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Original Communications.

THE BACILLUS TUBERCULOSIS IN ITS PRACTICAL BEARING ON THE DIAGNOSIS, PROGNOSIS, AND TREAT- MENT OF THE DISEASE.*

J. E. GRAHAM, M.D.

Ever since the discoveries published by Dr. Koch more than a year ago, pathologists have been busily engaged, first, in testing the genuineness of the discovery, and secondly, in placing a proper estimate on the presence of these bacteria in the diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of consumption.

With regard to the first point, the genuineness of the discovery, it must be admitted that so far, the great majority of the more distinguished pathologists have, by their investigations, strengthened the position taken by Koch, viz.: that the bacilli described by him are peculiar to tuberculosis, and that they are immediately connected with the production of the disease. The few who have arrayed themselves in opposition are, as he himself asserts, with two or three exceptions, men who have paid more attention to clinical medicine than pathology, and are for that reason unable to conduct these investigations with the delicacy and skill which are absolutely necessary in the solution of a question of this nature. When it is considered that Koch continued his investigations for two years after the discovery was made, before

he published it, having at his command every facility for the proper carrying on of his work, and having at the same time a knowledge of bacteriology, perhaps superior to any existing scientist, one is surprised that men who have worked perhaps with interruptions for a few months, with very poor advantages, at a subject about which their previous knowledge was not very extensive, should be so ready to oppose themselves to the great discoverer. It may be safely said that the discovery has held its ground against any assaults which have been up to the present made upon it.

It is however with the practical aspect of the question that we, as physicians, are principally interested.

(1) Can phthisis be diagnosed by means of the presence of bacilli in the sputa?

(2) Has the number of bacilli any relation to the prognosis?

(3) Has the discovery aided us to any extent in the prevention and treatment of this formidable disease?

In answer to the first question, it might be said that a number of investigations have been made, and the result has been in the affirmative, that we can diagnose the presence of this disease, even in cases which would remain doubtful with our ordinary means of physical examination. You all know how difficult it is sometimes to diagnose phthisis from chronic bronchitic cirrhosis of the lung.

In cases of this kind, the discovery of the bacillus would be a sure evidence of phthisis.

* Read before the Ontario Medical Association.