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Health at Home Tracts.

BY

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ETC.

MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH SOCIETY.

No. 1.

How to avoid Dying before the Time.

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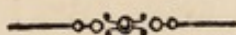
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HEALTH AT HOME.



No. 1.

HOW TO AVOID DYING BEFORE THE TIME.

BY ALFRED T. SCHOFIELD, M.D., M.R.C.S., ETC., MEMBER OF THE
NATIONAL HEALTH SOCIETY.



THERE is a widespread idea that no one ever dies until his time comes. In a certain sense this is true, but unfortunately it is too often used as a cover for our own carelessness in a way which is little short of criminal. Neither the law of God nor the law of England permits a man to put an end to his own life, nevertheless thousands do so indirectly. But let us see what is meant by "our time having come," and what connection it has with our duty to live as long as we can.

A friend of mine was arguing with a farmer one day, as they walked along a country road near Worksop, on the necessity of present trust in Christ for salvation; but to all his arguments the farmer would reply "that if he was intended to be saved, he would be, and that no one could alter the decrees of the Almighty, and that if he was intended to be lost, all the believing in the world could not save him." Seeing he was such a determined fatalist, my friend tried a fresh tack.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“Home to dinner.”

“To dinner! Ah! Do you believe, my friend, God has fixed the day of your death?”

“Of course I do, sir, the very hour.”

“And the day of your funeral?”

“Certainly; and where I shall be buried, too.”

“And no power can alter this?”

“None, sir, except there be a greater than the Almighty.”

“And you are going home to dinner? Do not your meals cost you something?”

“A goodish bit, sir, for I’m a hearty eater as a rule.”

“Why do you eat and spend all that money uselessly?”

“We must eat to live, sir.”

“But listen, my friend; you tell me God has fixed the hour of your death, and that nothing you can do can shorten your life a single hour, there is therefore no need for you to eat at all; and would it not be wiser, instead of wasting all that money, to save it for your children, when you tell me that all your eating cannot add a day to your life?”

The farmer seemed struck.

“You must see the folly of such an argument,” continued my friend; “but in the same way, though God, in His omniscience, may know all your future history, does it not strike you that it is as much folly to refuse the Bread of Life for your soul because of this, as it would be for you to abstain from eating because God knows the day of your death?”

We all acknowledge that God knows everything beforehand, and that it is our duty to nourish our bodies, but it is mere caprice and folly to say that because God is sovereign, therefore we are not responsible.

As a matter of fact, we are; and it is not piety, when through our own sin or carelessness we are brought to death's door, to calmly say it is God's will; it is far better, far truer, to own with humility that it is the result of our own negligence. People are too apt to shift the responsibility of such errors on God, and we desire to expose this error, and to enforce the true doctrine that "as a man soweth, so shall he reap," in matters physical as well as moral and spiritual.

Our appointed years are from three score and ten to four-score, and yet how very many of us never see seventy-five, and very largely through our own fault!

I would therefore earnestly beg the close attention of my readers to a brief practical study of this question; and there can be no doubt but that some may, by carefully considering what is here laid down, avoid dying before their time, that is, before old age has really brought their career to its close.

PREMATURE DEATH.

Most people, as we have seen, die prematurely, but the number of those who do so is gradually decreasing as the knowledge of the means of preserving health and of the laws of health is spreading; and when the community at large vigorously grasps the fact that their lives may positively be lengthened by certain precautions, these will be more generally adopted. It is doubtless extraordinary to consider how much people will give, when they lie on a death-bed, to live another week, and yet how little they will do when in health to prolong their life for years. Let us try and realize that in this country alone, according to an eminent authority, it is calculated that 250,000 people die annually from clearly preventible causes, and 7,000,000 are unnecessarily ill.

Consider for one moment the vast amount of needless sorrow and suffering which these figures represent, to say nothing of the enormous money loss, both to the individual and to the nation, in the withdrawal of such an army from the work of the country. These figures will give some idea of the vast importance of the subject of this tract.

The five leading causes of death in this country are consumption, bronchitis, convulsions, inflammation of the lungs, and scarlet fever, and all of these are largely preventible.

WHAT IS DISEASE?

Before we consider a list of the leading preventible causes of premature death, we will see what these words, "life, death, health, and disease," really mean.

Life and death really always go on together, that is, life of the whole and death of the part. The cells of each individual body are dying daily, and it is calculated that about one twenty-fourth part of them perishes every twenty-four hours, and of material one ton passes through the body every year. In health, however, our bodies are so ceaselessly and perfectly renewed that we imagine they remain the same, and we are really unconscious of the incessant change going on. In health this change is effected unconsciously to ourselves and with perfect ease, and the balance of life is maintained; in disease, on the contrary, decay exceeds repair, and the balance of life inclines to the wrong side, and the processes of life go on with more or less pain and difficulty, until in death all repair ceases, and decay alone remains.

CAUSES OF DEATH.

The limit of human life being from three-score and ten to four-score, one might expect a man, in ordinary

circumstances, to live to the age of 75; but, as we have said, nine-tenths do not. Many of the causes of premature death are wholly or partially preventible, and they operate in varying degrees according to the circumstances of different classes of people. Inherited disease or weakness, unhealthy and improper marriages, unsuitable clothing and food, excessive eating and drinking, immorality, idleness, and accidents, are causes which affect all classes. Against infection, impure air, dirt, and injurious climate, it is in the power of the well-to-do classes to take more effective precautions than their less favourably circumstanced fellows are able to do.

INHERITED DISEASE.

This afflicts all classes, and though the inherited weakness cannot be wholly eradicated, it may very often be prevented from coming to actual disease by reasonable care. Two young ladies came up to town a short time ago with consumptive tendencies. Both were equally warned against extremes of temperature and exposure—the one took great care and is alive and well, the other was heedless and is dead. The operation of this cause then *is* partly preventible. Luigi Conari of Florence had a weak and feeble constitution, which he still further injured by every possible excess till he was forty. At this age he studied the subject of health and disease, with such effect that he reformed his life. At eighty-six he wrote one of the best treatises on health ever penned, and died over a hundred years old. Some readers of this tract may, we hope, be awakened to a sense of their responsibility in this matter, and be led to take the best possible care of the life God has given them. Should any person, however, have reason to think he is likely to be the

subject of hereditary disease, he should avoid all habits that are likely to favour that tendency.

UNHEALTHY MARRIAGES.

This is clearly a universally preventible cause of disease and death. It is evident that consumption, scrofula, and other constitutional diseases are, by carelessness or ignorance in this respect, handed down from generation to generation with disastrous effects. It certainly does seem to be the bounden duty of every one to abstain from marrying any person with a marked hereditary taint. People in this unfortunate condition will be far happier in the long run in leading lives of single blessedness, than in bringing up families of sickly children. The records of the East End of London in this respect are simply awful, and hence the multitudes of diseased children and of early deaths.

Deafness, blindness, deformity, idiocy, not to mention commoner ailments, are often traceable to this cause.

INFECTION.

This is a cause which is preventible, in a greater or less degree, among all classes, the rich having it in their power to protect themselves from it more than the poor. Indeed, were it not for the beneficent action of the Board of Health, the ravages from the diseases due to this cause alone would be fearful. Great care is now taken of the public health; it is in private sanitation we are so dreadfully ignorant and behindhand. Every man and woman ought to have not merely a horror of infection, but a thorough knowledge of how to prevent it. By those who are able to secure protection for themselves, there should

be immediate and complete isolation under medical direction in seasons of danger. In other cases, notice should at once be given to the sanitary officer in order that this regulation may be strictly carried out. Let us all also remember two simple facts. Measles are infectious some days before the rash appears; and, on the other hand, there is danger of infection for a month or more after the patient has recovered from scarlet fever.

In country places, epidemics are still fearfully severe and very common, owing to neglect of the commonest precautions. In one of the worst epidemics of scarlet fever I ever saw, abounding with fatal cases, the common practice, in spite of all warnings, was to have a tea-party for the recovering child, to which all its juvenile acquaintances were invited, just when the danger from infection was greatest! I have broken up one or two of these festive gatherings with scant ceremony myself.

Where a case of infectious disease has occurred, the room should be disinfected by some competent person.

IMPROPER FOOD AND OVER OR UNDER FEEDING.

It is a well ascertained fact that most people who can afford it, eat too much. This is the clearly preventible cause of gout, dyspepsia, apoplexy, and many other maladies. Wholesome food can always be obtained by those who have the means of purchasing it, but people whose means are very limited or quite insufficient, cannot always choose their food. They have just to eat what they can get. Many of the City work-girls, for instance, dine off a halfpenny worth of cheese and of pickles. Again, disease and death frequently result from an insufficient supply of food. The health is

weakened and undermined through prolonged under feeding, and at last the sufferers fall an easy prey to any complaint.

Improper food is a terribly fatal but largely preventible cause of death, especially amongst babies. It is calculated that about three-fourths of the deaths among infants are due to this one cause. Two sorts of improper food are given to babies—the one, wholesome enough in itself, but unsuited to any child under six months old, such as biscuits, bread, most babies' foods, corn-flour, and, indeed, flour in any shape or form, meat or solids of any kind; the other sort consists of absolutely indigestible food, such as cheese, shell-fish of all kinds, and spirits, especially gin. It cannot be too often repeated that no child under six months old should have any other food but milk, save by direct medical advice.

Many foods are unwholesome and liable to decomposition, such as dried fish and shell fish in the summer. Food is often eaten too rapidly, or at irregular intervals. In short, nothing pays better for oneself and family, from a health point of view, than careful attention to a regular, wholesome, and sufficient dietary.

Special attention should be given to cooking thoroughly all kinds of food, so that if it should turn out to be unwholesome, the risk of eating it may be lessened.

IMPROPER DRINK.

The use of improper drink, and the excessive use of intoxicating drinks, are clearly preventible causes of death. The evils resulting from drunkenness among the masses of the people are more far-reaching in their effects than those from any other cause of disease and death. Besides it is a peculiarly expensive cause of

death, for money is spent on drink which is sorely wanted for food and clothing.

What can we say about this awful subject? It seems vain to repeat that one-tenth of all deaths arise from it, that 120,000 die annually from this cause in one way or another, that its direct victims number one thousand a week, that it produces a very large percentage of paupers and of hospital patients. When will working men awake to see the terrible injury they are doing to themselves and children, and at such an appalling cost?

Disease results also from carelessness in the use of other drinks, even of milk and of water. Cholera and typhoid fever are especially often traceable to this cause. All town water should, if possible, be filtered, and most country water boiled as well; milk also is safer when boiled.

Tea is not so injurious as some suppose it to be, if it be taken in moderate quantities and be freshly made.

House cisterns and filters should be carefully cleaned periodically, or water, otherwise wholesome, becomes tainted in passing through them.

IMPURE AIR.

Though the victims of impure air are few compared with the victims of intoxicating drink, the number in the aggregate is by no means small. It is in the overcrowded parts of large towns and cities where the people are most exposed to the evil effects of impure air. Think of the 150,000 poor work-girls of London alone? Consider those engaged in small laundries—working in the dog-days in a broiling atmosphere of heat and steam, every window tightly closed lest a speck of dirt should soil the shirts or collars. Consider their life,

and you will not be surprised at the ravages of lung disease amongst them. Look at the women and children in the ill-ventilated sweaters' dens in the East End of London. Can we be surprised at their languor and pallor, or ask in wonder, what is the cause? The lot of many of the poor is indeed a cruel one, and it is only adding to their sufferings, not relieving them, to blame them for causes of disease over which they have no control.

But the evil is in part preventible even amid a population of this sort. Thank God, all are not so treated. We have an increasing number of well ventilated workshops. The Government is not asleep on the subject, and we may hope that the happy time will soon come when these dens of disease will be abolished, and the sufferings of the poor from this cause lessened. Meanwhile let all who can secure their due share of pure air, by opening their windows at all suitable times, by getting thorough ventilation wherever possible, and by breathing the air in any open space at every convenient season.

DIRT.

What is dirt? Matter in the wrong place. It is a question whether we eat or breathe in most dirt. In either case it is distinctly unwholesome. It is a preventible cause of disease, for even the poorest can, as a rule, wash themselves, if not with soap, which is an expensive luxury to some, at any rate with water; and they need not swallow half so much dirt as they do. They have less control over the dirt or dust they breathe in, for this is in the air of their workshops and factories; and no one can help swallowing the germs and decomposing animal matter of close rooms as long as he is forced to remain in them.

A clean skin is a panoply against many diseases, and is of as much importance as a clean shirt, though such is not the general opinion. Clean hands are of great importance, at meal times at any rate, and to eat with unwashed hands is often a deadly peril. It is found in the painting and some other trades that the lead which poisons the men is not breathed but eaten, so many persisting in taking their meals with paint-stained hands. Dirt includes the subject of drains and dust-bins and other nuisances. Though there is considerable excuse for lodgers in these matters, yet even they could call in the sanitary inspector a great deal more than they do; and rooms however small can be kept scrupulously clean even by the poorest.

CLIMATE AND LOCALITY.

By this first expression we mean extremes of heat and cold, of dryness and damp, of exposure to east winds and other vicissitudes. Some have the power of choosing and changing the climate they live in according to the season of the year: the greater number, on the contrary, must be content to live all the year round in our changeable and, to many persons, trying climate. Out of the five most fatal diseases, three are chest affections. Carelessness, in many cases, is the reason why people suffer from these. But in other and by far the greater number of cases, people are exposed to all weathers, and have to encounter sudden extreme vicissitudes of heat and cold, which are perhaps even more trying as there is no way of getting hardened to them.

The delicate girl who is failing under the early beginnings of consumption might in many cases be rescued could she be sent to a suitable climate, but amongst the

poor this is impossible for want of means; besides she may have to support her invalid mother and younger brothers and sisters, and hence must sit uncomplainingly fourteen hours a day over the sewing machine, or stand nearly as long over the ironing table, till she is carried off to the hospital at last, when it is too late to save her. The evil effects of climate or locality may often be obviated by due attention to hints given in this tract.

I do not think anywhere the value of money is more clearly shown than in its power to purchase in many cases the means of prolonging life and health; and yet how often is it abused by those who possess it. Hence we not infrequently find one surrounded with every luxury, ill in bed from her own folly, while the factory girl, in spite of all her difficulties, succeeds in her hard fight against disease.

By locality we specially mean town or country. Towns are increasing in size, and the country is getting less populous, in spite of its value for health, on account of the greater facilities for work in towns. The country is still, however, the great sanatorium for the poor and overworked, and those who can vary the town life with intervals of country or seaside, are warding off many diseases and spending their money to the best advantage.

UNHEALTHY WORK AND OVERWORK.

These fertile causes of "ill-health" are only partly preventible by those who are forced to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows.

Overwork is more common among workers with the brain than among manual workers, artisans and labourers. Innumerable nervous diseases are due to

mental over-exertion. They are not confined, however, to those who are obliged to work in order to obtain a living, but are found also among the much smaller class who voluntarily devote themselves to the service of their sovereign and country in work that taxes to the utmost the energies of the strongest. For personal ambition and a sense of duty lead many whose means and position raise them far above any material necessity to spend themselves and to be spent in public life. These, however, have nobler objects in view than even the preservation of their own health. They act with their eyes open, and they do not lose their reward.

Many occupations are necessarily specially fraught with disease and death. As long as we require bright cutlery, dangerous chemicals, phosphorus matches, and other unhealthy productions, so long some people must suffer in providing them; but none need enter these trades against their will. Those who do should be careful to use the apparatus provided in many workshops for safeguarding the health of the workmen.

The influence of occupation on health is well shown in this table. Taking the general mortality of men in the United Kingdom as 18 per 1000 per annum, we find the following rates of death comparatively in the different callings:—

Ministers of religion.	. . . . .	9 to 10 per 1000
Farmers . . . . .	. . . . .	12 „
Shoemakers . . . . .	. . . . .	15 „
Grocers . . . . .	. . . . .	16 „
Carpenters . . . . .	. . . . .	17 „
Miners . . . . .	. . . . .	20 „
Bakers . . . . .	. . . . .	21 „
Butchers. . . . .	. . . . .	23 „
Brewers . . . . .	. . . . .	24 „
Cabmen . . . . .	. . . . .	28 „
Public-house servants	. . . . .	32 „
GENERAL MORTALITY	. . . . .	18 „

IDLENESS.

This fertile source of disease and death, in whatever class it is found, is, it is needless to say, wholly preventible.

It is the common cause of hysteria and its allied affections in both sexes, and it frequently is associated with errors of diet and other things. It only needs pointing out, the remedy is obvious.

IMPROPER CLOTHING.

This cause is only partly preventible amongst those whose circumstances do not enable them to dress as they would ; nevertheless many might dress more wisely than they do. The subject is also a most important one, for improper clothing is a common cause of disease and death. All we can do here, however, is to say what clothes ought to do, and what they ought not to do, and leave the application to our reader's common-sense. Clothes then ought to cover us, and to keep all parts of the body at an even temperature. Clothes ought not to compress any part of the body ; they ought not to oppress any part of the body ; they ought not to depress any part of the body.

In addition we may add they should be porous, should vary with the temperature and weather, should be suitable to one's work, should be clean ; and in all cases possible, flannel should be worn next the skin.

IMMORALITY.

This is a frequent and wholly preventible cause of disease and death amongst all classes. The remedy is self-evident. The moral law is as essential for the welfare of the body as well as of the soul.

ACCIDENTS.

Many accidents are wholly beyond our control ; these are in the class of non-preventible causes. All we consider here are those that could be avoided.

Much may be done by a little more common prudence amongst all classes. Care on the railways, in streets, in public resorts, on the water, on mountains and elsewhere, would often save from an untimely death or from lifelong suffering.

The little graveyard at Zermatt, at the foot of the Matterhorn in Switzerland, is an eloquent protest against exposure to unnecessary accident. There lie side by side the victims of unwise and useless daring, who have died before their time. These remarks are not intended to discourage the attempts often made by brave men to save the lives of others or rescue them from injury in circumstances of danger.

We trust enough has been said in this brief summary to point out how largely our life and health are placed in our own hands, and are under our own control. There is undoubtedly a large number of diseases and accidents which no human skill or foresight can prevent. These we can only submit to ; but it is the bounden duty of every man, and more especially of every Christian man, to take care of the precious gifts of life and health which God has entrusted to his keeping. Let none, however, think, on account of the needful prominence here given to health, that it is therefore the aim and end of life. After all it is the character, not the length of the life, that is the point ; the quality, not the quantity ; and it is for each one of us to see that he does not miss the purpose of his life, but that he seeks to fill his place in the world to the glory and praise of God. The task is impossible

save with Divine strength, but this our Heavenly Father freely bestows on all who are truly His children, and His true children we may all become by faith in Christ Jesus. Let us then put everything in its right order. Eternal life for our souls first, through faith in the finished work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and a steady purpose, by the help of the Holy Spirit, of living to God's glory, by victory over sin and active service in some way for Him; and then by that which has occupied us in this tract, a right and conscientious care over our health and strength, that we may not incur the guilt of cutting short our lives or throwing away our health by any folly or carelessness of our own. When sickness or death is really God's act and will, we can only bow our heads and say, "It is well!"

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