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THE EARLY DIAGNOSIS OF GASTRIC CANCER.¹

By HERBERT J. PATERSON,
C.B.E., M.C., M.D., F.R.C.S.

At present we know of no pathognomonic sign or symptom of cancer of the stomach. There is therefore no royal road to diagnosis. I cannot tell you how to diagnose gastric cancer; the most I can do is to emphasize the important points which will help you to make a diagnosis early, and to indicate some of the ancillary means which may help you to confirm such diagnosis.

In the early stage of the disease the symptoms are few and slight; in the later

stage so plain that he who runs may read. Many of the so-called symptoms, such as persistent vomiting, severe anæmia, jaundice and wasting, are late complications, and when such are present, the opportunity for successful treatment is gone for ever.

At the outset, I would emphasize the supreme importance of obtaining a detailed and accurate history of the case, and the making of a careful and thorough clinical examination. For these no laboratory investigations can be a substitute.

The earliest symptoms of gastric cancer are **gastric discomfort, loss of appetite, failure of strength** and a **slight degree of anæmia**.

Gastric discomfort may be defined as being conscious of having a stomach. A healthy individual is unaware of the existence of this organ. The onset of discomfort and uneasiness after food, insidious and scarcely noticeable at first, is

¹Part of a Fellowship Lecture delivered at the Medical Society of London, on Monday, February 9, 1931.