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DIPHTHERIA.

BY G. A. TYE, M.D., CHATHAM.

(Read before Ontario Medical Association, London, June, 1885.)

Mr. President and Gentlemen,—No subject can be presented to practical physicians that possesses a greater interest than diphtheria—a disease as ancient as history itself, and as widely spread as the human race.

It stays not its ravages for country or climate; it ruthlessly invades alike the hut of the peasant and the palace of the prince; it is not ashamed to claim its victims in the house of poverty, nor fears to enter the home of luxury.

Many here to-day have had the circle about their own fireside broken, and every one here has felt his utter weakness when the home of his friends was desolated in spite of all his art could do, and to-day we unite our forces to meet a common foe.

We possess two means—*prevention* and *cure*—which enable us to lessen its ravages. Our greatest power at present lies in the former. It is a great satisfaction that at last we have a system of State medicine established in Ontario, and that legislative enactments now guard the birthright of every subject's health. Such legislation marks an advance in true civilization. The country owes much to the Ontario Board of Health for its energy, intelligence, and thoroughness in carrying out the Act. The people of Ontario are being rapidly educated in sanitary matters, and there are fair prospects that the prevalence of this disease, as well as many others, will be soon limited.

The report of the Registrar-General shows that it ranks high amongst the fatal diseases of this Province. For the year 1876 he reports a large increase in the number of deaths. In 1874 the deaths were not sufficiently numerous to be placed in the list of the ten highest causes of death, but in 1876 it stands third. Many deaths really due to diphtheria are returned as croup; but the death rate from croup also increased in the same year, showing that they were probably due to one cause. In 1877 it stood 5th; 1878, fourth; 1879, sixth; 1880, fifth; 1881, fourth; 1882, fifth, in which year there were 1,239 deaths from this cause alone.

The predisposing causes are telluric, meteorological and individual. Amongst the former are low, damp situations. Houses are placed close to the ground, with no provision for currents of air to pass beneath them to dry the soil or expel noxious vapours. Houses too closely surrounded with plants, shrubbery, or trees, are favourable to the development of low organism. River flats, sites of old saw mills where there is much decomposing sawdust, seem to be prejudicial. I have observed several cases apparently due to these causes—at least no other could be found.

I have notes of nine cases observed in the autumn of 1884, which occurred in two weeks in two adjoining blocks, all occurring in small tenement houses, placed close upon the flat, damp, undrained ground. Dr. Ryall, Medical Health Officer of Hamilton, reports to the Board of Health (in April last) of that city, the condition of the premises in which diphtheria was