

The Pathology of Diphtheria

A physician says: A lady writes us, asking several questions upon this subject. She says the disease is quite prevalent in her locality. Her first question is, "Are 'Diphtheria' and 'putrid sore throat' the same?" Second, "If death is caused from choking—*apnœa*—or an inability to get breath?"

To her first question I answer "Yes." I know the laity (and some not over-well-posted doctors, too,) make a distinction from simply a difference in the severity of the complaint in two or more cases; calling the more violent cases of diphtheria "putrid sore throat."

The disease is a constitutional one. The throat is only one place out of many in which it gives us a "local" appearance. It attacks all mucous surfaces—ear, eye, mouth, nose, œsophagus, stomach, rectum, vagina, etc.—indifferently. It may be in any two or three of these localities in the same person at once. It also shows itself on any abraded surface of an afflicted individual.

The most general seat, however, is on the fauces (throat); yet cases are on record where, although, evident in other parts of the same patient, there was no throat complaint.

Locally, then, the expression of the disease is but an inflammation of the mucous membrane with an exudation of an organozete (fibrinous) lymph. This shortly "organizes" (consolidates) to the lacerated or ashen-colored membrane that is pathognomonic of the complaint. This membrane you find wherever the inflammatory process is set up, and it can be readily pulled off, leaving the raw surface beneath. Sometimes it gets to be very thick. It is the abundance of this membrane in the trachea and bronchial tubes that causes death by "strangulation;" it prevents the passage of air mechanically.

To answer her second question: In some cases it is; in others it is not.

Sometimes death occurs within forty-eight hours, and before this exudation is poured out from the inflamed surface, anywhere. Again, when the disease does not attack the larynx or trachea, "choking to death" is impossible. Death, in the majority of cases in children, does, however, occur as she indicates. In older persons death by ashenia (a gradual wasting of the power of life) is full as common.

The disease is one of excessive vomiting frequently, and loathing of food; hence, unless you are careful, your patient verily starves to death. Again, some deaths are from nervous lesions—a paralysis somewhere—as for instance of the nerve of organic life to the heart. Again, the blood (which is normally supplied with fibrine) has the fibrine notably increased; so much so that it clots in the heart, thus causing death.

It is by no means so frequent a disease as is supposed. Other throat inflammations are very frequently called diphtheria, either through a careless diagnosis or an unlaudable motive of the attendant. Babies always have "croup," you know, yet I venture my life that not one in a hundred ever had any such disease. Babies with croup are sick, and not generally nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand get well. So with diphtheria, yet cases sometimes are very mild.

I give no treatment, as it is a disease that only a physician should take hold of.

Sir John Franklin.

Nearly thirty years ago an English expedition sailed far into the arctic seas. There were two vessels, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, commanded by Sir John Franklin and Captain Crozier. The mysterious fate of these ships and their crews has never been known in detail, but it has passed into history that all perished. The vessels reached the eastern coast of Davis strait in safety, and were last seen moored to a mass of floating ice in about 76 deg. north latitude. No special fears for the safety of the party were felt until 1848; afterward successive expeditions went out in search of them. At that time began the efforts which Lady Franklin has never ceased to make in hope of obtaining some news of her husband. And recently she has renewed the offer of a reward of \$10,000, and such other inducements as are within her power to make, for the recovery of the records of the expedition. Long ago she was convinced of her husband's death. In 1860 a tin case was found beneath a heap of stones on a desolate island, and it contained a document stating that Sir John Franklin had died in June, 1847, that the ships had been deserted, and that 105 of the survivors had started to reach the Fish river. And here a dark curtain has fallen, hiding their fate from view. Lady Franklin believes that the records of the expedition were buried not far from the spot where the ships were abandoned, and may yet be found, and also that some documents may be in the possession of the Esquimaux. The chance of success seems small to

the public mind, but, with a devotion and faithfulness most rare, this patient woman clings to the hope of hearing something about the journey of her husband. Lady Franklin is in feeble health, but at her desire, a niece of hers has lately renewed the offer of reward, and brought to public notice the grounds on which she bases the probabilities of success.

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