

Cholera : copy of a letter to the editor of the "Standard," / from David Macloughlin.

Contributors

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CHOLERA.

Copy of a Letter

TO

THE EDITOR OF THE "STANDARD,"

FROM

DAVID MACLOUGHLIN, M.D.,

MEMBER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR.

LONDON:
CHURCHILL AND SONS, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1866.

GEORGE

BOOK OF A LETTER

To the Editor of the "Standard."

SIR,—As you were so kind as to notice, in *The Standard* of the 30th of May last, my letter to Lieut.-General Sir Edward Lugard, relative to the excessive rate of mortality, from Cholera, in the Army Hospitals, and suggesting the necessity for inquiry :

As the great mortality, from cholera, during the last season, in the Army Hospitals in the garrisons of Gibraltar and Malta, as compared with the mortality in the civil hospitals in the same locality, has proved the correctness of my statement to Lieut.-General Sir Edward Lugard,—that the soldier, labouring under cholera, is hurried out of existence by the disease, assisted by the so-called medical treatment he receives in the Army Hospital :

And as these facts will be brought before the House of Commons this ensuing session, with the view to ascertain if the soldier, labouring under cholera, receives in the Army Hospitals the best medical aid that medical science can give, to assist nature to save his life ; or if he receives the best aid that can be given to assist the disease to destroy his life :

In the interest of the public and in the interest of the army, permit me to place the following facts before you :—

It is on record that, after an absence of thirty years, when I returned in 1848, I found this country greatly

alarmed relative to an expected outbreak of Epidemic Cholera. I found that the medical profession had not profited of the former outbreak of this disease in this country, and had not gone to the bedside and there interrogated nature. All, without any examination, accepted as correct the opinion of Messrs. James Jameson and William Scot, that cholera was a disease *sui generis*, attacking persons in perfect health, suddenly, with vomiting, severe purging, spasms, etc., etc., and destroying life in a few hours. That diarrhœa and cholera were two distinct diseases; that where diarrhœa and cholera were remarked to be epidemic at the same time, that the diarrhœa, they said, weakened the patient, and made him more liable to be acted on by the cholera poison.*

* The Reports on Cholera, published by the General Board of Health, in 1850, 1853, and 1854, and the Report on Cholera, published by the Royal College of Physicians of England, are there as proof that those two great offices of state had not, up to 1854, the slightest idea that diarrhœa is the first,—the essential symptom of cholera; that a painless diarrhœa may have drained almost the whole serum from the blood; that the blood may have ceased to circulate; that the heart may have ceased to contract; that the person may be past all human aid. Yet, he is at his usual occupation, or walking about for pleasure or for business, unaware that he has anything the matter with him, except that his voice is weak; and, at a moment when he and his friends believe him perfectly well, he is struck down with vomiting, severe purging, spasms, etc., etc., and he ceases to breathe in a few hours.

The appointment of the house to house visitors,—which is so valuable an institution, and which ought not to be omitted when cholera is epidemic,—owes its origin, not to the knowledge that diarrhœa is the first, the essential symptom of cholera, but to the fact that, in 1849, almost every second person in London had a diarrhœa. And as the Board were informed that diarrhœa weakened the individual, and made him more liable to be acted on by the so-called cholera poison; the General Board of Health appointed the house to house visitors

It is on record that, regardless of time, of labour, and of expense, I publicly demonstrated at the bedside, before the whole medical profession of London, in 1849 and 1853, that every case of cholera is *invariably* preceded by a diarrhœa for a few *hours*, or for a few *days*, or for a *few weeks*; and that if this diarrhœa is promptly cured, the developed stage—that of vomiting, severe purging, spasms, etc., etc.—is prevented, and life is safe.

Prompted by gratitude towards the Registrar-General, Major Graham, and the gentlemen of his department, for the valuable information they had given me, I addressed a letter to Major Graham, in which I gave him an account of the results of my researches, which letter was published in his weekly report of births, deaths, etc., etc., on the 24th of September, 1853. See Appendix, No. 1.

As the results of my researches were new to the profession, and as they were of great importance to the public, I forwarded a copy of my letter to Major Graham, of the 24th of September, 1853, to the Imperial Academy of Medicine of France. On the receipt of my letter the Academy, with the sanction of the Government, sent Dr. Métier, a distinguished member of the Academy, to see me, to verify my facts, and to report.

Happily, since 1853, no outbreak of epidemic cholera occurred in France till last season; consequently, the Government had no opportunity to ascertain the correctness of the results of my researches. However, when cholera broke out in France as an epidemic last season, the Government directed pathologists to go to the bed-

to go to each house, and there ascertain if any one laboured under diarrhœa, and see that they had immediately medical advice, so as to prevent them from being weakened, and thereby made more liable to be acted on by the cholera poison.

side, and there ascertain the correctness of the results of my researches, and to report.

The pathologists reported that every confidence might be placed in the results of my researches. The Government then published instructions relative to cholera, in the *Moniteur* of the 18th of October last, based on my letter to Major Graham of the 24th of September, 1853. See Appendix, No. 2.

Therefore, since the French Government, after due inquiry, has accepted the results of my researches as correct, I feel that by having demonstrated that every case of cholera is *invariably* preceded by a diarrhoea for a few hours, or for a few days, or for a few weeks, and that if this diarrhoea is promptly cured, the developed stage,—that of vomiting, severe purging, spasms, etc., etc.,—is prevented and life is safe: I feel, I say, that I have placed the information within the reach of everyone, how to protect himself against an attack of developed cholera; that I have thereby done what no constituted medical authority or private medical practitioner has done to benefit the human race; and that for myself I enjoy the conviction that, relative to cholera, my life has been useful to my fellow men; that whatever fate may have in store for me, that my name, in connexion with cholera, will go down to posterity as a benefactor to the human race.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

DAVID MACLOUGHLIN, M.D.,

Member of the Legion of Honour.

London, 13th January, 1866.

36, Bruton St., Berkeley Square, W.

APPENDIX No. 1.

*Extract from the Registrar-General's Weekly Return,
September 24, 1853.*

The following note has been addressed by Dr. Macloughlin to the Registrar-General.

*" 34, Bruton Street, Berkeley Square,
23rd September, 1853.*

"In your last Weekly Return it is stated that a case of cholera occurred at No. 1, Charlotte Street, Waterloo Road, in a child 5 years old, which proved fatal in 7 hours, and without any premonitory symptom. I have been to the house, and seen the mother and the medical gentleman who attended the child. The mother left the child in the morning under the care of her eldest daughter, a child of about 10 years old. She was out all day at work, and does not know how the child passed the day, but when she returned home at night the child was in bed apparently perfectly well. At about half-past three o'clock next morning, she was called up to attend to the child, who had a copious liquid painless motion; about half an hour after the child had a second liquid painless motion; she then made a fire and got some warm drink, which the child took. The child went to bed again, complained of no uneasiness or pain, and slept a short time; she then had a third evacuation, still without pain, but felt sick at stomach. In less than three quarters of an hour after, she had a fourth very copious liquid painless evacuation, and vomited freely. The mother, feeling now alarmed, sent about 6 o'clock for medical assistance, and about 7 o'clock, when the medical gentleman arrived, the child had had severe cramps, vomiting and purging, and she was then in collapse. There was, therefore, in this case, a painless premonitory diarrhœa for at least three hours before cramps came on, and of course before collapse; and therefore there is nothing in this case which forms an exception to the rule,

that in every case of cholera there is always a premonitory painless diarrhœa for some *hours*, or for some *days*, or for some *weeks*, before cramps, and of course before collapse takes place ; and that it is during this painless diarrhœa that cholera is a most manageable disease ; and that it is within the reach of medical science. If this child had had medical assistance immediately on being seized with diarrhœa, would she have been saved ? No one can reply to this in the affirmative. But her father and two of her sisters were seized with painless diarrhœa the day after her death ; they instantly had medical assistance, and they are now safe."

APPENDIX No. 2.

Extract from Instructions published by the French Government in the Moniteur of the 18th October last, relative to Cholera.

" C'est une grande erreur de croire que le choléra se manifeste à l'improviste. Ce qu'il y a de vrai, au contraire, c'est qu'il avertit en quelque façon de son arrivée un jour, deux jours, huit jours même à l'avance.

" L'avertissement consiste, en général, en un dérangement de corps plus ou moins prononcé, avec ou sans coliques, en une diarrhée glaireuse ou séreuse, accompagnée ou non de malaise et de dégoût, avec pâleur de la langue.

" Il convient de prendre garde à cette diarrhée qui ne manque pour ainsi dire jamais et qu'on a appelée *prémonitoire*, à cause de sa signification. Abandonnée à elle-même, elle aboutira souvent au choléra ; traitée promptement et arrêtée, elle coupera court au mal, et il sera dans le plus grand nombre de cas enrayé dans son développement. Les observations les plus précises ont été faites à ce sujet tant en France qu'à l'étranger, en Angleterre notamment."

