

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

DIPHTHERIA: ITS DISSEMINATION, PREVENTION AND CURE.*

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DIPHTHERIA, a disease very infective and destructive to human life, long recognized and much dreaded, is now known to be a germ disease. It is caused by an invasion of the Klebs-Löffler bacillus and by no other, though thought so by many investigators. This germ seems to have different forms due probably to different cultures or periods of growth. It attacks the mucous membranes and the skin denuded of its epidermis. After exposure to infection from 2 to 5 days elapse before manifestations of the disease occur: fever, inflammation of the throat and nasal passages, an exudate covering the tonsils back of the pharynx; at times the nose, mouth and larynx, occasionally the vulva and the skin if broken. This exudate, the chief clinical determining symptom, is ashy gray in color, with white edges and quite distinctive from other membranes. Though at times mistakes occur and good swabs each of the nose and throat will under proper culture soon clear up the diagnosis. The great point of danger in diphtheria rapidly absorbed into the blood and are very poisonous and destructive to cell life and to the organism. The present-day knowledge of the spreading of the disease has taken away from us as practitioners, when we are at a loss to establish a direct connection between our case and a previous one, the chance to talk learnedly of the bad state of the cellars, outhouses, drains and the rotting vegetable matter lying about, chiefly in the spring. Though we are assured by our most learned and scientific investigators that the disease is due solely to the Klebs-Löffler bacillus, the above idea dies hard, and is not without its advocates to-day.

We do not now believe that the germ is wind-carried, but beyond the chance of droplet infection we must have contact direct; that contact may be through a number of individuals or objects, but to carry the germ contact must take place in some manner. The disease is one of childhood mainly, though often adults suffer. New-born children and elder people seldom suffer unless the exposure to infection has been prolonged to a virulent type of the disease.

Droplets of saliva driven into the air by coughing, sneezing and

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