulations of animals with identical results, and men who have taken these acids have developed the symptoms of gout or rheumatism. Furthermore, in gout the deposits about the joints, which cause the enlargements and deformities, are composed of urate of soda, the basis of which is uric acid. The opponents of these theories say that while it is true that uric acid and lactic acid are present in large quantities in gout and rheumatism, these chemical substances are not causes, but results; that they are present because gout makes the uric acid in the blood and rheumatism makes the lactic acid. The consideration of uric acid is one of the most common in relation to health. The formation of this substance in the blood is attendant, I believe, upon improper digestion of the food products—that is, a certain abnormal process accompanying their transformation into the blood, whereby they may nourish the tissues, is the cause of much of the disturbance to which everybody yields to a greater or less degree. It causes depression of spirits, irritability of temper, headaches, the more or less severe pains that attack the various parts of the body. The solution of these great chemical problems would mean the alleviation of great suffering, ill-health and semi-invalidism alike. Medical knowledge in regard to these matters is as yet rudimentary, but with zealous workers laboring ever, night and day, in chemical laboratory and with microscope, the time will come when the problem will be solved. And then life freed from pain will become Heavenly. Possibly here may also be the fountain of perpetual youth.

RESEMBLANCES AND DIFFERENCES.

Some writers recognize a very close relationship, if not complete identity, between gout and rheumatism; others say that the diseases are very distinct. It is also said that neuralgia is not a disease, but merely a symptom. The best authorities, however, agree that distinct from the inflammation of the nerves known as neuritis, neuralgia is a specific disease. The three diseases, neuralgia, gout and rheumatism, are allied in causation: they are alike in being very largely traceable to hereditary sources. Fully one-half of the cases of gout are inherited, it is said; and the same is true of rheumatism and neuralgia. All three are diseases of adult life, children being seldom afflicted with neuralgia and rarely with rheumatism, though sometimes with rheumatic fever, which comes from exposure. This paper is not intended to treat of the severe cases of rheumatic fever, but of rheumatism. More or less pain, which is characteristic of all three, varies in its location. This circumstance, therefore, brings us to the fundamental differences, as well as to the reason that they should be considered, if not one disease, at least, as a French authority has expressed it, as branches from the same trunk. There is much justification for believing that all three are due to the presence of some irritant in the blood, which acts on the tissues, thereby occasioning pain. In neuralgia it acts on the nerves; in rheumatism on the muscles and muscle coverings; in gout on the bones and tissues about them. Why the nerve should be chosen in one instance, the muscle in another and the bones in the third we cannot tell. It should be added, that the three diseases are alike also in that they occur from whatever depresses the system—such as over-work, too much and too little exercise and also great exposure to cold.

NEURALGIA AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS.

Neuralgia is manifested by pain, which follows the course of the nerves. Its most common variety is that of the face. It occurs sometimes on one side of the face only, and the pain is persistent and comes in paroxysms. Neuralgia of the face, fortunately, yields most speedily to treatment. It affects one or all of the branches of the facial nerves on one or both sides of the face: it may attack the forehead or go through the upper part of the face or be felt throughout the face. The attack comes generally when the patient is exhausted or run down.

The next most common form of neuralgia is that which follows the sciatic nerve, the great nerve of the leg. When sciatica becomes a settled trouble it is one of the most difficult of all the neuralgias to treat. Sometimes it has been necessary even to divide the nerve to give relief from the excruciating pain, the sufferer being willing to undergo anything rather than endure the torture. Fortunately neuralgia, whether the sciatic or of the facial nerves, where surgical relief is demanded, is not among the common ills.

Intercostal neuralgia usually frightens the person afflicted, as the pain is very great while it lasts, and the patient thinks he is going to die of pleurisy, for every breath that he draws is fraught with pain. Pleurisy differs in the presence of fever and in the fact that the pain does not follow the lower border of one or more ribs, pressure along which, if it is neuralgia, will show sensitiveness and tenderness, if not pain. For the physician the difference is readily distinguishable in pleurisy, the noise of the inflamed lung surfaces rubbing against the lung covering or the pleura being easily heard.

Lumbago is another sorely trying form of neuralgia which attacks the lower part of the back. It causes suffering so great that its victim can hardly assume an upright position. Fortunately, it does not last long and yields to external and internal remedies. Neuralgia of the internal organs is often severe and painful, but it is not common.

As neuralgia is an indication of a depressed condition of the nutritive system, the fundamental treatment is to build up the constitution. Neuralgia is the disease of women, while gout and rheumatism are those of men. Rheumatism is generally due to exposure to cold, while gout is attributable to excesses in eating and drinking, and neuralgia is the outcome of impoverished blood, lack of proper exercise and everything

* During the progress of the "Health and Beauty" papers in THE DELINEATOR, Dr. Murray was consulted so often on simple derangements of the physical system that it was considered desirable to give subscribers the benefit of her professional knowledge in the series of papers of which this is the fifth.

No. 1. Catching Cold appeared in the Number for January.

No. 2. Indigestion and Dyspepsia, in the Number for February.

No. 3. Feverishness and Fever, in the Number for March.

No. 4. Headaches, in the Number for April.