

early childhood with so terrible a disease, infected manifestly from towels, bed-clothing, etc., used by parents already infected; or a more horrible possibility still, by direct infection. It is a revelation of a canker in our midst of incredible danger, needing strong measures to eradicate.

Clinical Notes on Some Common Ailments.

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CONSTIPATION.

This is, of course, a very wide subject, inasmuch as there is probably no complaint which is more common at all ages of life, or about which so many mistakes are made at one time or another in treatment: moreover, it is a condition for which the patient generally treats himself—with rather unsatisfactory results, except in so far as the dividends of the patent medicine companies are concerned.

Constipation is both a disease, and a symptom of other diseases, that is to say, while it is sometimes itself the cause of many ailments with which it might not, at first sight, seem to be very closely connected, it is also not infrequently due to other diseases, it being then necessary to treat the original malady, and not only the constipation itself.

In this article no attempt will be made to give an exhaustive list of the diseases of which constipation is a symptom, but some of the more common causes of the condition itself will be described in so far as they bear on the methods which are employed for its treatment.

Constipation may be defined as an inability on the part of the patient to empty his lower bowel, and this defect may be either occasional or habitual—incidentally, a very important distinction. Before we go any further, it will be necessary to note, firstly, how the normal contents of the bowel get there, and then, how they get out again.

In theory, and under ideal conditions, there should not be any contents of the lower bowel at all. If we could always eat nothing but what was completely digestible and absorbable, and in the exact quantity necessary to maintain life and satisfy the requirements of the body, by the time the food had reached the lower bowel, it would all have been made soluble and have passed through the walls of the small intestine into the blood. This, however, is manifestly impossible, and we all err as regards our food in two directions; we eat matters that are not useful to the body at all, and we do not take the ideal quantity of nourishing things,

so, by the time the food has reached the large intestine there is a mass, which consists of entirely indigestible residue, together with the excess of nourishing matter which is not at that particular time required. Under normal conditions there should be just enough water in this mass to soften it so that it can easily pass out through the rectum.

For the expulsion of the faeces, it is necessary that the intestine itself should be moving with sufficient vigour; so it is obvious, therefore, that retention of matter in the lower bowel may be due either to the mass being too hard and dry to be easily passed, or to the bowel itself being in a sluggish condition and not moving sufficiently quickly or strongly to expel its contents; sometimes both causes are present together.

In practice the first of these conditions is the most common, and we may say at once that the real reason for this is not very evident. Water is excreted by a healthy person in two ways, by the kidneys and by the bowel, and in people who suffer from habitually dry bowels, the quantity of urine passed is almost always excessive, so there is a want of balance between the two methods by which water leaves the body; further than this, however, we cannot go; we do not know why this should be, though there have been many reasons given for the occurrence.

Deficiency of movement may occur in many states, the most common of which is anæmia, but tight lacing, pregnancy, and deficiency of general muscular movement also cause constipation, and are responsible for the fact that the condition is very much more common in women than in men. Women who do not wear corsets, and who take exercise, do not suffer from constipation, and effete men, who are wearied by a walk of a hundred yards, do. Deficiency of intestinal movement is also sometimes due to organic disease such as a narrowing of the bowel itself from a growth or adhesions (as in pelvic inflammation) or to paralysis from disease of the brain or the spinal cord.

Coming now to the results of the retention of faeces in the large bowel, it is important to remember that the numerous ills which constipation brings in its train are due to absorption of the excess of nutritious matter, and not to the mere retention of the useless part of the food in the large bowel; beyond distending the gut, and weighing it down into the pelvis so that it becomes weaker, no very great harm is done, but the effects of the absorption into the blood of more nutritious material than the body wants are very grave indeed, because, instead of being used up for replacing tissue, and for the production of heat and energy, it is

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