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978-1-108-06231-2 - The Influence of Climate in the Prevention and Cure of Chronic Diseases

James Clark

Excerpt

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**INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE**

ON

**CHRONIC DISEASES,**

*&c. &c.*

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Plurimi morbi, nullis aliis remediis domandi, tempestate vel cœlo mutato sponte evanescunt, aut levantur : Et omnes medici, tam veteres quam recentiores, in hoc consentiunt, cœli mutationem multum esse auxilii in variis morbis, vix aliter medendis.—GREGORY.

## PART THE FIRST.

### ON CLIMATE.

#### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

ALTHOUGH the power of different climates to produce as well as to alleviate and cure diseases, is well established as a matter of fact, yet, perhaps, there is nothing in general science more unsatisfactory than the manner in which we are able to explain this influence; and certainly there is nothing in physic more difficult than to direct successfully its application. Much of this arises from the natural difficulties of the subject, but much also from our neglect of careful observation. And yet when it is recollected that the problem of physical climate still remains unsolved by natural

philosophers, it need not be matter of surprize that the physician should find it no easy matter, nay almost impossible, to give a satisfactory explanation, when the subject becomes complicated by the addition of such elements as organic life, health and disease, with all the intricacy and complexity of their combinations. “When we study the organic life of plants and animals,” says Humboldt, “we must examine all the stimuli or external agents which modify their vital actions. The ratios of the mean temperatures of the months are not sufficient to characterize the climate. Its influence combines the simultaneous action of all physical causes; and it depends on heat, humidity, light, the electrical tension of vapours, and the variable pressure of the atmosphere. In making known the empirical laws of the distribution of heat over the globe, as deducible from the thermometrical variations of the air, we are far from considering these laws as the only ones necessary to resolve all the problems of climate. Most of the phenomena of nature present two distinct points, one which may be subjected to exact calculation, and another which cannot be reached but through the medium of induction and analogy.”\* No one can be more sensible of the truth of these remarks than myself; and, indeed, I have cited them to show, that,

\* On Isothermal lines.

although the utmost diligence has been used to determine the physical characters of the different climates, more especially as regards temperature, (unquestionably the principal element of climate,) such is the imperfect state of our knowledge on this subject, that in this, as well as in my endeavours to trace the relations between different climates and the human body in health and disease, I have been obliged to content myself, in a great measure, with simply detailing the unexplained results of experience. It will be my endeavour, however, in the following pages to state, as far as the data with which I have been able to furnish myself enable me—first, the physical characters of the different climates; secondly, the experience of the effects of these; and finally, the characteristic, or, if I may so express myself, the medicinal qualities of each particular climate, as deduced from the combined results of the two preceding sources of information.

The influence of climate in the prevention and cure of diseases is, for many reasons, a subject of peculiar interest to the inhabitants of this country. To the inclemency of our seasons we are justified in attributing some of our most fatal diseases; and many others, of great frequency, if they do not derive their origin immediately from our climate, are at least greatly aggravated by it. Among this number may be ranked pulmonary consumption, and some other fatal diseases of the

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## GENERAL INFLUENCE

chest ; scrofulous affections ; rheumatism ; disorders of the digestive organs ; hypochondriasis, and a numerous train of nervous disorders, &c. For the prevention of some, and the cure of others of these diseases, a temporary residence in a milder climate is the best, often the only effectual remedy we possess.

Change of climate and change of air have been considered by physicians as remedial agents of great efficacy from a very early period ; and the correctness of the opinion is supported both by reason and experience. It is reasonable, for example, to believe, that a change of residence from a crowded city to the country, or from a cold exposed part of the country to a warmer and more sheltered one, or from a confined, humid valley, to a dry elevated situation, or the reverse, would produce very sensible effects on the living body ; and we find by daily experience that such is the case. The marked improvement of the general health, effected by a change from a great city to the country, even for a short period, is matter of daily remark ; and the suspension, or even cure, of various diseases by a removal from one part of the country to another, is an occurrence that must have come within the observation of every one. It may suffice to mention here, in reference to this fact, intermittent fevers, asthma, catarrhal affections, hooping cough, dyspepsia, hypochondriasis, and certain nervous disorders.

All these diseases are frequently suspended, and often entirely cured, by simple change of situation, after they had long resisted medical treatment; or they are found to yield, under the influence of such a change, to remedies that previously made little or no impression upon them.

If such marked results are produced by a change of so limited an extent as has just been noticed, it is surely reasonable to expect that a complete change of climate, together with the circumstances necessarily connected with this, should produce still more important results in ameliorating the general health, and in preventing and curing diseases: and in this expectation we are again borne out by experience.

Unfortunately, however, for the character of this remedy, it has too often been resorted to either as a last resource, or forlorn hope, in cases which were almost hopeless; or it has been misapplied in cases wherein it might have been of essential service. Patients, who really might have derived much benefit from climate, have been too often sent abroad without proper directions respecting the situation most suited to their complaints, and altogether uninstructed respecting various circumstances, a due attention to which could alone render the best selected climate beneficial to them.

Under such circumstances, it need not excite

our surprise, that success has not more generally attended the practice of sending invalids abroad ; nor even, that the result should have been such as to bring the remedy into discredit. The fault, however, is to be sought for, not in the remedy, but in the manner in which it has been prescribed. My own experience, the result of extensive observation, satisfies me, that, for the prevention and cure of a numerous class of chronic diseases, we possess in change of climate, and even in the more limited measure of change of air in the same climate, one of our most powerful remedial agents ; and one, too, for which, in many cases, we have no adequate substitute.

On the continent, the beneficial effects of change of air are duly estimated ; and the inhabitants of this country, and more especially of this metropolis, are now becoming fully sensible of its value. The vast increase in the size of our watering places, of late years, and the deserted state of London during several months, are sufficient proofs, not to mention others, of the increasing conviction among the public in general, that, for the preservation of health, it is necessary, from time to time, to change the relaxing, I may say deteriorating air of London, for the more pure and invigorating air of the country. This, indeed, is the best, if not the only remedy, for that terrible malady which preys upon the vitals,



and stamps its hues upon the countenance of almost every permanent resident in this great city, and which may be justly termed the *Cachexia Londinensis*. When the extent of benefits which may be derived from this remedy, both on the physical and moral constitution, is duly estimated, no person whose circumstances permit him to avail himself of it, will fail to do so.

But even in cases of this kind, the remedy, simple as it appears, must not be applied indiscriminately and without consideration. In that numerous class of persons, indeed, who are merely suffering from a residence in the city, without any decided disease, the simple change to the country may be all that is requisite to restore their health, and it is of less consequence to what part of the country they go. But the case is very different with the real invalid, whose sufferings are chiefly referable to some particular disease. To him, the selection of his temporary residence is not a matter of indifference. For one individual of this kind, an elevated situation and a dry bracing air, will be most proper; a sheltered residence, with a milder air, will be suitable to another; while the sea-side may be the situation indicated for a third. In like manner is it with the more important measure of change of climate. In the case of the valetudinarian, in whom the feelings and functions of health are merely dete-

riorated by too close application to business, &c., and to whom relaxation of mind is as requisite as change of climate, we may permit the patient to choose the situation which is most agreeable to himself. But the great difference which exists in the physical characters of the climates of the places frequented by invalids in the South of Europe, and even in the southern parts of our own island, renders the selection of a winter residence for the invalid suffering under actual disease, a matter of vital importance.

This is a subject which has, unfortunately, been little attended to ; and the neglect of it has, I believe, arisen, in a great measure, from the opinion which has generally prevailed in this country, that climate is chiefly useful in consumptive diseases. Such an opinion could only have originated in a very limited acquaintance with the influence of climate on disease ; and, indeed, it is so far from being a correct view of the matter, that, were the character of this remedy to be estimated by its effects on consumption, when fully formed, it would be justly valued at a very low rate. In dyspepsia, and disorders of the digestive organs generally, and in the nervous affections and distressing mental feelings which so often accompany these ; in hypochondriasis, in asthma, in bronchial diseases, in scrofula, and in rheumatism, the beneficial effects of climate are often far more strongly