

Death during the Fast

There was much newspaper discussion of my fasting papers—most of it being sarcastic. The most biting comment that I recall came from somewhere out West, and ran about as follows: "A Seattle man fasted forty days for stomach trouble. His stomach is troubling him no longer. He is dead." I set to work to find out about this case, and I give the facts on page 137. I also saw a report from the London Daily Telegraph to the effect that a man had died in South[Pg 69] Africa as a result of trying my "cure." How many thousands of people tried it and lived, I do not know; but horrified relatives and enterprising newspaper writers would see that the public was informed about any that died.

As to the possibility or probability of death during a fast, I have one or two points to note:

First, a good many sick people are dying all the time. It would be an argument for fasting if it saved any of them. It is no argument against fasting that it fails to save them all. No one would think of bringing it up against his surgeon or his family physician that he occasionally lost a patient.

Second, people might die very frequently, without that being an argument against the cure. It might simply be a consequence of the desperately ill class of people who were trying it. A doctor who had a new method of healing, and was permitted to use it only upon those whom all other doctors had given up, would be considered successful if he effected even an occasional cure. I would wager that of the people who read my article and set out to fast, practically all had been suffering for many years, and had given the "regular" physicians unlimited opportunity to work on them.

Third, it may be set down as absolutely certain[Pg 70] that no one ever died of starvation while fasting. The essential feature of the fast is that after the first two or three days all hunger ceases; and that any one could die of lack of food without feeling a desire for food, is absurd upon the face of it. Nature simply does not work that way. It reminds me of a young lady who once told me that she would not go to sleep with a mouse in the room, because she imagined the mouse might nibble off her ear without waking her!

As to the possibility that you might starve, during those first days while you are hungry—the answer is simply that you don't. It is perfectly true that men have died of starvation in three or four days; but the starvation existed in their minds—it was fright that killed them. That they did not

truly starve is proven by my letters from several hundreds of people who have fasted over that time, and who are alive to tell of it.

There are conditions in the human body which lead to death inevitably; and some of these conditions are beyond the power of the fast to remedy. When a person so afflicted sets out to fast, and dies in spite of the fast, the papers of course declare that he died because of the fast. Dr. L. B. Hazzard of Seattle has published a very useful little book, "Fasting for the Cure of Disease," in which she tells of two cases of "death from[Pg 71] fasting," where the autopsy revealed conditions with which the fast had no connection, and which made death certain. Chances of that sort one has to take in life. You may have a blood vessel in such a state that when you run after a street car the increased pressure will cause it to burst; but you do not on that account declare that no man ought to exert himself violently.

As an example of the part that mental disturbances may play in the fast, I will cite the case of a woman friend who started out to fast for a complication of chronic ailments. She was rather stout, and did not mind it at all—was going cheerfully about her daily tasks; but her husband heard about it, and came home to tell her what a fool she was making of herself; and in a few hours she was in a state of complete collapse. No doubt if there had been a physician in the neighborhood, there would have been another tale of a "victim of a shallow and unscrupulous sensationalist." Fortunately, however, business called the husband away again, and the next day the woman was all right, and completed an eight-day fast with the best results. Bear this in mind, so that if you wake up some morning and find your temperature sub-normal and your pulse at forty, and your arms too weak to lift you, and if your friends get round you and tell you that you[Pg 72] look like a mummy out of a sarcophagus of the seventeenth dynasty, and that I am a Socialist and an undesirable citizen—you may be able to smile at them good naturedly and tell them that you will never again eat until you are hungry.

I have thought over the cases of failure of the fast, where I have been able to inquire into all the circumstances, and I think I can make the statement that I do not know a case which might not be attributed either to the influence of nervous excitement, or to unwise breaking of the fast. In the last batch of letters was one with a printed account of the disastrous results of a three weeks' fast taken by a woman. It is an example of about all the blunders that I can think of. She describes herself as occupying "a responsible office position," which taxed her strength to the utmost; and she tried to do this work all the time she was fasting. She would get up and go to work when she was "scarcely able to drag one foot after another." On about the nineteenth day her mother arrived, and then I quote: "She almost dropped at sight of me, for I had not given a hint as to my condition; but despite my protests, she sent for the doctor at once. My! Didn't he scold, and tell me what was what! Mother's heart was so torn with sorrow and pity that she hadn't the heart to reproach me for my three weeks' orgy[Pg 73] of fasting. She thought I had paid dearly for my folly." I don't think it necessary to say anything more, except that I feel sorry for the victim, and that I am glad to know this happened two years ago, so that I am not to blame for the results.

By way of contrast with this case I will quote the following letter, which will show the reader the kind of experience that makes fasting enthusiasts: "My wife and I have each nearly reached our seventy-second year. I was born a physical wreck. A dozen years ago we began taking short fasts,

from three to eleven days' duration, for all our ills of the flesh. But each of us had chronic troubles of forty years' standing, which seemed growing no better. And finally, two years ago last July, my wife said she was going to take a 'conquest fast' if it killed her, for she was tired of living with her present ills. I thought it a good time to try a little conquest fasting on my own hook. I had no fear of the result. I knew that nature would tell me when I had fasted long enough. So we began an absolute fast from all food except distilled water and fresh air. We lived in fresh air night and day. We took copious enemas daily, and I took a cabinet sweat, followed by a cold plunge every other day. I knew that I must have many years of filth accumulation in my bowels. And the amount of putridity that[Pg 74] came from my bowels the first twenty-five days of the fast was amazing.

"After fasting twenty-eight days I began to be hungry, and broke my fast with a little grape juice, followed the next day with tomatoes, and later with vegetable soup. My wife began to be hungry after fasting thirty-one days, and broke her fast in a similar manner to myself.

"It is now two years since we took the conquest fast, and my wife has no return of her former troubles. And I am enjoying all the mental and physical pleasures which come from clean bowels. We think we have learned how to live that we will never need another fast. Soon after the fast I was examined by Dr. S——, the leading surgeon of Los Angeles and Southern California, who pronounced me as being the most wonderful person he ever met regarding softness of arteries, and suppleness of body, for my age."