

# A DISCUSSION ON CHOLELITHIASIS: CAUSATION, SYMPTOMS, DIAGNOSIS, AND TREATMENT.

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## ON CAUSATION AND TREATMENT OF CHOLELITHIASIS.

The subject of cholelithiasis, which it is my privilege to bring before this Section, is one well fitted for discussion, a common disease affecting no fewer than 7 to 10 per cent. of cases, and yet in its mode of origin still exceedingly obscure, running a very varying clinical course, sometimes without symptoms, at other times the cause of the most intense suffering, presenting in its course problems in diagnosis and treatment baffling at times physician and surgeon alike. No portion of the subject presents greater difficulties than that of causation. And it is with this portion I propose especially to deal.

What are the conditions, general or local, that determine the formation of biliary concretions within the bile passages? At the outset I would remark how slowly our knowledge of this subject has advanced; how limited it still is; how little, except in one or two particulars, presently to be noted, it differs from that possessed 50 or 150 years ago.

Stagnation and inspissation of bile contributed to by advancing age, sedentary habits, inactive life, slowing of circulation, interference with movements of chest and abdomen by such causes as lacing and pregnancy, consequent greater liability of women to suffer than men (five times greater)—all these were recognized and pointed out so long ago as 1757 by Thomas Coe.<sup>1</sup> In great part they represent the amount of the knowledge we have till recently possessed. Yet the inadequacy of these various factors to account for the formation of gall stones was then, as now, fully recognised, the presence of gall stones in the young and active, their absence in the old and inactive.

Did this represent all the knowledge we at present possess regarding the causation of cholelithiasis I confess I should have little satisfaction in discharging my present task. Fortunately it does not, thanks to observations of the last few years which have introduced to our notice a new class of facts. Up to the present these observations are chiefly interesting from their extreme suggestiveness rather than from their conclusiveness. They are only conclusive in one direction,

<sup>1</sup> Brookbank, On Gall Stones, London, 1896.