The Treatment of Cholera.

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PREFATORY.

SHORTLY after I had taken my degrees in medicine and surgery, 1876-77, I went to Calcutta, and cholera was one of the first diseases I was called upon to treat. I had carefully studied the different authorities on the subject, but my knowledge was, of necessity, theoretical and not practical. One day I overheard a remark made by a native, "that the doctor did not understand the disease." Ready and eager to accept any hint, no matter from what source it came, I turned to the native, and asked him to point out the error, and explain to me the correct method. He was unacquainted with any scientific views, but he said cholera was a disease which deprived the body of water, and, therefore, water was a necessity of treatment. He further said opium was bad, except in the earliest stage of the disease. *His* success was extraordinary, and subsequent experience substantiated the wisdom of his treatment.

The object of these articles is to share with others the knowledge he imparted to me.

CHAPTER I.

CHOLERA.

Cholera is an epidemic disease, said to be dependent on a specific poison, the nature of which is at present imperfectly understood. The most recent theory is that the disease is caused and propagated by the presence of a microbe which has the power of rapid reproduction provided it meets with conditions suitable for its favourable development. The microbe is capable of diffusing itself through liquids, and until recently was considered to exist also in the air and be carried by the winds. In shape it bears a resemblance to the ordinary comma of punctuation, and so has received the name of the comma-shaped bacillus.

The Germ Theory.—The so-called germ theory of disease pre-supposes that all infective diseases are dependent on the existence of a living organism or germ, which is capable of almost indefinite multiplication and reproduction, provided it finds a suitable soil for its nutrition, maturation, and fructification. The favourable circumstances and surroundings are a necessity for the growth of the microbe, or otherwise the bacillus is incapable of development. Bacteria exist in the food we eat, the water we drink, and the air we breathe without presumably causing any ill effects. It is feasible, therefore, that the microbe of an infectious disease may enter the system without producing the disease, if the powers of the constitution are strong enough to resist it.

The Spread of Cholera.—The recognised belief of the present day is that cholera is conveyed by human inter-communication, chiefly by the pollution of the drinking water, and it is thought that cholera cannot, under any circumstances, originate, except by the introduction of the specific cholera poison, either in the food or the water. The idea that the poison could be carried by the winds from one place to another, independently of communication between the sick and the healthy was in former years generally recognised, but this view has of late been discarded as untenable. The contamination of the drinking water by the discharges from a patient suffering from cholera is a rational explanation of the propagation of the disease, for it is well known that enteric fever spreads in the same manner, yet, although water is indisputably one of the vehicles for the conveyance of the poison, this view is insufficient and inadequate to account for the outbreak of every case of cholera. Doubtless a combination of influences is responsible for the development of the disease. Not so long ago the spread of cholera in India was foretold with a marked and marvellous accuracy. Cholera maps were prepared, and the date of the expected arrival was announced in medical orders. The wave of cholera seldom deviated from its anticipated course, and the fact that birds suddenly deserted a locality supplies a strong argument in favour of the diffusion of the disease by means of the winds. On several occasions I predicted the occurrence of cholera in certain houses, owing to the flight of the birds from the neighbourhood, and although it would be unwise to attach too much importance to events which might have been only coincidences, the observation merits further investigation. There is another view which deserves consideration. It was thought that some meteorological conditions existed which favoured the spread of the disease. Our knowledge on this subject is so strictly limited that it would be unreasonable to speak with any confidence on this theory, but it is well known that a thunderstorm affects many persons in an extraordinary and inexplicable manner, some of whom possessing a peculiar idiosyncracy, are prostrated

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