

**LECTURES ON THE PRINCIPLES  
AND PRACTICE OF MEDICINE:  
ON SLIGHT AILMENTS; THEIR  
NATURE AND TREATMENT**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649662982

Lectures on the Principles and Practice of Medicine: On Slight Ailments; Their Nature and Treatment by Lionel S. Beale

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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LONDON: J. & A. CHURCHILL.  
PHILADELPHIA: PRESLEY BLAKISTON.

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## PREFACE.

THE few lectures forming this volume were delivered in the early part of my course on Medicine in the autumn of the year 1878.

The shorthand notes, taken by Mr. S. Knox, have been rearranged and carefully revised, and much new matter has since been added. Though preserving the somewhat familiar style permissible in elementary lectures to students, I have thought it better to give up the division into distinct lectures, hoping that in this less pretentious and more compact form, the work would be found more useful to young practitioners and their pupils.

L. S. B.

61, Grosvenor Street,  
June 20th, 1880.

ON  
SLIGHT AILMENTS,  
THEIR NATURE  
AND  
TREATMENT.

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EACH one of us has, no doubt, suffered from time to time from slight derangements of the health—derangements not dependent upon or likely to determine structural change in any tissue or organ in the body—but due to temporary disturbance—to an alteration in the functional activity of tissues and organs, which may be soon succeeded by a return to the healthy state. In many instances probably the derangement depends only upon the altered rate at which normal phenomena are performed. Perhaps, in consequence of changes in the blood itself or in the tissues outside, the blood flows too slowly or too quickly through the capillaries, occasioning disturbed action in the adjacent nerve-fibres, and in this way causing the pain or discomfort we experience.

Among civilised nations a perfectly healthy individual seems to be the exception rather than the rule. In the course of my life I have not met with more than two or three exceptionally fortunate persons, who could assure me they had never suffered from any derangement of the health. Such instances are certainly most uncommon, for almost every person one sees has experienced very frequent departures of one kind or another from the healthy condition, and expects to experience such as long as he lives.

A little too much food, or food of a bad kind, or badly cooked, or food eaten at the wrong time, or too quickly—a glass of bad wine, bad milk, or bad water, to say nothing of a dry east wind, or a cold damp atmosphere, has occasioned such disturbance in the normal changes in the body, as to cause even the strongest and exceptionally healthy among us to feel for a time far from well. Every generation has thus

suffered, and we have not yet discovered exactly how a healthy person should proceed, so as to keep every organ and every tissue in his body in a perfectly healthy state under the necessarily varying conditions to which it is exposed, so that each may continue to act for the longest possible time, until all gradually fail together in old age, and at last action ceases in natural and inevitable death.

As it is our particular work in life to reduce disease and suffering to the utmost extent that is possible, it is our duty to carefully study and investigate, as far as we are able to do so, the nature of such slight aches, pains, discomforts, and derangements from which nearly all suffer, and which not a few people magnify; although on the other hand, some are inclined to under-estimate their importance, or to ignore altogether aches, pains, and disturbances, the early recognition of which might be of great advantage, enabling us to interfere at the right time, and, it may be, prevent serious illness or even to save that particular life.

You will certainly be very frequently called upon to prescribe for slight ailments, and you will often be asked how this and that bodily derangement or discomfort may be avoided, upon what it depends, and whether it is not indicative of some change more serious than mere temporary disturbance of ordinary action. You will be expected to fully explain how many a slight ache or pain is caused, and you will often be asked to lay down rules of health, by the practice of which it may be avoided in the future. Very disappointed will the sufferer feel if you make light of his suffering, and dismiss him with the suggestion that being only functional derangement it is of no consequence. A little study and intelligent observation among sick people will teach you not to be too off-hand in giving advice, and will suffice to impress upon you the fact, that very grave symptoms and the most excruciating pain may result from temporary derangements of no real consequence, and that, on the other hand, the most terrible morbid changes in important organs may exist for years, and run their course without the patient being cognizant of any unusual symptoms, or conscious that anything in his organism had been going wrong.

It, therefore, follows, and this will be strongly impressed upon you when you come to work carefully at the important subject of diagnosis, the detection of disease, that many of the apparently slight disturbances or ailments may be due to some grave pathological change, which would be entirely passed over by one who had had little experience in medical observation, but would be full of significance to the well informed practitioner, and that apparently serious illness may be due to temporary and functional derangement only. Do not, therefore, be too hasty in giving an opinion concerning the import of uncertain and indefinite symptoms. We should remember that the most perfect machines some-