

Stammering and its treatment / by Dr Chervin.

Contributors

Chervin, Arthur, 1850-1921.
Royal College of Surgeons of England

Publication/Creation

Paris : Institution des bègues de Paris, [between 1880 and 1889]

Persistent URL

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/n3x3uarf>

Provider

Royal College of Surgeons

License and attribution

This material has been provided by This material has been provided by The Royal College of Surgeons of England. The original may be consulted at The Royal College of Surgeons of England. where the originals may be consulted. This work has been identified as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighbouring rights and is being made available under the Creative Commons, Public Domain Mark.

You can copy, modify, distribute and perform the work, even for commercial purposes, without asking permission.



Wellcome Collection
183 Euston Road
London NW1 2BE UK
T +44 (0)20 7611 8722
E library@wellcomecollection.org
<https://wellcomecollection.org>





2

STAMMERING

AND

ITS TREATMENT

BY

Arthur
Dr CHERVIN

Director of the Paris Institute for Stammerers,
etc., etc.



INSTITUTION DES BÈGUES DE PARIS

10, Avenue Victor Hugo, 10

(ARC-DE-TRIOMPHE)

Fondée, en 1867, avec le concours de M. le Ministre de l'Instruction publique,
Subventionnée par le Ministère de l'Intérieur et la Ville de Paris



STAMMERING

AND

ITS TREATMENT

WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Considérations générales sur le bégaiement (in journal:
l'École de médecine) 0 fr. 50

Analyse physiologique des éléments de la parole.
Voyelles et Consonnes, mécanisme de leur prononcia-
tion 2 fr. 50

Du bégaiement et de son traitement. Discours pro-
noncé en séance générale du Congrès périodique interna-
tional des sciences médicales, à Amsterdam. . . 1 fr.

Physiologie du bégaiement. Mémoire lu à la Société de
médecine de Paris. 1 fr.

Comment on guérit le bégaiement (in *Journal de Thé-
rapeutique*) 0 fr. 50

PERIODICAL INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

OF

MEDICAL SCIENCES

AMSTERDAM SESSION

GENERAL MEETING

Professor DONDERS, *President*

MR. PRESIDENT, GENTLEMEN,

There is no one amongst you but has, at any rate, once in the course of his practice, been consulted by a patient whose articulation of the smallest syllable was possible only at the cost of the most laborious efforts attended with grimaces and contortions more apt to excite laughter than compassion, had not the tortures endured by the unhappy sufferer been positively painful to behold. Such a man, Gentlemen, who finds so much difficulty in speaking, now at the beginning, now in the middle, now at the end of his words, is a stammerer.

Allow me then to dwell for a few moments on that curious infirmity called stuttering or stammering.

If a person who stammers be attentively examined, it is very soon noticed that the difficulty which he experiences in speaking is attended with a certain difficulty in breathing; and, after repeated observa-

tions, the conclusion is arrived at, that this irregularity of breathing is the very foundation of the affection. Indeed, Gentlemen, it stands to reason that stammering does not always reach that pitch of which I was just now giving the sad description; some who stammer suffer from but a slight impediment in speech, which they indeed not unfrequently succeed in cleverly disguising. The face of such men is calm, the interruption of speech which is but momentary, can easily be mistaken for a difficulty in finding the fittest expression for their thoughts. If therefore stammering were defined by what is most obvious, by an interruption of speech attended with grimaces, it would follow that stammering would be almost rare, instead of which it is of very frequent occurrence, as I will presently show you from official returns.

According to me, stammering may be defined as an impediment in speech presenting itself with great intermission, sometimes at the beginning, sometimes in the middle, sometimes at the end of words, but more especially at the beginning of words. This impediment is characterised either by a sudden stoppage in speech, or by the convulsive and more or less frequent repetition of the same syllable; it is always attended with a disturbance, with a defective application rather, of the rhythm of breathing in the act of speech.

I would call, Gentlemen, your attention to the fact that this infirmity presents itself with great intermission; for it is a fact that always strikes not only those who see stammerers for the first time, but also the patients themselves, and those about them. How many times have I heard this statement in my practice : « I must tell you a very curious fact, doctor ; I do not stammer every day ; there are whole days, weeks even, during which my speech is so

clear and unembarrassed that nobody would believe me if I said that I stammer as you see I do ! »

This undeniable intermission of stammering is especially dependent upon such moral influences as are brought to bear upon the stammerer. Some, for instance, cannot at times articulate a few syllables or the most indifferent sentence without the greatest difficulty, if any person present make them nervous ; whilst a few minutes later, when alone, they will speak for hours together without experiencing the slightest hesitation. Timidity itself (and this is an important point to bear in mind), does not always increase stammering ; and such is also the case with anger, intoxication and other causes of excitation of the nerves. Some indeed who do not usually experience much difficulty in speaking, will be utterly unable to pronounce the smallest syllable, if under the influence of anger or alcohol. But others again, though afflicted with stammering in the acutest form will enjoy a fluency of perfectly unimpeded speech when in anger or after alcoholic libations. In proof of this I could adduce many most conclusive instances ; but I will only quote one, which will illustrate at once the influence of stimulants and the sad drawbacks incident to stammering.

A merchant, already middle-aged, came one day to consult me. He had been afflicted from his birth with a dreadful impediment in speech. In the course of conversation, he imparted to me the joy he would feel in getting rid of this infirmity which, he said, had been the bane of his life. Amongst other things, he disclosed to me that owing to all the obstacles that arose before him every time he would open his mouth to speak, his disposition had turned gloomy, and that he had very often thought of putting an

end to his torments by destroying himself. « Would you believe, doctor, » he said, « that I, who am as abstemious as any man alive, am reduced to get myself into a state of intoxication, whenever I have business of importance that I cannot entrust to my head clerk? Yes, doctor, whenever I have to discuss important business, before leaving home I take a glass of brandy which gets into my head, and then I recover my self-possession, and I can speak. Yet, not for long, for in proportion as the fumes of the alcohol pass away, my stammering comes back, and if the transaction is not concluded, I have to postpone it till the morrow. The next day, I take a fresh dose of brandy and I am off to my business again ».

If I wished, Gentlemen, to treat exhaustively the subject that I have the honour of now exposing to you, I should require far more time than I have at my disposal, even should I give you but a mere nomenclature of the countless theories that have been put forward from antiquity down to our own days, I shall therefore not trespass so far upon your kind attention, as to dwell upon them; the more so as the interest they present nowadays is merely historical.

Without further delay, let me enter upon the causes of stammering.

The ætiology of stammering is most interesting; and I must tell you, Gentlemen, at the outset, that stammering can either be congenital or acquired. When congenital, it often finds its manifest cause in hereditary transmission; I regret I have to make use of the words *congenital* and *hereditary transmission* which do not fully express my thought, but I am at a loss for other words. I do not indeed mean thereby that stammering is hereditary like scrofula, phthisis or syphilis; I do not either mean that the

child brings into the world the germs of stammering. I merely mean that the child stammered from its very first words, and that its parents stammered also.

This stammering which I call congenital, may be the result of a fright, or some violent impression, or a fall in earliest childhood, which has left deep traces in the young brains; this trace reappearing like phosphorescent light at the slightest emotion, may paralyse the act of speech and produce stammering.

It may be again that this so-called hereditary transmission be simply imitation and therefore can be brought under the head of acquired stammering. For, amongst the forms of acquired stammering, stammering by well proved, well established and undeniable imitation holds a most important place. How often have children lost their fluency of speech through imitating a playfellow who stammered; others, noticing that a master never required one of their schoolfellows who stammered to repeat his lessons, have feigned stammering, in order to get off theirs, and have very quickly acquired a real impediment in their speech. Very frequently do children born of parents who stammer, or placed among stammerers, become so themselves ere long; such children learnt to stammer as they would have learnt to pronounce a foreign tongue, by the ear.

Again education has a certain influence on the development of stammering. As climate makes the physical man, so education makes the moral man. The child timorous by nature will acquire a permanent excess of nervous sensitiveness, if at every moment he be threatened or frightened; nor is any more than this required to bring on stammering.

Finally stammering has other causes no less cer-

tain; these are a violent emotion, a fall, a fright or ill treatment. Sometimes indeed, and this is of greatest moment for my argument, stammering is brought on instantaneously. Should a child receive a violent blow on the head, should he be suddenly frightened, or should he be startled by any occurrence whatsoever, he may be afflicted with stammering forthwith, on the spot. I must confess that these cases are not the most frequent; but a certain number of carefully observed facts suffice to allow one to affirm that a violent brain-shock can cause stammering. In most cases, after one of these frights, one of these falls, the child hesitates a little, and this hesitation is attributed to the agitation under which the child now stands. But this hesitation continues; it grows; it asserts itself; and doubt is no longer possible, the child stammers.

You may be perhaps somewhat astonished to hear me, when speaking of the causes of stammering, always take instances of children : the reason is, that stammering never by any chance develops itself in adults. The latest age at which I have seen it appear is 14 or 15. Generally it is between 3 and 6 that a child begins to stammer.

Some authors have endeavoured to localize stammering, and to study the anatomical disorders introduced by this infirmity.

Before following our learned colleagues into their anatomo-pathological researches, it seems to me that one may be allowed to ask oneself whether *a priori*, these studies are called for, whether, in short, there are any reasons that can lead one to believe in the existence of a lesion.

I must confess that a lesion which would show itself at times and vanish entirely at others, which

would appear and disappear with the speed of lightning, seems to me to be a lesion of a very peculiar character. What would become of it during rhythmical utterance or in singing since under these circumstances stammering never occurs? From *a priori* consideration then it seems fair to conclude that stammering entails no lesion in the organism; and the fact is moreover fully confirmed by anatomical research. Stammering has also been compared to the cramp of clerks, and more especially telegraph clerks; the comparison does not either seem to hold good; for in this case, it is always in consequence of fatigue that cramp is produced; furthermore, it shows itself constantly and without intermission; all which characteristics are totally different in the case of stammering.

For me, stammering is a physiological disorder consisting in a want of coordination between several organs that ought to act in harmony. Who, indeed, has not noticed some hesitation or stammering, even in persons entirely free from this defect, but who, owing to either the vagueness of their own ideas or the nervousness caused by the presence of some person in awe of whom they stood, lost their entire self-possession and hesitated in their speech?

I now come to the diagnostic of this disorder, and I shall not lay much stress upon it; for it usually presents no difficulty, and as a rule it may be said that any impediment in speech characterised by repetitions or interruptions in the emission of sound, in a person who shows no symptom of paralysis, alcoholism or intellectual disorder, is stammering, and I add curable stammering.

It is true, however, that the prognosis varies slightly according to the variety of stammering to be dealt with.

I was telling you just now, Gentlemen, that the irregularities in the rhythm of breathing were, so to speak, the essential element of the diagnosis of stammering ; I will now tell you that they also assist in establishing the prognosis of the treatment.

I am therefore led to speak to you of the different varieties of stammering and the classification in this infirmity.

Stammering occurs either while drawing in breath or while letting it out; or finally during both actions indifferently. Hence three great classes :

Stammering during inspiration;

Stammering during expiration;

Mixed stammering.

It is evident that the prognosis is in a certain measure subordinate to the degree of intensity of the disorder; nevertheless I must say that *cæteris paribus*, stammering that produces itself during inspiration, and nasal stammering during expiration are the two most serious forms, and those that require most care in curing.

And the reason is, that in the stammering during inspiration, the stammerer has contracted the habit of speaking at the same time as he draws air into his lungs; he speaks *in*; he makes use of his vocal cords in the opposite way to what he should; the rhythm of breathing is therefore completely done away with. Add to this, that it is not rare in this form of stammering, to witness nervous spasms in the glottis, which make matters singularly worse.

In the nasal stammering during expiration, which produces itself more particularly in the three explosive consonants P, T, K, the stammerer instead of sending his provision of air through his mouth, directs it into the nasal fossæ. The nervous spasms are here produced simultaneously in the soft palate, in the posterior

pillars and the upper third of the pharynx; the result is that the air remains pent up in a kind of blind alley or cul-de-sac, constituted above by the nasal fossæ, behind by the pharyngian sinüs, on the sides by the pharyngo-staphylini, and in front by the soft palate and the root of the tongue, so that despite all the sufferer's efforts, the articulation of the consonant is possible only, when the spasm has disappeared.

Nevertheless this disorder, in spite of such complication, is cured in the great majority of cases.

The treatment lasts twenty days, and requires neither remedy, nor operation, nor the use of any instrument or apparatus in the mouth. It merely consists in gymnastic and rhythmical exercises of the organs of phonation and articulation.

The irregularities in breathing which are at the very root of the evil, naturally call for special exercises. The point is to teach the stammerer how to breathe, how to take breath at the proper moment, and how to let it out in a normal, physiological manner. This is obtained by showing the pupil how these different acts are performed, making him repeat them very slowly at first, and gradually increasing the speed.

The breathing once restored to its normal condition, we begin the study of the elements of speech, first of the vowels, then of the consonants. Finally we come to exercises on syllables, then words, then sentences; and as all this is done by degrees, step by step, as the difficulties are broken up, as it were, into many exercises, it follows that the stammerer comes almost insensibly to speak without stammering; and this new mode of speech becomes easy and natural for him in the short space of time the treatment lasts.

To resume, the treatment lasts three weeks : the first is given to bringing the vocal instrument back

to its physiological condition; the second to acquiring an easy and natural, though slightly rhythmical, mode of speech; the third to strengthening this new mode of speech acquired rather from practical and daily imitation than from theories and instructions.

But let it not be imagined that the application pure and simple of our exercises would be sufficient to cure : for, to this indispensable physiological treatment must be added a moral treatment, the advantage and necessity of which become every day more evident to me. And, Gentlemen, I need hardly say, that this is a matter requiring very delicate handling. The pupil's self-confidence must be awakened and strengthened as the course of the treatment goes on; he must be made to feel, to lay his finger on the step forward he makes every day, so as to quicken his eagerness and confidence in his own powers; he must again be forewarned against the small checks he may experience, be taught to argue them out, to account for them, so as to avoid them another time, and especially so as not to allow himself to lose heart.

There is, Gentlemen, an objection which I would meet at once; for it does not stand in my way in the slightest degree; and I wish to leave no doubt of any kind in your minds.

I may suppose that you are ready to concede to me that stammering can be cured by the means I have just set before you; but some of you may still doubt whether this cure is lasting, and think that it has but a momentary and fleeting effect. This objection I now beg to answer.

I might indeed, refer you to the report made to the Medical Academy of Paris in the meeting of August 25th 1874, by a special commission appointed at the request of the Prefect of the Seine, and declaring

« they had seen a certain number of Mr. Chervin's former pupils cured several years previous, who spoke perfectly well, and without the slightest hesitation. »

I might draw your attention to the following conclusions of the report of that same commission :

« In consideration of the facts that the commission (1) has witnessed, it proposes to give the Prefect the following answers :

1° That, from a scientific point of view, Mr. Chervin's method for the treatment of stammering, is rational;

« 2° That its results are very remarkable; and the method, well calculated to do much good service;

« 3° That one of its great advantages lies in the rapidity of the results obtained; while these results appear to be lasting, as the commission has ascertained in a certain number of cases;

« 4° That it deserves encouragement and assistance in the good work it is calculated to do. »

I could be satisfied with an affirmation so clear and positive, the value of which is further enhanced by the eminent competency and unquestionable impartiality of the Academy of Medecine, but I prefer to grant that cases of relapse may occur, that cases sometimes do occur however rare. And I beg to be allowed to give you a true and sincere account of the way in which these relapses have taken place.

You will then decide, Gentlemen, whether the method or the instructor, or the pupil is to blame.

(1) On commission : Dr. Bouvier, honorary physician of the hospitals; Dr. Hervez de Chégoin, honorary surgeon of the hospitals; Dr. Baillarger, physician at the Salpêtrière hospital; Dr. Moutard-Martin, physician at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital, hon. sec.

When the treatment is over, when the period of exercises performed under my direction has come to an end, I recommend the pupil to work alone for some time yet, in order to confirm his progress and make it lasting. I more especially recommend him to devote one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening to exercises, the greater part of which consists in reading very slowly out of any book he pleases. What I ask therefore is neither hard, nor excessive, nor tedious.

Moreover, I take the greatest care to tell the pupil that all the exercises that he is given, indispensable as they are to success, cannot possibly preserve and strengthen the new pronunciation acquired, if the instructions they contain are not put into practice, whenever an opportunity of speaking arises. You see then that instructions are not wanting. Well, question the few who have relapsed into their stammering; ask them whether, on leaving me, they continued to work by themselves, to practice the exercises I indicated, whether they studied to speak slowly and calmly : they will answer that they have neglected to follow the instructions they were given; and I will add that they invariably confess that it is they themselves and their negligence which are to blame for their relapse.

In short, absence of work and of watchfulness can bring about a relapse in the first few months, because the causes that produced the cure, are suppressed before the new mode of speaking has become a confirmed habit, thoroughly matured.

I was just now telling you that the number of stammerers, is far greater than is generally imagined; here are my proofs.

Some years ago, my father was commissioned by the Minister of Public Instruction to draw up the

statistics of stammering, and, after examining the reports of the « Conseil de Révision » (1) from 1850 to 1869, he found that during this period of twenty years, 13,215 recruits had been found unfit for military service on account of stammering, which gives an average of 6,32 recruits that stammered per 1,000 examined.

13,215 stammerers! that is, you see, Gentlemen, almost a little army: you would think that all the stammerers in the world had agreed to assemble in France. And, mark that I am speaking of men alone! Well, women are universally admitted to enjoy greater facility of speech than we do: in point of fact, you meet about one woman who stammers to nine men afflicted with this infirmity.

On the other hand, defects in pronunciation, such as lisping, are of frequent occurrence in women, whilst men are seldom afflicted in this manner. The explanation of this is to be found in a peculiar order of circumstances.

The little girl, who under her mother's eye, plays with her doll, not unfrequently distorts her words in imitation of the endearingly lisped words she hears addressed to herself. Well, this pronunciation which adds something yet more childish to the child's pretty prattle is rarely found fault with or corrected by the mother, who too often, on the contrary, encourages the child by imitating it herself; and it sometimes occurs that this manner of speaking only appears ridiculous when the child is beginning to grow out of childhood. But then, correction is of no avail; the

(1) The medical commission before which recruits for the army are examined before they enter the service. Every young man in France has to serve in the army for a certain time, and therefore has to pass before this commission.

habit is taken, and special exercises will be required to cure this defective pronunciation, which, I may as well say at once, never fails to disappear under a careful and intelligent treatment.

Utterly different is the education given to the little boy, who sent to school at an early age is generally corrected of any tendency to careless pronunciation by his fear of ridicule.

Not wishing, Gentlemen, to trespass any longer on your kind attention, I will go no further into the matter, though there remains much to be said on this interesting question affecting as it does so closely both science and humanity. For you must not forget that to restore freedom of speech to a stammerer, is not only to allay considerable moral suffering, but also to restore to society and families members who may some day be their guardians and pride.



