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The Throat and The Voice: Part 1, Chapter 10: Foreign Bodies in the Throat and Windpipe

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CHAPTER X.

FOREIGN BODIES IN THE THROAT AND WINDPIPE.

FOREIGN bodies sometimes become lodged in the throat or windpipe. These may be ill-fitting plates of false teeth; * large morsels of food or fragments of bone arrested, or "going the wrong way" during eating; pins and tacks and the like held in the mouth temporarily; toys, coins, and other objects placed in the mouth during play, and so on. If the foreign body be arrested in such a manner as to prevent breathing, sudden death by suffocation may ensue.

The usual symptoms of the entrance of a foreign body in the throat or air-passages, are sudden paroxysms of pain, or coughing, and gasping for breath. Sometimes the paroxysm is immediately fatal, as has been mentioned. In most instances the intruder is expelled. In a great number of cases, a foreign body remains in the air-passage and cannot be expelled by voluntary effort. It then produces repeated paroxysms of cough and suffocation, more or less frequent, according to the position of the foreign body, which may vary from time to time.

* Plates of false teeth should always be removed on going to sleep, for fear of an accident.

An individual with a foreign body in the air-passage is never safe. A fatal paroxysm may ensue at any moment, on slight provocation. It is essential, therefore, that due efforts be made for its removal or expulsion. In many instances it becomes requisite for the surgeon to make an artificial opening into the air-passage (tracheotomy), and extract the body thence with forceps.

In cases of the kind, a physician should be promptly summoned. Pending his arrival, attempts may be made to excite vomiting by tickling the throat deep down with a feather; or to excite effective cough by bending the body well forward and having some one strike the back smartly during each successive act of cough. Small children can be held up by the legs, head downward.

Should the body not be expelled, and the paroxysm cease, rest of body should be enjoined until skilled assistance can be procured. Irrational and haphazard efforts to get rid of the body are very apt to be injurious. Attempts may be made to reach the body by the forefinger, which can sometimes be hooked around it to detach it when high enough up. Sometimes, when the body is a smooth one, as a pebble or coin, and is caught in the windpipe, it may be removed by letting the individual bend himself backward towards the floor from the arm of a sofa or the like, upon which he is first to sit, when the body will roll down by gravity into the mouth.