



CHAPTER 21: Sickness

My DEAR COMRADES,

I have, I think, already said something in the course of these Letters, as to the value of health, and the importance of using all reasonable means for its maintenance. I do hope that my counsels, bearing on this subject, will receive your consideration, for we must all agree that "prevention is better than cure."

But after every effort has been made, that can be made, for the preservation of this inestimable boon, Sickness, unwelcome as it is, will break into the best regulated families; and when the family is a large one, it will seldom be absent for a very long time together. Perhaps, therefore, few topics have more to do with the peace, comfort, and well-being of a household than the best means of dealing with Sickness when it does appear. What can I say? Well, to begin:

1. Do not give way to unnecessary fear on the first approach of Sickness. Nothing will be likely, more effectually to hinder your purpose of helping the suffering, than panic or anything bordering upon it. Do not unduly magnify the matter, either to yourself or those around you; and especially would I say, "Do not alarm the sufferer with long faces or hasty words about the seriousness of the malady."

The symptoms by which different diseases manifest themselves very strongly resemble each other, When our vessel reached Freemantle, on my last visit to Australia, it was found that we had a Singhalese man servant on board, who showed symptoms of Chicken-pox, which symptoms are very much like those developed in the earlier, stages of, Small-pox. The ship's Doctor examined the man and said that he had Chicken-pox, but the Officer of Health, who came on board on our arrival, said, No, it was, he feared, something more serious than that – it was Small-pox. And as the Harbour Authorities objected to the risk of anyone landing, infected with that disease, they sent fifty-two of the passengers, myself amongst the number, to afford themselves the opportunity of ascertaining whether we had the disease as well. After waiting two or three days, the sufferer's disease developed and the ship's Doctor



turned out to be right, and the Officer of Health wrong. It was not Small-pox, but Chicken-pox, and after encountering more inconvenience than I can here describe, we were all set at liberty.

Now, try to avoid such alarms, not only to the sufferer but to yourselves. When symptoms can be interpreted in the direction of several maladies, you should hope for the least serious of the number. When a hot skin, and a painful head and back, combined with general exhaustion, indicate either a bad feverish cold, or the beginning of Influenza, or the first stage of some contagious Fever, do not jump at once to the conclusion that the patient is suffering from the most dangerous disease of the three; but, while taking proper care of the invalid, hope that it is nothing worse than the least serious. In following this somewhat sanguine method, you can always encourage yourself with the experience of the man who said that seven-eighths of the things from which he had suffered the most during his lifetime had never happened! If this is applicable to anything in human history, I am sure it is true of anticipations of disease in a family.

Loving hearts are ever ready to fear the worst in such circumstances. They cannot help it. Oh, how often, with my own dear children, have I, at such hours, been able to calm gloomy forebodings, and quiet anxious hearts, by hoping for the best; and, oh, how many, many times my sanguine predictions have proved correct! "If hopes are false, fears oftener lie."

But, is it not the safest always to fear the worst and to take precautions accordingly? No, I cannot say that it is. Hoping for the best does not prevent such precautions being taken. Indeed, they should be taken.

But is there not such a thing as losing time? Doubtless, there is; and therefore, everyone responsible for the health of others, should be familiar with those symptoms which usually indicate the approach of serious illness, such as high temperature, a very rapid or very slow pulse, continued vomiting, delirium, persistent sore throat, continued sleeplessness, pain that cannot be accounted for, and so on. In elderly people, sudden chills should always be treated seriously.



2. When such signs are present, there are grounds for apprehending that the Sickness is serious, and an intelligent and reliable opinion should at once be obtained as to the nature of the malady. In this respect, a Doctor can help you; but having obtained his opinion, you should still use your own judgment and carefully watch the progress of the complaint.

3. Beware of physic, whether supplied by a regular practitioner, or from that numerous company of quacks who profess to cure almost everything with the same remedy. My own preferences, in Sickness and ill health, are for what is known as the system of Hydropathy, or the Water-cure. I have frequently seen in my own family, what might almost be styled miraculous cures wrought by this system, and strongly advise my readers to be at some trouble to make themselves acquainted with it. Some simple suggestions upon this subject will be found at the end of this volume.

4. I also recommend to the consideration of my Comrades everywhere, what I have said already in these Letters on eating, drinking, and the like. They have much to do with delicate health, and illness of all kinds. Let people exercise common sense on these questions, and test the counsels I have given them by personal application. When I get out of condition myself, my plan is usually to fall back upon a little extra fasting, sleeping, and bathing. I find the Lamp Bath, as I have recommended it to you, to be a useful remedy in cases of chill, over-fatigue, and sleeplessness.

But as my maladies will, no doubt, differ from those of others, the remedies must be different also. Judge for yourselves.

5. After all that has been said and done, however, most people will rely very much on the regular Doctor. They are at his mercy, whether he belongs to the old – the Alopah – the new – the Homeopath – or any other school. When I was ill in South Australia, I felt so confused with the conflicting theories of the Medical Faculty, and so uncertain as to the possibility of finding anyone whose opinions would be at all likely to accord with my own, that I simply said, "Find me, a capable, conscientious, and, if possible, a God-fearing man, and let us see what he can do." They found me a Doctor whom I believe answered to that description. As to the system he followed, I am glad that I have not to pronounce an opinion upon it! I got well – that was what I wanted to do –



and that quicker than anyone expected. He paid me every possible attention by night and by day, and would not receive any fee either for his medicine or trouble. God bless him!

6. I need not impress upon Salvationists the duty of dealing faithfully with the souls of those by whose sick-bed they watch. If there is any uncertainty about the safety of the sufferers for Eternity, push them up to that repentance and faith in Christ which will secure them admission into the City of Light if they die; and will make them useful warriors of the Cross if they recover.