

THE LAST ILLNESS OF LORD BEACONSFIELD

by Dr JOSEPH KIDD.

When I commenced by attendance on Lord Beaconsfield in November 1878, he was in a sad condition of health, suffering from Bright's disease, bronchitis and asthma; at night his sleep much disturbed by cough, wheezing and breathlessness; suffering much all day from nausea ' the result of ipecacuanha taken at night for the asthma ' and from headache and gouty dyspepsia increased by the use of steel and port wine ordered for him because of his 'debility'. With a grim smile he often alluded to such a remedy for debility, and the pitiable results. The disturbed nights had also brought on depression of spirits, loss of appetite and unfitness for brain work. For the ipecacuanha and steel, *iodide of potassium* was substituted and subsequently a mild course of *arsenic* which cleared his bronchial tubes without any subsequent nausea. In place of the port wine the finest Chateau Lafite was given. Indigestion disappeared as a strict regimen was laid down and followed. The dinner became a light repast of one course, without pastry, pudding or fruit. He soon began to have a most hearty appetite for breakfast and lunch. He slept well at night without asthma, as he took less and less food at dinner.



Lord Beaconsfield
(Benjamin Disraeli)

The albuminuria (Bright's disease of the kidney) was wasting his strength and was much aggravated by the dry state of the skin. Regarding it as the most important indication for treatment, I advised the regular use of a lamp bath at bedtime for fifteen minutes, and to sleep in a nightdress and sheets of soft Saxony flannel. At first he rebelled at this. 'You say you want me to perspire. I never did since I was born. I have had a dry skin all my life. It is useless for you to try.' But he obeyed as I explained its importance for the relief of the kidneys and he allowed his faithful servant, Mr Baum, to administer the lamp bath regularly on alternate nights. I visited him three times a week, in the morning soon after nine for many months. As I felt his skin at each visit he would say quietly: 'No use, give up the trial. you will never bring me to perspire.' My answer was a quiet 'Yes: by perseverance I will succeed, and to your great relief when I do.' he was a very sharp observer of doctors, by many of whom he had been treated. To conquer in everything was his passion, yet he had no faith in any doctor who was easily moved from his won ground or could be driven to yield. About three months after this treatment was commenced at one of my morning visits, while I was feeling his skin carefully, he looked up with a most genial smile. 'you have conquered,' he said; 'I perspired freely last night.' Gradually his skin became soft like a child's and a gentle moisture all night added to the comfort of his life; the morning depression vanished and the albuminuria lessened, his old freshness and vigour returned. During the next few months the relief afforded was very helpful, the depression and weariness passed off, he was able to enjoy his work and take open air exercise. The improvement lasted all through 1879, with the exception of a feverish chill in November, which confined him to the house for a week. He recovered well from this, seldom suffered from asthma, although obliged to keep very strictly to his diet regimen, as the least infraction gave him bad nights.

The greatest difficulty was to get the patient to take exercise. 'My grandfather,' he said to me, 'lived to ninety years; he took much open air exercise. My father lived to eighty, yet he never took any.' Lord Beaconsfield tried to steer a middle course, but the utmost he could be persuaded to take was a short walk two or three times a week if Lord Rowton or some other pleasant friend called to accompany him, otherwise he easily found an excuse for not going out. His slow pace in walking prevented him from getting much benefit from it. [56] Riding he had given up, although in his early days passionately devoted to it. For many years his life had been a sedentary one; presuming on his hardy constitution, and the fact of his father's great age without open air exercise, he considered it a matter optional in his case. He had the excuse of urgent occupation in his political and ordinary life to hinder it. yet Nature has a 'Nemesis' power of revenging herself on the man of sedentary life. In the end the liver suffers. In one of his letters to his sister he says: 'I have recovered from the horrors of a torpid liver which has overwhelmed me the last few days.'

The character of Lord Beaconsfield was most singular. To those without, his manner was that of reserve and coolness, with a proud expression of power and lofty aim. But to the charmed inner circle of his friends there was a bright genial glow of kindness shown which made all feel at ease. At first a manner apparently cold and distant, but directly you struck the chord of sympathy, most cordial and responsive.[57]

In the company of ladies his face became most animated. All the activity of his mind became freshened into new life and he spared neither time nor trouble to interest them. An old lady, Mrs de Burgh, hearing of his asthma, sent him a pot of Stockholm tar, with a note advising him to expose it in his bedroom at night. It proved helpful. An ordinary Prime Minister in full work might have written an autographic note of thanks. Lord Beaconsfield found time to visit her in Eccleston Square to thank her for her kind present, much to her delight.

Through all the constant intercourse of nearly three years there was not a hitch or break in his Lordship's cordial manner to myself personally, except once. He was then suffering much from gout and irritability of liver. In striking contrast with his usual manner he was curt and sharp to me, but I knew it was only a symptom of his disease. *Yet the same evening* Mr Bernal Osborne sat next to Lord Beaconsfield at dinner, and the next day said to a friend of mine, 'During dinner Lord Beaconsfield spoke again and again to me of Dr Kidd and said, "I owe the health and comfort of my life and my fitness for work to his care." '

After the London season his life at Hughenden was very quiet: a walk around the 'German Forest' ' a lovely clump of young trees that Lord Lyndhurst named the 'German Forest' ' and a look at the beautiful shrubs and trees on the Terrace, most of them with a history, one planted by this friend and one by that. he delighted to recall the memories of old friends from the trees planted by them. After his walk, to write or to read was his chief occupation. He was a great reader: of the many journals and reviews on his table, the *Revue Des Deux Mondes* was his favourite. Over it he spent much time.

At Hughendon he was the most genial of hosts. To interest me one evening there he took out a rare old copy of Virgil, and opened up its treasures till I began to share his enthusiasm. 'Dining here often alone,' he said to me, 'I have an understanding with my cook that there is to be ten minutes interval between one course and the next. That ten minutes I invariably devote to reading one of the great authors of antiquity, and I can say that for many years I have listened to many of the greatest wits and orators of the age, but I have derived more pleasure and enjoyment from Homer, Virgil and Horace than from all the living celebrities I have met in life.'

His general health gradually improved in 1879, with occasional interruptions. He kept steadily to the use of lamp baths, as he delighted in the relief through the skin. He had much more faith in wise general hygienic and dietetic treatment than in medicines.

As the time of the Berlin Conference drew near, Lord Rowton, his dearest and best friend, urged that I should accompany him to Berlin. Lord Beaconsfield was unwilling, satisfied with my promise to be in readiness to start at once for Berlin if telegraphed for. At Berlin his health was suddenly disturbed by a severe chill. An urgent telegram summoned me there. I found him suffering from a fresh attack of congestion of the kidneys and liver, but was enabled to afford prompt relief, and he recovered his usual vigour of mind and body, and got through the work of the Congress with ease. I remained with him till the Treaty of Berlin was completed, and returned with him as far as Calais. Three or four days before the Treaty was signed, I was sitting with him in his private room when Prince Bismarck was announced. He walked into the room giving his hat to the servant. After being introduced to the Prince, I retired and found the servant outside the door trying on Prince Bismarck's hat. 'Why,' said one of them, 'the hat is almost big enough to take our two heads into it.' The day after Lord Beaconsfield said to me 'I can tell you today the object of Bismarck's visit yesterday, as it is no longer a secret. The Congress was on the point of coming to an untimely end that morning, as I absolutely refused one of the Russian Plenipotentiary's conditions, and I left the Congress room saying I should have to return to London at once to concert other measures. Bismarck heard of this and rushed off to the Russian Ambassador, persuaded him to withdraw the point and then called to stop my return to London.'

At Berlin he was the favourite of the people, crowds waited outside his hotel to catch a glimpse of him, and as he walked out leaning on the arm of Lord Rowton, without police or soldiers, the crowds followed him with an expression of the deepest regard and interest. On his return from Berlin the King of the Belgians sent his own private saloon railway carriage to Berlin for Lord Beaconsfield's use and sent it on by special express from Brussels to Calais.

During the winter of 1880 his condition became more and more anxious, the frequent changes of temperature increasing the tendency to asthma which the Bright's disease intensified. The kidneys gradually became incompetent to remove waste products, leading to the accumulation within the body of substances (poisonous to the brain) that should have been eliminated by the kidneys. The bronchial cough became more and more troublesome and the expectoration difficult. The relief from the *iodide of potass* and the lamp bath became less, and a gradual deterioration of health supervened as the albumen increased, depression of spirits coming on with suppressed gout.

In the spring of 1881 he felt the cold most keenly, and seldom went out for a walk, his only exercise. Yet he could not deny himself the pleasure of going into society in the evening. He thought that with fur coats and shut carriage he might risk it. But on one of the worst nights in March he went out to dinner and returning home was caught for a minute by the deadly blast of the north-east wind laden with sleet. Bronchitis developed the next morning with distressing asthma, loss of appetite, fever and congestion of the kidneys. Notwithstanding prompt treatment he began to lose ground. Sleepless nights and weary days gradually undermined his strength, the deadly uraemia crept on. I visited him three times a day, and for a week sat up with him all night. The paroxysms of asthma came on so suddenly and violently that quick relief was needed. His constitution did not respond to the remedies as before.

Asthma is the most peculiar disease. It comes on often in the most healthy places and vanishes in the crowded close streets of the town. In the low-lying Downing Street near the Thames he had much less asthma than in Curzon street, where his bedroom was a small stuffy one with fluffy paper and old-fashioned curtains. From the first asthma followed him in Curzon street. After a week in the close small bedroom, the bed was moved out into the airy drawing-room with great benefit. On the

tenth day of the attack, when the dangerous nature of his illness had declared itself, Dr. Quain and Dr Mitchell Bruce became associated with me in the treatment. Dr Bruce and I divided the watching at night, he taking on half the night, and I the rest. Thus the great strain on my mind and body was relieved. This was most welcome to the patient, as he wished to spare me after having had seven nights' close watching. The visits of Dr Quain were very highly appreciated by Lord Beaconsfield, who was much helped by his great skill and cheerful manner. He was ready to meet every symptom and suffering with a fresh suggestion and cheering word. One day, with a smile, Lord Beaconsfield said to the doctor, 'You have given a good report, but your face looks anxious.' Dr Mitchell Bruce' watchful care and attention proved invaluable, and were always gratefully welcomed.

During his last illness there was no pain nor acute suffering, but at times much distress and endurance. To all those around him he showed the greatest kindness and consideration. He watched the daily reports of his case in the newspapers. Thus it became an anxious duty every night at eleven o'clock to write out the bulletin for the morning papers. It was very difficult steering to give a true idea of the gravity of his illness without causing anxiety to him on reading it. This caused many an anxious hour to the three doctors.

During one of our eleven o'clock settlings of the bulletin H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, fresh home from the funeral of the murdered Czar, came in upon us, asking anxiously of the progress of our illustrious patient. Amongst the many distinguished callers Mr Gladstone walked in and inquired most feelingly after his old opponent. We, the doctors, had a hard time in reading the many hundreds of letters, telegrams and postcards with suggestions for infallible cure. One card to Lord Beaconsfield delighted him much; it was:

Don't die yet; we can't do without you. (Signed) A British Workman.

Lord Beaconsfield's love and regard for Earl Cairns were unbounded. One day during his illness Lord Beaconsfield said to me, 'I want especially to see Lord Cairns. He is admirable in council, I want to explain my views to him.' After spending upwards of an hour with Lord Beaconsfield, Lord Cairns came out and said to me 'With so near a prospect of death, can you not get Canon Fleming to visit him? He is specially the one Lord Beaconsfield would listen to on matters concerning the soul and eternity.' Obstacles were put in the way, and the opportunity was lost. To myself sitting by his bed at night he spoke twice on spiritual subjects, on a manner indicating his appreciation of the work of Christ and of the Redemption. At Hughendon he was a diligent attendant at the communion service, and when in London at Whitehall Chapel.

All through his illness, till within a few days of the end, the heart's action was steady and regular; a good vigorous pulse showed the hardy race from which he descended; but even with a vigorously acting heart the outlook for a man at seventy-six is bad when the kidneys fail to eliminate the gout poison. Chronic disease of the kidneys renders the patient much more susceptible to chills and sudden changes of climate. The greatest care in clothing may lessen the effect of such, but the deadly undermining action goes on by the insensible wasting of the nutritive parts of the blood (the albumen) and the defective elimination of the saline debris of the tissues.

About a fortnight before he died I found him greatly exhausted after the exertion of getting out of bed. I asked him to allow the nurses to manage for him. 'No' he said, with a fixed determination, 'I must get out of bed.' Quietly yielding, I sent at once for a fracture couch and had it placed alongside the bed he was lying upon. When next he got out of bed, I asked him to come to the fracture couch in place of his bed. His delight was extreme, the ease with which it was raised up or let down and its soft padding relieved his wary limbs. The mechanical contrivance rendered the getting out of bed unnecessary. 'Conquered' he said, with a genial smile and a cordial grasp of the hand.

Towards the close his nights became much disturbed by coughing. The more he used what he called 'the little demon' (a powder of saltpetre and stramonium to burn up and fill his chest with

vapour) the worse its after effects, the shorter became the relief and the more frequent the need to have recourse to it, exhaustion following it. Spite of all our efforts the kidneys became more and more deeply obstructed, the amount of albumen increased; but worse than that the excretion of urea became less and less, so that blood-poisoning (ur'mia) insensibly gained ground, and the nervous system fed by poisoned blood became exhausted. The restlessness at night also became more distressing, and his strength gave way, thus the bronchial tubes became clogged with mucus which he was unable to expectorate. Although the utmost care was taken to keep the temperature of the rooms equable, towards the 18th of April a gradual change for the worse came on, increased restlessness, loss of strength, incoherence of speech, occasional delusion, restlessness alternating with the heavy sleep of coma, increased frequency of pulse and of respiration.

At midnight there was a visible change for the worse, and the heaviness gradually passed into the calm sleep of death. Lord Rowton remained up all night with Dr Mitchell Bruce and myself. At one o'clock we summoned Dr Quain, Lord Barrington and Sir Philip Rose to witness the end. Lord Barrington was the first to arrive, and at once joined Lord Rowton in a loving clasping of Lord Beaconsfield's right hand; his left hand was laid in mine. Soon afterwards Dr Quain arrived. It touched us all deeply to see the dying statesman rise up in the bed and lean forward in the way he used to when rising to reply in debate; his lips moved but no sound came. he fell back on the pillows, and in about ten minutes, without suffering or distress, his spirit passed away.

Joseph Kidd M. D



Dr Joseph Kidd