

Stammering : a method of curative treatment thereof based on practical experience / by Cortlandt MacMahon.

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TO MEMBERS

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TO MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

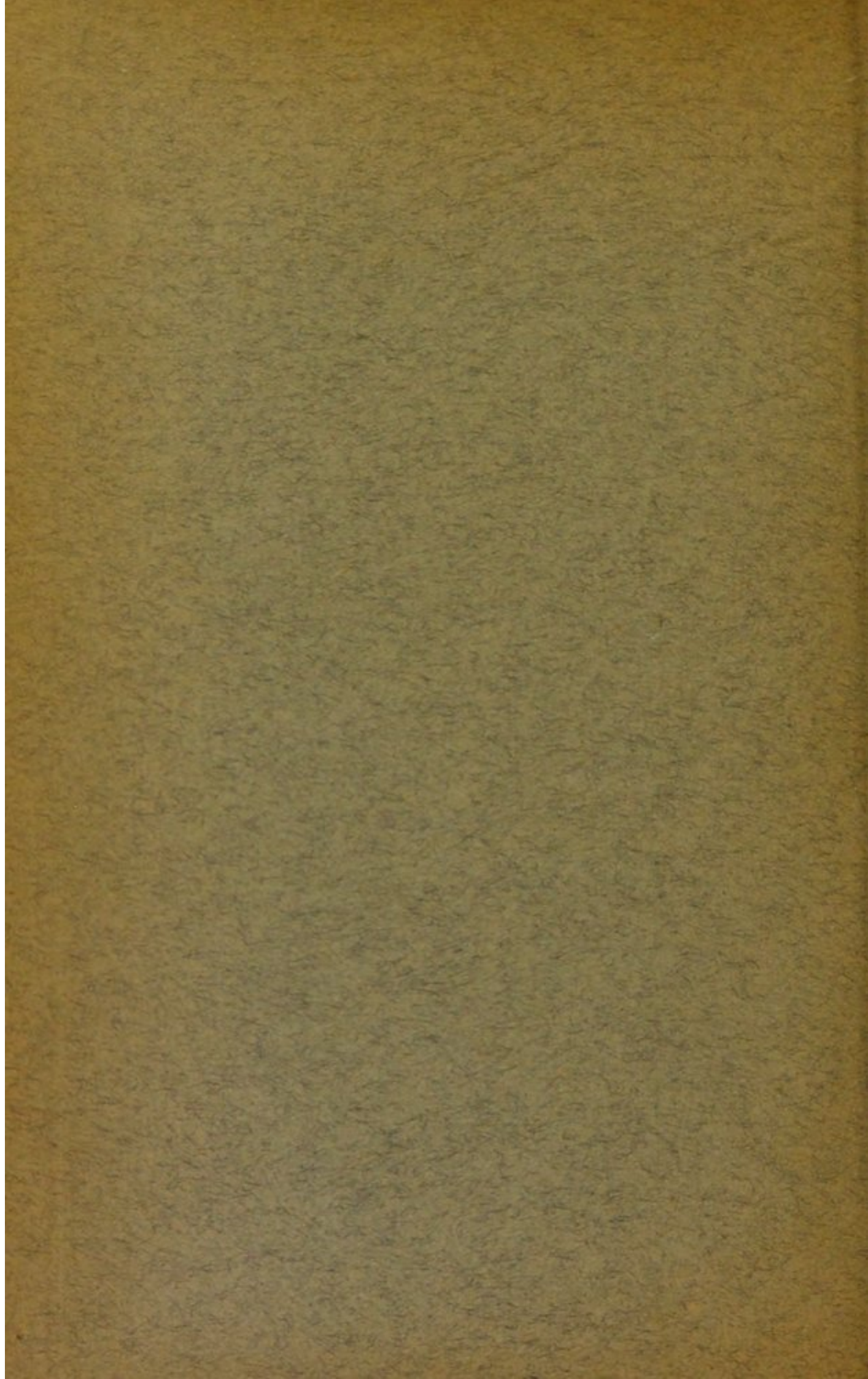
STAMMERING.

*A Method of Curative Treatment thereof based
on Practical Experience.*

C

BY

CORTLANDT MACMAHON, B.A. Oxon.



TELEPHONE
3380 MAYFAIR.

13, WIMPOLE STREET,
W.

17th March 1911

To
The Librarian

The Royal College of Surgeons.

Dear Sir.

I beg to offer the
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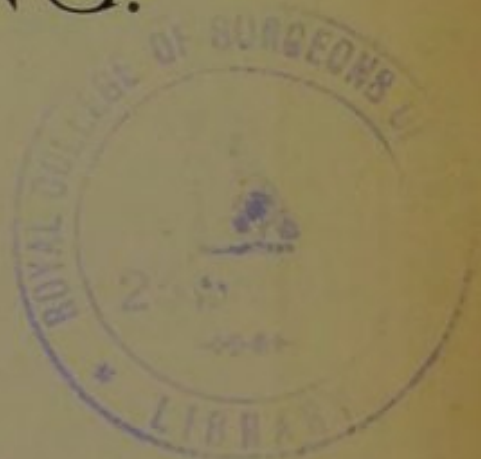
Yours faithfully
Cortlandt Machin

THE END OF THE WORLD

1884

TO MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

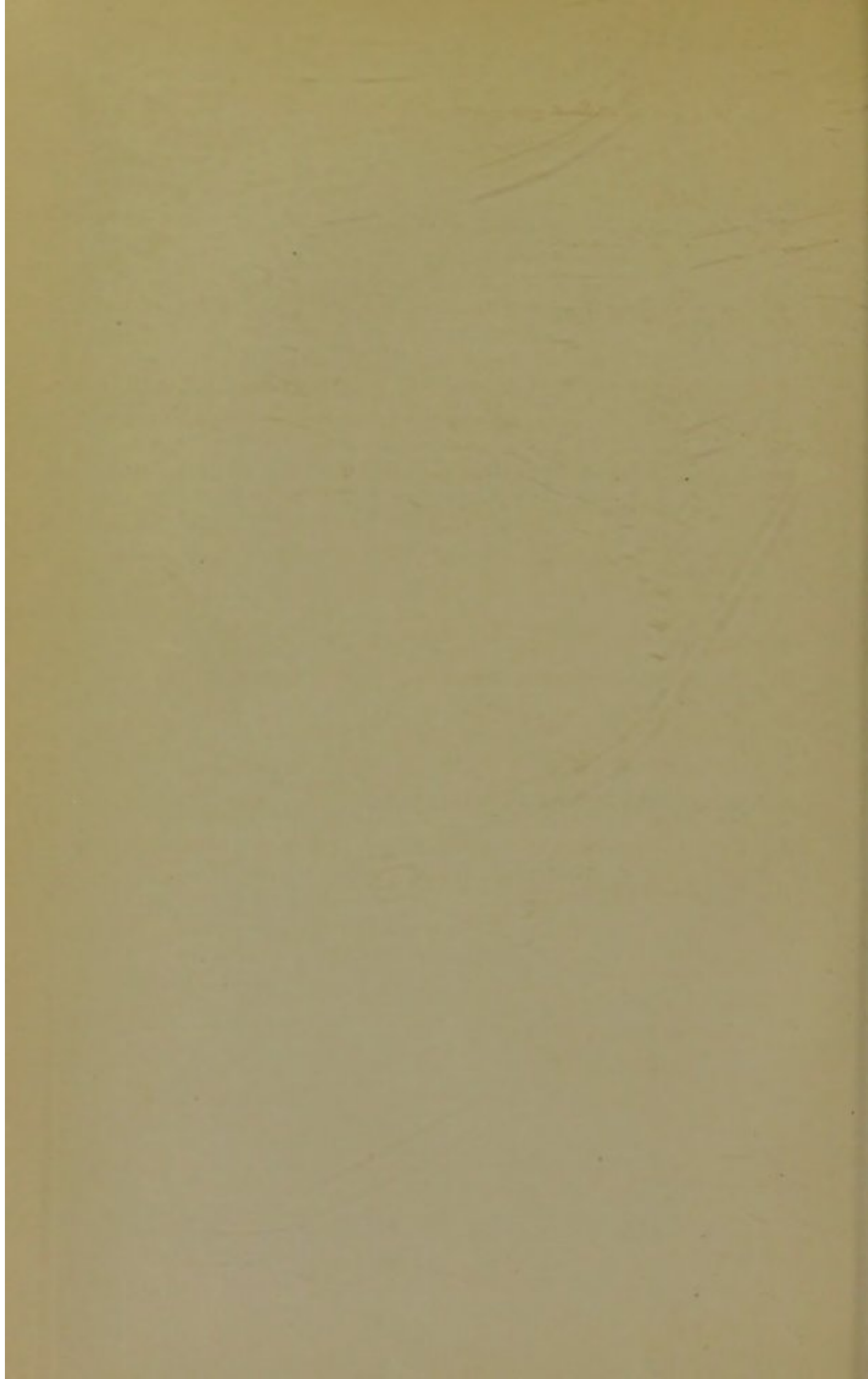
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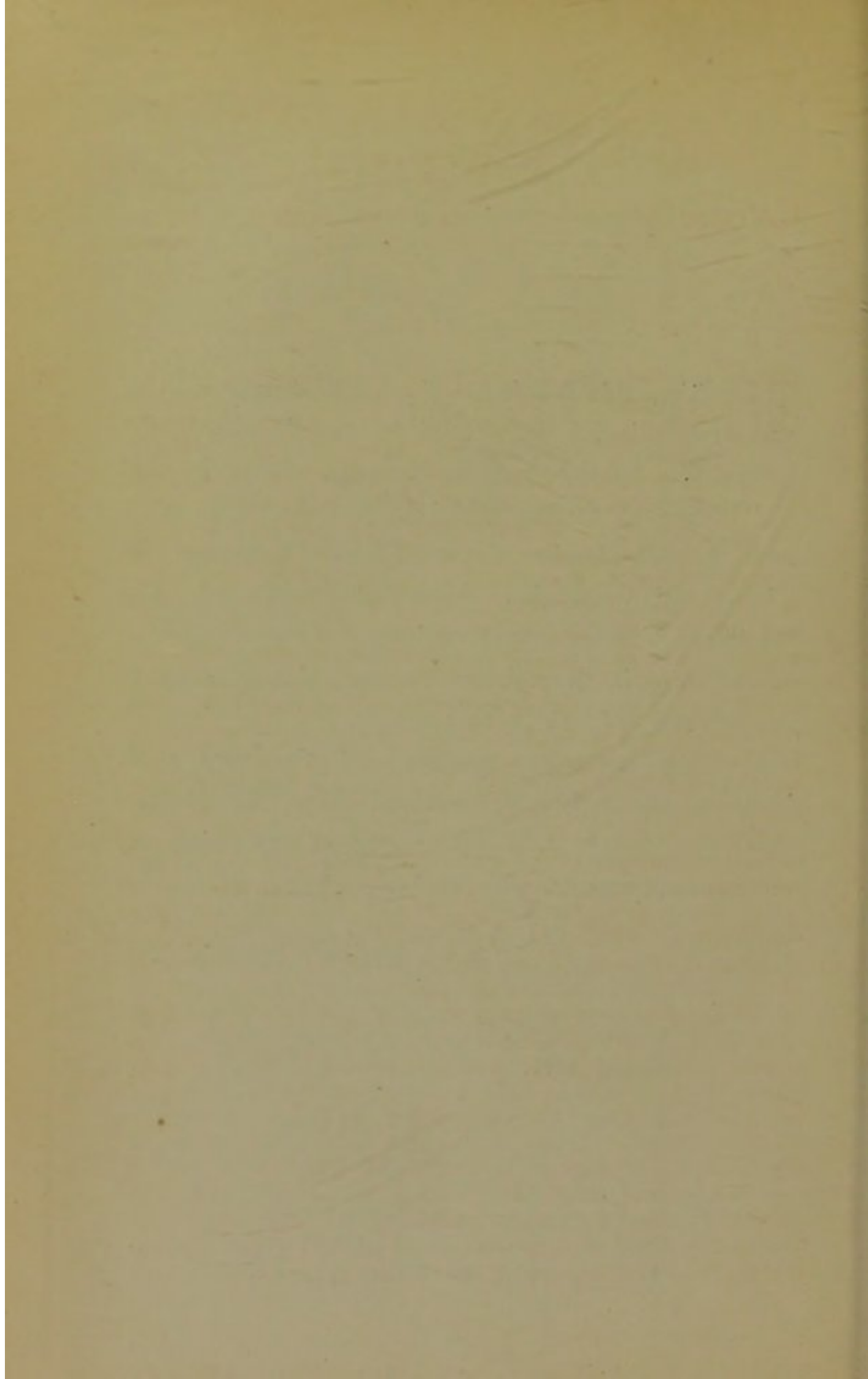
IN writing this article on the curative treatment of Stammering, I have tried to explain clearly the general idea of my methods. I would always be glad and willing to further explain and demonstrate all I teach to any Member of the Medical Profession who might be kind enough to desire fuller particulars. The treatment of other speech defects, and the production of the voice in general, are on lines closely allied to the methods set out in this article.

For the generous support and the very great kindness which I have received from the Medical Profession, I take this opportunity of expressing my most sincere and grateful thanks.

CORTLANDT MACMAHON.

13 WIMPOLE STREET, W.

March, 1911.



STAMMERING.

A METHOD OF CURATIVE TREATMENT THEREOF BASED
ON PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE.

BY

CORTLANDT MACMAHON, B.A. OXON.

IN introducing a treatise on this subject it is well to point out that, in dealing with cases of stammering, he who would benefit and eventually restore to a normal state of speech-power those whose infirmity has been entrusted to him, must be endued with the virtues of enduring patience, power to inspire great confidence and hope and an unconquerable optimism, otherwise he will be at a considerable disadvantage, for, in the treatment of this defect, one must be prepared to encounter many temporary set-backs and disappointments, to overcome which more hope, more determination, more moral courage must be instilled into the sufferer if ultimate success is to crown his efforts. Some cases get well in a surprisingly short space of time, whereas others, where one would look forward to a rapid and even progress towards recovery, are found to be stubborn and discouraging, but both these kinds of cases, affording as they do an instance of the Law of Compensation from the instructor's point of view, tend to bring out clearly the undoubted fact that the cure of stammering is as much moral as it is physical, and therefore requires a dual mode of instruction from both these standpoints. Once get the sufferer to believe steadfastly that the body must be merely the servant of the mind and show him by what means the bodily infirmity is to be brought into subjection thereto, and a decided step towards the ultimate cure will have been made. Of course, the stammerer who is prepared to put up a strong and determined fight is much better equipped for the fray than he who is only capable of a half-hearted effort chiefly displayed in the presence of his instructor, but it is the latter case that brings out the great value of the indispensable strong will-power of the instructor exercising its influence over the weaker mind of his pupil; and at this point I would lay particular stress upon the fact that in dealing with a

stammerer it is absolutely essential that the sufferer should realise fully that a cure is impossible unless he himself puts his whole heart and mind into the various instructions laid down for him, and sees that he carries them out with intelligence and purpose.

I myself do not think that any good purpose is served in trying to differentiate between stammering and stuttering. I consider that as the species is to the genus, so is stuttering to stammering, there is, however, a possible distinction between them, and I will deal with it later. The primary causes of stammering are of course well known, and arise from an infirmity in the motor nervous power. Professor Wyllie has dealt with the causes of stammering exhaustively in his splendid book on speech defects, and the following extract from a Tract in the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons, written in 1850 by one Henry Munro, is, I think, very clear and concise. It is as follows:—"There exists in some individuals an idiosyncrasy amounting probably only to a great irritability or sensibility of fibre in that part of the brain or ganglia, as well as their efferent nerves which control the motions requisite for speech, and this peculiarity exposes it to be most easily deranged and driven into spasmodic action by the ordinary mental desire to speak. If there exists a tendency to local congestion about any of the motor fibres of the brain or spinal ganglia, it would itself cause irritable spasmodic action or paralysis (in proportion to the amount of pressure) of the muscles supplied by them. We cannot directly check such local congestions, yet we can indirectly, through control of the emotions of the mind by an effort of will." In this last sentence lies one of the keys to the whole situation, but although the mind has a great part to play in overcoming the bodily infirmity, we must give the sufferer complete knowledge how to deal with every phase of his infirmity, and show him how and why every sound is produced, and make him familiar with them all, otherwise he will ever be at loss how to get better and be always groping in the dark.

Stammerers can, I consider, be grouped into three broad classes, due allowance being made for individual idiosyncrasies, and to the fact that they are liable to their "good" and "bad" days corresponding with their condition of health and other circumstances.

In Class 1, I would place those whose infirmity is severe and is both laryngeal and articulative. In these cases the lack of co-ordination between the vocal and articulative machinery is very marked.

In Class 2, those whose infirmity is mainly laryngeal. As a rule these cases present the least difficulty.

In Class 3, those whose infirmity is mainly articulative. In this class I place the stutterers. Stuttering is a more or less rapid repetition of consonants, and while it is occurring the larynx is able to do its part, but the articulation seems to be at fault.

In dealing with all three classes one must, as I have already said, enlarge on the mental aspect of the infirmity and impress upon the sufferer what an enormous part his own will-power and control of the emotions have to play in the conquest of his defect, after which comes the physical and practical part of the cure.

When one remembers that Voice is simply air vibrating in the resonating chambers of the body, it immediately becomes apparent that if good results are to occur the breathing apparatus must be got into perfect working order. This of itself is, I need hardly say, a very important subject, and to set out in detail the physiology of it and the many breathing and physical exercises required in it, would enlarge this treatise much beyond desirable proportions; but the result of the exercises is that, in addition to greatly improved health and physique, whole-lung breathing is acquired in which lateral-costal breathing plays a very important part. The reason I impress upon all my pupils the value of lateral-costal breathing as a special part of whole-lung breathing, is that when it is properly acquired one can get a strong and immediate expulsion of the breath on the slightest contraction of the abdominal muscles. The abdominal muscles are trained so that they become extremely powerful, and being always in a condition of complete tonicity are enabled to efficiently perform their function of regulating the expulsion of the air both in force and quantity. I need hardly say that during inspiration the abdominal wall should never be relaxed beyond its natural line, as does occur in the pernicious method of breathing known as "abdominal breathing." It is on the proper control of the abdominal muscles that real tone in voice depends, and unless they act perfectly the resonating chambers have no proper

chance of augmenting the voice to the best effect, and for the stammerer their perfect working is absolutely essential.

I now come to the time when the stammerer, having learnt how to control his breathing apparatus, applies it for voice. In all cases I commence on the singing voice with the "M" sound for getting resonance, especially in the nasal cavities: as soon as this is properly produced the six big Italian vowel sounds are taught, they are "oo, oh, aw, ah, a, and ee." Each has its shape at the lips, its distance between the teeth and its position for the tongue. When these vowel sounds are produced perfectly, a great improvement in voice is noticed, the reason for this being that the voice is being enriched by overtones and harmonics occurring in the vocal resonators. This perfect vowel production requires assiduous practice, but once learnt the various shapes are never forgotten, and the correct vowel position for every main or subordinate vowel or combination of vowels is recognised in any word, and the best possible result is at once attained through the purity of the vowel production.

When the vowels are learnt, the consonants are dealt with. They are, of course, of immense importance, and they can be classified in various ways and assigned to their various stop positions, but for practical purposes, especially in the case of children, they can be divided into two classes—the Voice and the Breath consonants. In a short time it is quite easy to remember which consonants carry the voice and which do not. The position of the tongue must be taught most carefully, and the strength with which it leaves the palate for the linguo-palatals made particular note of, especially in the case of the stutterers.

The next step, of course, is the combination of the vowels and the consonants, and it is at this point that the most unremitting care and attention of the instructor is required, and it is at this point also that one is able to detect if the groundwork has been properly grasped. I mean by the "ground-work" the breathing, the production of the vowel sounds, and the management of the varying qualities of the consonants. Let all this preliminary training be performed on the singing voice, then, when words and sentences can be perfectly produced and phrased for on the singing voice, lift the singing

voice into the speaking voice. In this lies the greatest chance of a complete cure. The sufferer must learn to produce his speaking voice in exactly the same way as that in which he produces his singing voice, except that the volume of air from the lungs is not so great, nor can the vowel sounds be held so long, but the voice can be produced full of music and resonance, and sentences properly phrased for as in song. I am most emphatic in saying that not only stammerers—although for them it is absolutely essential—but *we all should speak on the singing voice*, and I do not mean by this that we must use a silly sing-song voice—I mean that we must acquire a voice full of resonance and music which depend on perfect breath control, perfect vowel production, and perfect articulation.

The various phases of stammerers' infirmities are familiar to most people, but, until one is brought into close contact with them, one often does not fully realise the pathos and seriousness of the infirmity, not only in marring to a great extent the pleasure of existence for the sufferer and of those about him, but there is the great danger of others, especially children, also becoming stammerers by thoughtless imitation and by the force of example, especially where there is a predisposition in the individual to acquire the complaint. In all cases the infirmity should be taken in hand as soon as possible, and should not be neglected for years before a cure is attempted.

One finds beyond doubt that the painful spasms and contortions of the bad stammerer are more often than not brought about by his vain endeavour to get voice with no air in his lungs; he is striving for the impossible, and when, after being nearly asphyxiated, he gets his breath the voice comes with a rush. This of itself proves, if proof were necessary, the enormous value of proper breathing. Instead of trying to speak with collapsed lungs, the sufferer must be taught to fully inflate the lungs whenever he is going to use his voice, and to put a big volume of air through the vocal cords which will set them in strong vibration, and which will very often drive past most of the obstacles raised by nervous action where a feeble expiration would be checked.

The ability to recognise the main vowel sound in words containing subordinate vowels is a matter depending very

largely on the most careful teaching on the part of the instructor, and in this connection I should like to point out the great necessity of skill and practice on his part to detect where the check is. For instance, in a word like "Dorothy" the stammerer may be speechless, and one may think it is the "D" that is stopping him, but possibly he can put all the main vowels behind the "D" without any difficulty. As a matter of fact, it is the lack of knowledge as to what is the main vowel sound and position contained in the subordinate vowel that is preventing speech. In the word "Dorothy," "ah" is the main vowel sound; let the jaw fall to the full "ah" position by its own weight at the moment when the tongue leaves the palate with considerable force for the "D," and the word will come without the slightest trouble. This is only one instance, and of course one could give a great many others. It is most remarkable how quickly the stammerer learns to recognise the main vowel sounds in even difficult words, and the way in which he improves as a result is extremely gratifying.

A good voice is the most refined outcome of perfect physical movement, and therefore the greatest care must be taken to keep the body in a good state of training and fitness to ensure it being strong and fully elastic. The body must be perfectly balanced and the head correctly poised, and there must be a complete absence of constriction everywhere. The lips are made great use of in this method of producing the voice, and the orbicular muscle is carefully trained so that the lips become exceedingly mobile. One impresses upon the stammerer that the voice must, so to speak, be lifted right into the lips, and that the throat muscles must be completely relaxed and also that the abdominal muscles are, in contraction, the motive power of voice.

I hope that in this article, which does not in any way presume to cover all the ground in connection with this distressing complaint, I have been able to indicate a method of curative treatment which holds out a strong hope of complete recovery in even very bad cases. I wish to emphasise the fact that in this method nothing whatever is left to chance. The stammerer has something definite to work upon from the very start, and every phase of his infirmity is dealt with, and the way to overcome his

various difficulties clearly explained and proved to him. He quickly understands what is required of him, and as a result soon appreciates that he is making sure progress towards entirely overcoming his infirmity. Once having done so he can know that, from the nature of the treatment and from his complete knowledge how to deal with any obstacle that may suggest itself, he need have no fear of there being any return of his trouble.

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W.

