General Remarks

ON THE

PRACTICE OF MEDICINE.

BY

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X.—FEVER. PART 2.

Inflammation and its Fever.

LET it be constantly borne in mind that Fever is not the man's disease, but the man's life assailed by his disease; his life, not as a single thing which is inapprehensible and unimaginable, but as embodied in the functions and feelings of the entire vascular system and nervous system, and seen and read of all men.

Now our best insight into the nature of Fever is likely to come from contemplating it in diseases with which it is most conspicuously allied, beginning with any one that we know the most of. And the most familiar thing bearing the name of a disease with which we are acquainted is Inflammation. The organic processes, which concern it, have been minutely scrutinised and had their meanings interpreted by pathologists. They are all visible on the surface of the body, and many of them are audible as they transact themselves in some important organs within. Then of the antecedents of Inflammation, we have a pretty good notion which they are that may be set down for its exciting causes. Such are things that can hurt mechanically; such are unwonted transitions from heat to cold; such are overtaxing or too hard usage of the bodily powers in health, and of the mental too sometimes. Of some of these we are so sure that we could choose them, and apply them, and so procure Inflammation at will.

At all times, and especially at sickly seasons, Inflammation abounds in large hospitals. And cases of Inflammation are the best studies we can have of Fever. Above all other cases they represent: 1. The relation of Fever to the disease as a whole from first to last. 2. The correspondence of Fever with the disease in its intermediate changes, stage for stage. Further, above all other cases, they denote the bearing which it belongs to Fever to exercise upon the management of the disease. Here, if ever, the vital movements of the vascular and nervous system, now assailed and aggrieved, stand out as indications of treatment. Here, if ever, they first suggest what that treatment should be upon the whole; and then, from its effects upon Fever and Disease correspondently, they suggest what it should be from stage to stage until the end. And all with some evident exactness.

Now, Inflammation is naturally the simplest of Diseases, and Fever annexed to Inflammation is the simplest of Fevers. But then they must meet with fortunate coincidences to make them and keep them such.

The artist, whatever be the material he uses for his projected work, whether wood or stone, takes care to have the most perfectly sound specimen of it he can get; knowing that, otherwise, the work itself

is like enough to turn out a failure, and be neither so good or so durable as his ambition might hope. And we physicians, when we want Inflammation for a study of Fever, would like to choose the subjects whom it should befall, and have them of the soundest material. But we must take cases as they come. We are practitioners by necessity; we are pathologists by choice or by chance. It is well when we can be both, but the first we must be.

In a large hospital, the cases of Inflammation are not all of the right vital stuff for making the disease the thing which (so to speak) it naturally ought to be. For entertaining Inflammation and its Fever, and insuring them their natural simplicity, and carrying them to the perfection they are capable of, the body must be previously healthy. There must be the antagonism of health to show to the full what the disease naturally is.

This is no paradox; but a truth put (I believe) into fitting words, and worthy to be noted.

Now, it is where their natural simplicity is preserved, and perhaps in consequence of it, that Inflammation and its Fever do, if ever, display a superlative energy, and require and tolerate the most powerful remedies. The cases typifying this course of things make a great show in medical books. The disease is then severe and unmistakable; and its treatment heroic and successful. But such cases are the few. Perfect health, like perfect beauty, is a rare thing; and so, it seems, is perfect disease.

Still, not to speak of perfect health, good health is common enough, and Inflammation does not befall those the oftenest who have a fair share of it. Yet when it does, then, if ever, the case is demonstrative of the points most sought after, both pathologically and practically, and is an easy and satisfactory study.

But let us take the experience of a large hospital year after year for a succession of years, and run over what records we have of those who have suffered Inflammation there. Of some patients, we shall find that they were old; of some, that they were half-starved; of some, that they had chronic liver-complaints; of others, that they had habitual coughs; of others, that their constitution was bad at the best, and (what they called) their health was no better than other men's disease. All these many patients had Inflammation. The pneumonia, or pleurisy, or peritonitis, was diagnostically the same disease in them as it was in the few. But observe the difference. In the few, Inflammation found Life unharmed and vigorous. In the many, Inflammation found it hurt and deteriorated. In the few, Life, embodied in the vascular and nervous systems, being now assailed, was ready to resent and react according to its strength; in the many, according to its weakness.

By strength and weakness, is here meant nothing more than the completeness or incompleteness of men's habitual health. And these furnish us the measure or gauge of their vital sufficiency or insufficiency to encounter whatever of an extraordinary kind may befall them; for instance, to bear inflammation when it comes, and bring out its natural characteristics, and help us to make good its treatment.

But, taking still the experience of a large hospital for a few years, let us review as well what has

been our treatment of Inflammation as those who have been our patients, and note its results. In so doing, we shall doubtless be able to give a goodly account of some easy and successful experiments, in which all went on well from first to last; of Fever and Inflammation proceeding in perfect harmony together, and preserving a constant course, and presenting indications of treatment safe and sure, because distinct and intelligible; and of simple and powerful remedies, all telling for good, and all producing the effect for which they were given. But this goodly account, if it be honestly reckoned, will not be a numerous one. In fact, the much more numerous account we shall have to give will be of experiments in which our treatment has been successful indeed, but not easy. All came out well in the end. Meanwhile, however, from intervening accidents, or some weakness of the subject, Fever and Inflammation did not keep exact concord together, and presented but obscure and half-legible indications of treatment; and these were adopted with much care and circumspection. And our treatment became all along a compromise between what the disease required, and what the patient could bear. Nevertheless, it was successful in the end, and largely too. And then will come our inventory of unsuccessful experiments, made up partly of cases in which our treatment saved life indeed; but, being unequally matched with the disease, could not bring it to an end on better terms than that it should leave the part it occupied permanently damaged, and the whole man permanently deteriorated; and partly of cases in which our treatment absolutely failed, and life was lost.

Thus, let Inflammation and Inflammatory Fever be naturally ever so simple, they cannot exist without life and organisation. And so variable a thing is Life, and such disguises does it throw over them, and whatever else that can befall it from time to time, that they are not always to be apprehended in their entire natural simplicity.

Still we do but begin with the beginning, when, in seeking to know what Fever is, we try first to trace it in its connection with Inflammation. For Inflammation is, preeminently, a fundamental subject of practical medicine, and its great vital ingredient is its Fever. It is to us a sort of grammar, which helps us to construe half the things we see and deal with as physicians. And therein our great grammarian is John Hunter. For it is from him that at this day we have our most comprehensive teaching in all that Inflammation includes, and especially its Fever. Observe how constantly sedulous he is to keep apart what is local and simply organic from what is constitutional and more eminently vital. As soon as the entire vascular system and nervous system shew themselves assailed and aggrieved, *i. e.*, as soon as Fever arises, he lays aside his scalpel and every foreign implement, and abstains religiously from all meddling and interference. He becomes, in the strictest sense, a physician. He sits by the bedside, and takes note of chilliness, and heat, and perspiration, and all the unwonted movements of the vascular system and nervous system, as they follow the visible shiftings and changes of the Inflammation; and so he seeks to understand better the meaning of both, and how they serve to interpret the Inflammation and it them.

Rheumatism and its Fever.

Within a large hospital, and side by side with cases of Inflammation and Inflammatory Fever, are cases of Rheumatism and Rheumatic Fever. The characteristics of these latter have been well studied and are well marked and well known. The thing which, seated in the joints, and in this part and that, is called Rheumatism, if regard be had to the organic processes which concern it, will just as well bear to be called Inflammation. And the manner in which, this Rheumatism being present, the vascular and nervous systems show themselves assailed and aggrieved, can be called nothing else but Fever.

But there is a great difference between them somewhere. And it lies deeper than sight, or hearing, or microscope, or stethoscope, or any instrument we have to help us, can reach. Let us review our cases of Rheumatism and Rheumatic Fever, and collate our experience of their treatment for a few years. Such heat, perspiration, and pain; such general vascular action and nervous distress as we witness in Rheumatism, had they occurred in Inflammation, would have been taken by us to hold some correspondence with its amount, its extent, its stages, and been used for plain indications of treatment, and the patients' safety been thought to turn upon the just fulfilment of them. But now, in their alliance with Rheumatism, we did not, and we dared not, take them literally for what they were, and apportion the force of our remedies accordingly. Further, with all our observation, be it ever so correct, of times and places and seasons and of antecedent and concurrent things, we cannot pitch upon certain of them at our command, and take and apply them, and so produce a Rheumatism in individual men and women as we can produce an Inflammation. Where many or most of them are present, there must still be something over and above them, or there will be no Rheumatism. And oftentimes, where none of them exist, there will still be Rheumatism. But what this thing is, which, favoured by coincidents or by its own sole agency, is the very cause of Rheumatism, no man knows.

All men, however, guess pretty unanimously whence it comes. Sagacious observers and experimenters have, in these later days, gone nigh to show that there is a chemistry within us which is cooperative with life; that making good its work, it gives to our bodies the materials of their health; and that doing its work faultily, it suffers noxious things to form, which become the elements of their diseases.

Already a miscellaneous throng of diseases is fairly conjectured to issue from this vital laboratory; many trivial enough, and of smaller interest, and coming and going with little interference on our part; and many of deeper pathological and practical concern, and more abiding. Among these, one of the most momentous is Rheumatism with the Fever that accompanies it.

The disease cannot be named which makes a handsomer figure nosologically than this Rheumatism. Yet there is none about which we are more in the dark. For nosology, at the best, is but a sort of provisional pathology, telling us something, little, or nothing, as it may happen, about the nature of the disease, and the management thereof.

This Rheumatism once begun, we can make no reasonable calculation when it will end; in a few

days, or in a few weeks, or in a few months. Begun in a single joint, we do not know how many more joints it will visit, and what other and nobler parts besides; the heart, the lungs, the brain. Further, this Rheumatism calling for medical management, we are divided between (what I have called) cure and treatment, between the use of special remedies whose aim is nothing less than to be counteractive of the entire disease as such, and the use of any remedies whatever best calculated to satisfy indications which present themselves in individual patients. Hence upon a retrospect of years, in the management of Rheumatic Fever, cinchona, colchicum, guaiacum, nitre, lemon-juice, alkalis, and alkaline salts, will claim the authority of our experience for their occasional and inconstant success as special remedies for Cure. And so will bleeding and purgatives and opium, as common remedies in Treatment.

Erysipelas and its Fever : Boils : Carbuncles.

In a large hospital, and side by side with Inflammation and Inflammatory Fever, are cases of Erysipelas and Erysipelatous Fever; also cases of Boils and Carbuncles. And these, together with Rheumatism, regarded from the physician's point of view, group themselves into a class, different as they are in outward aspects; for they are all alike favoured by external causes with which we are not unacquainted, while they are essentially due to something over and above—to something which we have no exact knowledge of; and hence they are beyond our power to produce. Further, from time to time they all in their turn alike surprise us by the success and the failure of the remedial measures we adopt. Cure and treatment, special remedies and common remedies, have gained for themselves the praise or the blame of unaccountable results. But they all show their vital import in one and the truest sense, by the power they have of assailing life in the entire vascular and nervous systems, as seen by the Fever of various degrees and durations that may or does accompany them all.

The physician, finding these diseases—Rheumatism, Erysipelas, Boils, Carbuncle—all beyond the power of known external causes to set them a-going, has with good reason transferred them pathologically to the sphere of those that are engendered within. But in so doing he has pledged himself to a task of great, perhaps insurmountable difficulty.

Touching external causes of diseases, there could have been no certain proof given that any such exist, short of specialising some of them, and showing that it was this, that, and the other cause which set a-going this, that, and the other disease. And this proof has been abundantly given in specialising many contagious and malarious elements, and tracing their several diseases infallibly home to them.

Now, even such philosophy as we physicians pretend to cannot be satisfied with less, when the question is of causes engendered within. Here there is even more and more need of first specialising things into realities before fixing upon them as germs of disease.

This is the work to be done. But the science which must help us to do it is new to the age in which we live, and has almost taken us by surprise. One may be pardoned for being a little jealous of it at starting, for already it has been made to stand sponsor for some fantastic imaginings.

Diseases (so the history of medicine tells us) have many of them been named and nosologised so luckily and so well from their external characters, as to betray the physician into the belief that he had a perfect understanding of them. But of those among them whose proper elements are self-engendered and within, he now sees that he knows little enough, and he fears a natural interdict to his knowing more, until he has specialised the cause or causes he is in search of; and this may be the work of ages yet to come.

But our subject is Fever. And it was for the sake of gaining some better insight into its nature, that we came to meditate upon the several diseases which have been named; that in Inflammation, seeing Fever allied with the disease of which we know the most, and then allied with others of which we know the least, we might perhaps gain some surer reckoning of what it is from contrast or comparison. Whether we have really done so, I cannot tell. But this is certain, where the question is of Life (and, if the phenomena of Fever be rightly interpreted, it is now preeminently so), we must look for enlightenment anywhere and everywhere. Even between Inflammation and its Fever the proportions were not found exact. Large allowances had to be made for age and for constitution, and for hereditary and individual strength and weakness. And all this implies nothing less than some power beyond the reach of science, that can calculate what their life is worth in individual men and women before it suffers the disease. And this power belongs to practical experience—to busy, thoughtful, multifarious experience—the honest and just judge that ultimately settles the worth of everything for physicians.

THE PYTHONESS AND HER BROODING. All hopes of the hatching are now at an end; the eggs are removed. No blame whatever can attach to the authorities of the gardens, nor to the keepers, for this unfortunate result, unless it be the very forgivable one of a too polite attention to the wishes of members and visitors. There is no doubt that the frequent removals of the blanket in uncovering the eggs, and the occasional partial uncoils of the snake, caused too numerous sudden changes of temperature for the proper development of the young, which originally, we know, from Mr. Bartlett's dissection, were in them. The effects of these disturbances attained a climax in the lengthened period of the snake's absence in shedding her skin, during which, it will be remembered from our former statement, the eggs became completely cold. They were removed under the direction of the superintendent of the zoological collection, by her keeper, who has attended her during the whole of her location in the gardens, for more than seven years. The necessity for their removal was not only apparent from the bad state they were in, but the impoverished condition of the pythoness, diminished in bulk by probably at least one-third of her former dimensions, and her long absence from food (now 32 weeks), naturally led to anxiety as to her ultimate safety if she were allowed to hopelessly continue her sitting. The snake behaved spitefully during the operation. We can but express the hope that Dr. Slater will soon have another opportunity of satisfying the interest which this incubation has excited, when the like deference to the natural inquisitiveness of the public could be with propriety forbidden by the council of the society without any ground for offence against them. (*London Review*.) [Sad news this for Dr. Hastings, the curer of consumption by serpents' excrements.]