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Cholera; Its Nature and Its Cure.

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REPRINTED FROM THE
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
SEPTEMBER 30, 1893.

CHICAGO:
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
1893.





CHOLERA; ITS NATURE AND ITS CURE.

"We have no better means of combating the cholera to-day than at any time since it became known to civilization, a thousand years ago," said a distinguished physician in a recent number of the *Review of Reviews*. The medical profession therefore stands confronted with the appalling fact that hitherto all theories of this disease have been so misleading, and all forms of treatment have proved so worthless, that longer to trust them would be little less than criminal. Better theories and practice are urgently demanded.

The bacillus theory of Dr. Robert Koch, which was so eagerly grasped at, is now found to be fallacious. Dr. Koch himself admits that comma-shaped germs are found in the common diarrheas of summer everywhere, and he tells us: "Water, from whatever source, very frequently, not to say invariably, contains comma-shaped organisms." He is not ignorant of the fact that these bacilli are found in the secretions of the mouth and throat of healthy persons and in the dejections of hardened fecal matters. Dr. Koch also knows full well that Drs. Pettenkofer of Munich, and Emmerich of Berlin, two of the most distinguished members of the medical profession of to-day, and experts in this disease, drank each a cubic centimeter of "culture broth" containing these pathogenic bacilli without experiencing a single characteristic symptom of cholera, though the draught in each case was followed by liquid stools swarming with these germs. Hasterlik reports six cases of the same kind without any apparent results. The utter worthlessness of Dr.

Koch's comma bacillus as diagnostic evidence of this disease is thus fully demonstrated.

As the result of a personal experience in every epidemic of this disease in our country since 1851, together with an experience of its effects upon my own person and a success in its treatment quite phenomenal, I am prepared to assert that cholera need be no longer the dread and scourge which hitherto it has been.

It is strange that a new philosophy of this disease which must revolutionize its theories and its treatment is now found where it never before has been sought for, but where alone it is possible to find it, viz: in the right interpretation of the symptoms which characterize the disease. This philosophy not only reveals the essential nature of this disease, but points unerringly to a more successful treatment.

The symptom of most vital importance, and the only one which is pathognomonic, is the watery exudations which find their way so profusely through stomach and intestines and skin. In fact, all other symptoms which follow this one have their origin *in it*, since, in the entire absence of *this*, neither of the others can have an existence. The most vital consequences, therefore, depend upon the right appreciation of this symptom, together with the promptness and efficiency with which its indications for treatment are carried out. This watery element is constituted of the serous element of the blood, and comes from every part and portion of the system.

The question now arises, by what process does this rapid separation of the finer element of the blood from the coarser take place? The nerves of the system, when in their normal condition, preside over and maintain the tonicity of every organ, vessel and tissue of the body. They control the functions and processes of every part. The rapid filtration of the watery element of the blood through the now loose and patulous walls of the blood vessels indicates a loss of tonicity on the part of the nerves which per-

meate those walls. On account of such weakened condition of the walls of the blood vessels a general serous outflow pours from every vein and venule of the body, and the great life current is thus robbed to supply these so-called rice water discharges. At the same time the weakened vessel-walls contract with diminished force upon their remaining contents, and consequently the brain and heart fail of an adequate supply, and the more fatal symptoms and death follow. Such is the secret of the disease and its rapid and phenomenal fatality.

The rapid abstraction of a single element of the blood becomes disastrous in the same manner as when the full blood itself is lost in the more common forms of hemorrhage. It is, therefore, passing strange that this rice water phenomenon never has been recognized as a hemorrhage, with all that such a hemorrhage implies. All symptoms and conditions incident to this disease, as also the changes observed upon the cadaver, are explainable upon the hypothesis of actual hemorrhage; and we are warranted in saying, *only* upon that hypothesis.

Owing to the failure to discriminate between the actions of the red corpuscles of the blood and its white discs, its chief constituents, this hemorrhage hypothesis has not been applied in explanation of this disease. The vital forces of the system depend largely upon the action of the red corpuscles, for through these chiefly are effected the oxygenation of the blood and the consequent revitalization of the system. A small loss of this element may become quickly fatal. On the other hand, the serum or white element which constitutes the bulk of the blood performs less vital functions, and its abstraction becomes neither so quickly nor so seriously manifest. In this disease enormous quantities are sometimes separated from the circulating current without fatal consequences.

Treatment.—Since the disease is essentially a neurosis, and its controlling symptom a hemorrhage, its

treatment becomes at once clearly defined, and the pure empiricism of the past must give place to a scientific treatment with vastly improved results. We must look upon the cholera hemorrhage as subject to the same general principles of treatment as other hemorrhages.

As the cholera hemorrhage occurs over so large a portion of the body, is colorless, and therefore virtually a *concealed* hemorrhage with all that is alarming which that word implies, it calls for attentions at once prompt, efficient and watchful. No painless diarrhea or painless vomiting is free from danger during a cholera epidemic, since the milder conditions of the disease often quickly change to those more grave and fatal.

Both the principles and the practice of medical science teach that position, *position*, POSITION, is the prime safeguard in sudden and profuse hemorrhages occurring from any cause. In the treatment of cholera hemorrhage, position with the body horizontal or with the head the lowest, is quite as indispensable as in that arising from any other cause.

Position in the treatment of cholera is not simply a repose in bed with the head resting comfortably upon the pillow, and raised or lowered at the pleasure or caprice of the patient; but to be efficacious, as in its graver cases, it must be *compulsory*, and strictly maintained, *as for the very life*, until the danger period is passed. The vital necessity of position in the treatment of cholera is shown by Murray, Cunningham and other distinguished authorities when they tell us that "once sitting upright in bed sometimes causes death in this disease." Not even in the act of evacuation of the bowels should the head be raised in the more serious cases. But position in this disease is sometimes difficult to secure, as the patient, when weakened by exhaustive discharges and pain, becomes disturbed in intellect and is with difficulty controlled.

If the best results are sought for, the horizontal

position should be enforced in every case of even suspected cholera. In cases of great danger the body should be inclined with the head the lowest. This position should be maintained until the blood vessels contract upon their contents, which fact is shown by an improved condition of the pulse.

In the present condition of medical science, opium and its preparations stand far above other remedies which may be employed in the treatment of this disease. No remedy is known which surpasses this one in the power to change the perturbed condition of the nervous system and close up the diminutive avenues through which the watery element of the blood and the life ebb away together. During an epidemic it is hazardous to rely upon remedies taken through the mouth, since in cholera the action of the mucous membrane often becomes changed, so that internal remedies either fail to act or are ejected. Moments are sometimes precious, as a life may depend upon the certainty of retention of a remedy and the promptness and efficiency with which it may act. The hypodermic method is here our best resource. According to the reports of cases in Asia, Australia and elsewhere, the hypodermic use of morphia has shown almost uniformly favorable results; the one-eighth to the one-sixth of a grain of the latter very rarely need be exceeded or frequently repeated. Opium and morphia *in large doses* are decidedly contra indicated *in any of its stages*; since, if these drugs are retained in the stomach, they may become cumulative and in the case of reaction they might become fatal.

For the relief of the atrocious cramps, the administration of chloroform by inhalation, together with small doses of morphia hypodermically applied, offers the most speedy and effectual means at our command. The stimulation of the brain by currents of blood sent to that organ by *position*, wonderfully facilitates the control of the cramps.

For excessive thirst, ice may be given *ad libitum*;

and if ice can not be obtained, the coldest water in small quantities and frequently repeated. The suffering from thirst in this disease is inconceivable, and it is unjustifiable, unmitigated cruelty to withhold these necessities from the sufferer. Ice has been given freely in *every* case under my charge, and with the happiest effects.

The circulation should be promoted by the application of heat and friction to the extremities. Any further treatment may be conducted upon general principles.

En résumé: This disease, so destructive to human life, is thus found to be most simple in its character and positive in its indications for treatment. As a problem in medical science, cholera resolves itself into a question of supply of blood to the brain and heart. If this supply be kept up, a fatal termination to this disease is not probable. Whatever course will best promote this end, therefore, must secure the most favorable results in its treatment.

The inestimable value of *position* as the fundamental idea in the treatment of cholera was first exemplified upon my own person in 1854, and has been abundantly demonstrated in the epidemics which have since occurred.

The simple theory herein advanced is found in entire harmony with the highest principles and practice of the advanced medical science of to-day. It offers results such as never yet have been realized, and places within the reach of all a ready method of treatment. This treatment may be successfully employed even without the use of medicines.

In fine, in the light of the study of this disease during forty years, both at home and abroad, such as few have had either the opportunity or the inclination to pursue, and in view of the phenomenally favorable results of treatment based upon this philosophy, I believe myself fully warranted in asserting that the rate of mortality of this scourge may be

reduced to less than half of that at which it confessedly stands to-day.

The foregoing theories have been presented by the writer before the American Medical Association, the New York State Medical Societies and the Chautauqua County (N. Y) Medical Society; also through the columns of the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, the *Chicago Medical and Surgical Journal*, and the *Quarterly Epitome of Practical Medicine and Surgery*.

