

INFLUENZA: DIET AND TREATMENT.

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My Girton girls must not be shocked, when I tell them that down here, in Bonnie Berks, influenza is familiarly though not affectionately called "The flue." The word influenza is of course Italian, the symptoms of the horrible complaint having been supposed to be caused by the influence of the stars. I don't say, mind, that there may not be a grain of truth in the notion, for scientists have discovered that when there are but few spots on the sun, deaths from colds and coughs are more rife in this wee morsel of a world of ours, and *vice versa*.

Influenza is well named epidemic catarrhal fever, and the French call it la grippe.

But what's in a name, after all?

"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." The bother of it is that when you have got la grippe, or rather when la grippe has gripped you, you cannot smell at all.

In my county, and in my own little village, the epidemic has been raging fearfully and many have died.

Symptoms.—A well-known medical authority in one of his books gives the symptoms somewhat as follows:—Shivering or sense of chilliness down the back, followed by heat and dryness of skin; urgent frontal headache; aching pain about the eyes; coryza and sneezing; tenderness in the back of the throat; harassing cough and shortness of breath; pains in back and limbs; perverted taste with disordered stomach; nervousness and muscular debility.

Now influenza has been epidemic among us off and on for many years; but this time it seems to have changed its tactics somewhat. I believe I was at sea when it was last raging, but anyhow, I am told that it then attacked the lungs with greater vigour than now, for in this epidemic it seems to divide its attentions impartially between the bronchial tubes and the organs of digestion. The appetite flies and takes its own time in returning, and there isn't the slightest use in forcing food.

In a paragraph to a local paper, I described my own experience as follows: (It must be remembered, however, that the symptoms are never precisely the same in any two individuals, so much depends on idiosyncrasy and condition of body).

"Briefly speaking, my own symptoms were these: A kind of mixture of rheumatic and neuralgic pain in every limb, with a general tired feeling, so that, after sitting for a short time, I found it somewhat difficult to stand up again; loss of appetite; running at the nose, followed by bronchitis; frontal headache, and terrible coldness of body and feet. This was followed by diarrhoea, which I did not check, as it seemed to relieve the headache. The worst feature of the cough was that it kept me from sleeping. I may say, however, that the coldness of the skin is not an invariable symptom, but when it is there, why, it is there; no fire-coddling and no amount of clothing can banish it, and one feels as if sitting all the while in a tub of iced water."

I may add that I think the pains in the limbs were the first symptoms, and I feared I was going to have another attack of the rheumatism from which I was invalided from the Royal Navy. It was a sort of tired feeling at first. If I knelt down to stoke my wigwam fire, I had to put my hands on my knees to get up again. Cycling was impossible. Soon the tiredness amounted to actual pain. Then came the other symptoms.

The frontal headache was terrible, and has only left me for a week, so I have been a whole month ill. As to sneezing, I really

thought I should sneeze my head off. And a splendid head it is, you know. N.B. That last little sentence is "wrote ironic." Well, or rather "ill," my tongue was very white, and my heart seemed to do very much as it pleased without consulting me. For an hour or two it would laze along, as if it had half a mind to stop altogether, then make up for lost time by rattling on as quickly as the Scotch express. When it did so, my face flushed and my eyelids felt as big as Spanish onions and as hot as curried kidneys.

Well, now, the treatment usually laid down by the best authorities is somewhat as follows: You are to keep to bed in a fresh, well-ventilated room for three or four days, and drink plenty of barley water, which will quench the thirst and support the system also. But raspberry vinegar in effervescent lithia water—which you can buy in syphons—is also good. So is tea with milk in it. It will not do to eat solid food. I should just allow chicken broth or barley broth with a morsel of toast, because, mind you, the stomach is in a bad state, and so weak that it *must* have a rest.

As a rule medicine is hardly necessary, unless the cold is very bad, when a mixture containing conium and ipecacuanha, which any chemist can prepare, will do good, or ten grains of Dover's powder at bed-time, but you must keep your bed next day. Sometimes there is constipation and the liver goes on strike. In this case I think a dose of Apenta water will put things straight.

A friend of mine wrote me, saying, he did not wonder at me catching the "flue," as I sat all day at the open window. But he is wrong; you must inhale the specific poison before you get down with influenza. But I must confess that I myself did not give in to the trouble, and in this I was very foolish. Though pretty prostrate, I just kept kicking about round the garden and among the dogs, until one bitterly cold day, when I caught what is called a second chill, and my bronchitis was increased tenfold. As Artemus Ward said, I just let things slide. Well, warmth in bed, if the sufferer is one of those contented beings who can lie in bed, is very serviceable. I cannot say that doing so can kill the bacilli, but it helps to prevent secondary symptoms. Warmer clothing when out of doors; as much light, nutritious food as can be taken; aperients; stimulants only if ordered by the physician, because their action is only temporary—they are merely cheques drawn upon the bank of health, and they have got to be paid for, as reaction is certain to follow. If they seem to warm the blood they in reality cool it. As to medicine proper, some find great benefit from quinine, while it increases the headache in others. Of course, the patient should let the doctor see to the prescribing. Nevertheless, the medicine called antipyrine, taken by itself, generally relieves the headache in a few hours. At the same time, a mixture of salicylate of soda and bromide of potassium does much good.

I don't want my readers to do as I do, but to do what I advise them to do. I myself am a headstrong Highlander, a son of the heather, and though far indeed from fat, as hardy as the heather, though no one should boast of his strength.

Now the debility that follows influenza is very bad, even if you have been ill but three days. Though it is nearly a fortnight since I rounded the corner (this is the 12th of March) I am far from strong yet, and, with stooping to write, my back aches most wearily.

I am taking real Scotch porridge and milk

every day, however, and can highly recommend this. It must be thick, and medium oatmeal, not the Irish pin-head stuff, should be used. I do pity the English bodies at my hotel, whom I see sitting shivering of a morning over a saucerful of thin, unsalted stuff, imagining they are having porridge. Well, before I took to my porridge, I took beef-tea or Bovril, eggs switched up with milk, raw eggs alone. I tried wine and spirits, champagne and Scotch. They only flushed my face and made me uncomfortable. So I gave them up. When sleepless, I found fifteen grains of the bromide of potassium in water soothed me.

Though eating solid food now, I am using plenty of fruit and drinking coffee. Fruit is highly to be recommended. I use sweet oranges, English grapes, tomatoes, and bananas eaten with a glass of milk.

Now here is a curious experience. I determined a week ago to take my cold bath again, which I had been obliged to omit for about a month. It was only six in the morning, and the frontal headache was pretty bad. "It is kill or cure," I said to myself. So I stripped and entered my dressing-room. The windows were hard-frozen, but I wouldn't look at them for fear of lessening my courage. Well, I took the bath, using a sponge that holds about a gallon of water. I shan't say it was not cold, but as soon as I had done towelling and had dressed, I found myself marvellously better, and the headache had flown up to the moon.

Frost or not frost I have taken the bath every morning early since then.

By-the-way, every week I receive letters from people thanking me for having recommended the cold morning tub, in my usual journalistic columns.

"It has made quite a new man of me," writes one correspondent.

"I would not miss it now for all the world," writes another.

"I feel so cheerful and clear-minded after it," says a third.

Well, that is just what I myself do. I am fond of music, and I am no sooner dressed than I begin to sing. I can no more help singing than the mavis or blackbird can, when I am fit and in good form. Alas, when the influenza was at its worst, there was precious little music in me, and so weak was I that, had I played a plaintive air on my violin, tears would have fallen from my eyes, and that would have spoiled the varnish.

As regards food during the debility of convalescence, you cannot be too cautious. Do not venture to eat meat until the appetite is quite restored, and even then, but little for a time. Cod or haddock, or any non-oily fish is far better. Soup is good, but it must not be too strong. Really well-made Scotch barley broth is best; the fish with mashed potatoes to follow. But the potatoes should be really mashed, not the tiniest lump should be left in them. They should then be well stirred with a little cream and salt and put on the range again to get thoroughly hot. A good tomato may be taken, and then some white pudding with good jelly or jam, blanc-mange, rice or tapioca pudding.

After this go and rest for an hour on bed or sofa, and you may have tea at four, but unless really hungry do not eat anything with it.

Get out all you can into the fresh air. Do not drive, nor ride either, but walk.

It is very wrong and deleterious to attempt to excite an appetite by condiments or stimulants. Beware of eating too much. The food that is unnecessary is simply poison.