

## The Cause and Prevention of Consumption.\*

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I have spoken on the cause of consumption, the chief ways in which it is spread. I will now say a few words upon the predisposing causes—those that favour the life of the germ, or lessen the power of resistance of the individual to the attack of the germ. They are shortly:—

First.—Habitual inhalation of re-breathed air—in other words, over-crowding in dwellings, schools, workshops, etc., and deficient or imperfect ventilation. This, undoubtedly, is the strongest predisposing cause, and applies not alone to human beings, but also to other animals. I have already shown how it affects cows, the same observation holds good with regard to horses. The British and French armies used to lose a large proportion of their cavalry horses yearly by disease; the subject was investigated, the space allowed to each horse increased, and the ventilation of the stable improved. The death-rate among them at once fell cent. per cent. The same result has followed improved ventilation in public institutions amongst human beings. I have no doubt that the high death-rate from consumption in Dublin is mainly due to the over-crowding and want of ventilation in our tenement houses. Therefore, if you wish to circumvent the strongest predisposing cause of consumption in your houses, institutions, schools, and shops, allow plenty of space for each individual, and see your mode of ventilation is good—air, that is, fresh air, everywhere, and at all times, night as well as day.

Second.—The want of light.—All light, and especially sunlight, is deadly to these germs; therefore let in all the light you can, avoid heavy, dark curtains, and don't take a room or a dwelling that has not plenty of light and some sunlight at one time of the day. When you go out, go to a sunny neighbourhood and keep in the sun.

Third.—Dampness of sub-soil and of the dwellings, walls, etc.—Some years ago it was discovered, almost by accident, that the death-rate from consumption of a town situated on a damp soil could be reduced more than thirty per cent. by draining the sub-soil. The importance of this is obvious, and the practical application is to drain the sub-soil when damp, and if this is not, or cannot be done, then as individuals to avoid such a town and seek one built upon a dry soil. This, of course, is all the more necessary in delicate people. Damp walls and

damp houses are equally dangerous, and should be remedied, or, if not, the house abandoned.

Fourth.—Dusty Occupations.—The dust produced in various trades irritates the lungs, and renders it a fertile soil for the consumptive germs. If you have delicate lungs don't follow a dusty trade, and, in any case, do all you can to assist the authorities in carrying out the regulations now enforced to lessen the dust produced in various dusty pursuits. The dust produced in flax scutching in Belfast is undoubtedly the chief predisposing cause to the high death-rate there.

Fifth.—Lastly, though not least, intemperance is a strong predisposing cause to consumption. Not alone do the intemperate suffer more frequently as the habit lessens the power of resistance of the tissues to the germs, but also when they are infected they have a much less chance of recovery.

Before I conclude, I wish to say that if consumption was made a notifiable disease and that the doctor should send notice of each case to the local sanitary authorities, much could be done to lessen its spread. The only objection worth speaking of which has been advanced against this useful measure, is that patients would conceal their disease and not consult a doctor, for fear of notification. I do not think this would be found to be the case in practice, as it is not proposed to remove the patients to hospitals against their will when the disease is notified. In any case, a beginning might be made, as is done elsewhere, and the notification left optional to the medical man.

Now, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, I have touched on the chief points of the causation, the spread, and the prevention of consumption. It is not to be expected in such a lecture, and in the time at my disposal, that I should have exhausted the subject. If I have said enough to create an interest and a desire to co-operate in the great effort which is now being made to lessen, and, if possible, stamp out this preventible disease from amongst us, I will have accomplished my purpose this evening. No doubt some of the suggestions I have made may not be pleasing to those interested in maintaining some of the present conditions which undoubtedly favour and spread consumption, but of this you may be assured that the facts upon which I have based my statements are reliable, and that the reforms proposed have the sanction of the leading thinkers and workers in that most advanced and scientific branch of medicine which deals with the prevention of disease.

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