

CORSON, (H)

AN ALMOST  
UNRECOGNIZED CAUSE OF  
DISEASE IN YOUNG  
CHILDREN.

BY

HIRAM CORSON, M.D.,  
CONSHOHOCKEN, PA.

FROM THE  
MEDICAL AND SURGICAL REPORTER,  
September 22, 1888





From the MEDICAL AND SURGICAL REPORTER,  
September 22, 1888.

AN ALMOST UNRECOGNIZED CAUSE  
OF DISEASE IN YOUNG  
CHILDREN.

BY HIRAM CORSON, M.D.,  
CONSHOHOCKEN, PA.



During my many years of practice, there have been many occasions on which I found it necessary to warn persons who used tobacco against using it in the sick-room, especially in the lying-in room. I have often known poor men, after coming from work and also in the early morning, to fill the room where there was an infant only a few days old, with tobacco-smoke, and that some of these children sickened and died from the effects of it I have no doubt. Three years ago, I was passing along Green Lane, a street running from Roxborough to Manayunk, when I met a young man proudly carrying a child of but a few months, on his shoulder, with the child's face close to his own head. He was smoking, and, as he faced the wind, the smoke was carried back into the child's face. It was Sunday, and himself and wife had apparently just started

to visit friends in Manayunk—a very short distance. After I had gotten away from them, I reproached myself for not having accosted them and warned them of the child's danger. It is quite probable that, before they reached their friends, the child was sick; then, if a doctor was sent for, he was doubtless told: "It was quite well when we left home, and we can't tell whatever has made it so sick." Being so very sick, and malaria being so plentiful in that region, the doctor could readily see that it ought to have medicine—some antiseptic or some germicide—and then—well, we may fancy the rest.

I have often, when called to young children, believed that the cause of the sickness was due to the fumes of tobacco; removing them from the cause often soon placed them in safety. And yet that many suffered from that cause, and that it was not recognized as such by me, I have no doubt.

Can it be possible that an infant could be subjected to so potent a cause of disease without being deeply affected by it? But it would be difficult for the most vigilant physician, however anxious to prove this a frequent cause of sickness, to do so. Children, no doubt, often become accustomed gradually to the fumes of tobacco, and after a while they have little effect on them. But that it has a deleterious effect on children of even one or more years of age is probably true.

In *Friends' Intelligencer and Journal* of the present month, there is reported a case so carefully observed and so evidently caused by tobacco, that I feel it to be important to give it to your readers. It is entitled:

**“Important to Fathers who Smoke.”**

“May I give you my recent experience of tobacco-smoke? It may be a warning to others. I have one child, a little girl not yet two years old, who was as healthy as the birds when she was born. For more than a year past, ever since she was old enough to be less in the nursery and more with her father and me, she has ailed mysteriously. I could not say she was ill, yet she was hardly ever well. I was in a perpetual state of anxiety about her. The symptoms were absence of appetite, complaints of sickness, stomach and digestion out of order. Last August, I took her to a country town, where we stayed two months. After the first week, she flourished like a young bay-tree, ate, and drank, and laughed, and played, and slept, and kept me forever busy enlarging her garments. I brought her home rosy and robust. In one week, all the old symptoms reappeared—loss of appetite, dark lines under the eyes, listless ways, restless nights. Some one suggested that the neighborhood did not suit her; and I was cogitating how to take her away again, when she caught a severe cold and was confined entirely to one

room for three weeks. She recovered her health completely. Appetite, spirits, sleep, all returned. It could not be the neighborhood. After her cold, she joined us downstairs again, as usual, two or three times a day. In less than a week, sickness, etc., returned. I was in despair. For nearly three months, I racked my brains about drains, wall-papers, milk, water, sauce-pans, any and every thing in vain—the child slowly wasted. The weather was too severe to take her away. In an agony of mind, I noticed one day that, so far from out-growing her clothes, as I expected, they were too large for her. The little thing was not eating enough to keep up her strength, and we could not coax her to eat. Yet she was not really ill; she ran about and played in a quiet way, and looked fairly well to those who had not seen her more robust. Suddenly my husband was summoned into the country. A week after he went, she began to eat with a relish. In a fortnight, she was her own happy self, full of riotous childish spirits. ‘Her father has never seen her like this,’ I remarked, one evening, when she was particularly merry and mad; and then the truth flashed upon me. It was his tobacco that upset her. He has been away now for a month; and the child’s limbs daily get firmer and rounder, and she is the merriest, healthiest little mortal possible. He always smoked after breakfast and after lunch, with her in the room,

neither of us dreaming that it was injurious to her. But for his providential absence this time, it would never have occurred to me, and we might have lost our darling, for she was wasting sadly. It was acting like a slow poison."

It seems to me probable, from the above history, that the child was confined to the nursery for the first few months, and not with the father when he was smoking, and was thus not affected so early as children often are. With rich people, in cities, the "smoking-room" saves children, infants at least, from early poisoning by tobacco-smoke. But that thousands of infants, in the homes of the poor in the small crowded houses of the alleys in cities, are sufferers from this cause is quite probable. People with consumption and other exhausting diseases are sometimes greatly nauseated by the odor of tobacco brought into the sick-room by a physician much given to the use of tobacco. I have several times heard them speak of its being very offensive to them.

As "a word to the wise is sufficient," it seems to me quite proper to call the attention of the profession to this cause of disease, of suffering, and oftentimes of premature death.









