

## The Cause and Prevention of Consumption.

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I USE the term consumption in place of the more technical one tuberculosis, because it is the one more generally understood, and because it binds to no particular theory of the disease.

The disease is, unfortunately, very common in these countries, no less than one-seventh of the deaths from all causes being due to it, and one-fourth of the deaths from all causes between the ages of fifteen and forty-five are attributed to it; therefore, an examination into its cause and how it is diffused; the predisposing causes, or those that assist or render efficient the cause, the modes of destroying the cause or rendering the predisposing causes less active is of the greatest importance alike to the community and the individual. You will understand that I do not propose to enter upon the purely medical treatment of the disease when present, that is the function of my profession, but the prevention lies in the hands of the public themselves, and through them the public sanitary authorities, and hence the instruction of the public in these subjects is not only desirable, but absolutely necessary if any real effort is to be made to rid us of this dreadful pest.

I may first put aside, as proved to be fallacious, some ideas long held both by the medical profession and the public. Consumption was supposed to be hereditary and to be incurable. Now, consumption is neither one nor the other, but I may hear some of you exclaim, so-and-so had the disease and two or more of her children died of it. Now, we know that these children did not directly inherit it, but at most inherited a delicacy which rendered them susceptible to the infection of the disease when exposed to it, a far different thing, for if they had not been exposed to the infection they would not have got it, or even if they had, had they been strengthened, they might have resisted that infection. For, happily, though many fall victims to the infection when exposed to it, the majority of us are sufficiently strong, or have favourable surroundings, that render us able to resist the infection. Again, consumption is not necessarily incurable. Many cases recover, and many more would do so, if the sufferers could be placed in favourable conditions to that end. Now, you may have surmised from what I have said, that consumption is now regarded as an infectious disease, due to the entry into the body by various paths of a very small vegetable growth called, for its shape, a bacillus—if when so introduced the growth finds the conditions in the body favourable for its develop-

ment, it does so, and sets up various affections of the surrounding tissues of the body. This really is the essence of the cause of the disease, and what we want to learn is, the paths by which this germ obtains entrance into the body, and how may that be prevented. Secondly, what are the conditions or surroundings of the body which render it susceptible to the germ when so introduced. Now, undoubtedly, the germs most frequently enter by being inhaled into the lungs with the air. The breath of consumptive people does not contain the germs, but their expectoration does in millions; that expectoration, when it becomes dry, becomes dust, and that dust contains the fatal germs which live for a considerable time in the dry state. It is perfectly plain, then, to allow consumptive people to expectorate about in public buildings and houses, churches, offices, shops, trams, or, indeed, anywhere, is to involve the rest of the community in a real danger. All such sufferers should be obliged to expectorate, or to put it plainly, to spit into little bottles, which they might easily carry with them, and the bottles should be emptied, and the germs killed every night. This killing can, I may say at once, be easily and effectively accomplished by pouring boiling water on the contents. These bottles can be made so as not to spill, and should be supplied free of charge by the public health authorities, to all applicants, and to the hospitals. The expense would be trivial, and the benefit to the public in lessening the amount of infective matter great. It does not suffice for these sufferers to expectorate into handkerchiefs, the infection is so preserved, and gets on their clothes and infects them. Moreover, the rooms which a consumptive has occupied, or died in, should be disinfected by the sanitary authorities as in any other infectious disease, the walls and furniture, as carpets frequently shelter millions of these germs, which must be destroyed in the interest of the healthy. It is in this way that one member of a family suffering from this disease infects other members. The public ascribe it to the disease being in the family, whilst really it is in the house, by the infection from the sufferers. Moreover, I think it absolutely necessary that a boy or girl suffering from even the earliest stages should not be sent to school, where contact with other children is so close and the danger of infection considerable, nor should any sufferer be allowed to work in a dairy, or where food may become infected; indeed, though I have the greatest sympathy for such sufferers, I think it undesirable that they should be employed in often too crowded offices, workshops, or shops, it is not safe to the other employees, nor, indeed, the best for themselves. An occupation where they are constantly in the open air is their best chance of recovery. Nor

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