

The Preventability of Tuberculosis*

By W. J. DOBBIE, M.A., M.D.C.M., Physician-in-Charge of the Toronto Free Hospital for Consumptives.

TUBERCULOSIS is not hereditary, but is on the other hand a mildly communicable disease. A consumptive is not such merely because his forefathers were; nor does it necessarily follow that children will be exempt from the disease simply because their parents were healthy. The disease is transferred from one person to another, and for this transference, two conditions, and only two, are necessary. The germs of the disease, the tubercle bacilli, must gain an entrance into the body, and in the body there must be either a tissue of low vitality or a reduced power of resistance.

And it is because tuberculosis is a disease of such a nature that it is preventable. And on this account the more it is a matter for wonder that a disease so insidious in its onset, so widespread in its distribution, so destructive in its effect, has not long since claimed a more adequate attention from the most thoughtful men of the community. Were it a disease more alarming in its onset, more spectacular in its symptomatic manifestations, and more rapid in its progress to a fatal termination it might perchance have claimed a more careful consideration. And yet it is a disease most prevalent and destructive. Consider the following roll of death in the City of Toronto:

	1904	1905	1906
Smallpox	2	0	0
Scarlatina	12	5	12
Diphtheria	127	131	42
Measles	6	2	11
Whooping cough	8	18	11
Typhoid fever	41	39	67
Tuberculosis	303	271	279

or consider that, in the Province of Ontario for one month

November, 1906

	Deaths
Smallpox	0
Scarlet fever	4
Diphtheria	45
Measles	3
Whooping cough	11
Typhoid fever	113
Consumption	134

and some idea will be had of the prevalence and destructiveness of the disease.

In the prevention of tuberculosis there are three main points presented for consideration:

(1) The prevention of the transmission of the phthisical tendency from parents to children.

(2) The prevention of the development of the disease when the predisposition exists or has been acquired.

(3) The prevention of those unsanitary conditions, uncleanly habits, unhealthful circumstances of life which are known to favor the acquirement, development and propagation of the disease.

By the hereditary tendency to tuberculosis it is not meant that tuberculous parents transmit to their offspring constitutions in which at a certain period tuberculosis must

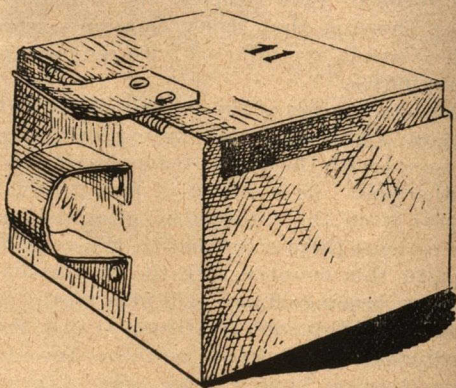


FIG. 1

necessarily develop, but rather that there is transmitted a constitution favorable for an attack by the tubercle bacilli. That such a tendency may be transmitted is not at all to be doubted, but in no sense can this circumstance be taken to imply that the disease itself is transmitted by inheritance. The children of tuberculous parents may have a peculiar tissue of low vitality, and they may have constitutions of poor resisting power, but they do not except in a few very rare cases inherit the disease itself. They are, however, if exposed to contagion more liable to contract the disease than are children not so handicapped, and the only method by which the transmission of this so called tubercular tendency can be prevented is by discouraging the begetting of children by persons actually infected or belonging to families in which the inheritance of such a tendency is known to be the rule. This can be brought about only by the dissemination of knowledge concerning the nature of the disease but even at that from the nature of the case the results to be expected in this regard are not, to say the least, very promising.

In the matter of preventing the development of the disease in persons in whom a tendency is already known to exist very much may be done. Prophylactic measures should be instituted at the outset and carried out faithfully and persistently. Every effort should be made to secure and maintain as high a standard of general health as is

* Third in a series of popular and informing articles on Tuberculosis by Dr. W. J. Dobbie. The first appeared in November CANADIAN OUT-DOOR LIFE, entitled, "Tuberculosis: What it is and Its Cause." The second in December on "The Communicability of Tuberculosis." The series will embrace twelve articles all told.