THE REDUCTION OF CANCER

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649018208

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

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BY

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LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA
1907

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THE great increase of communication between all parts of the world which has taken place in recent times is rapidly obliterating many of the distinctions between countries and races which were noted by our predecessors. These distinctions were not only of great interest for the purpose of ethnographic inquiry, but gave material for conclusions of value to the race, and in no respect were the several characteristics of greater import than in relation to physical health. The best opportunities of comparison occurred during the last century, when many countries were first visited and observed in a scientific spirit. The differences in conditions were then to a great extent undisturbed. Even the counties of England had their well-marked characteristics. We have therefore in the records of travellers during the nineteenth century the chief depositary from which we may derive knowledge of many of the conditions on which the health and the diseases of a nation depend.

A very moderate amount of research and reasoning upon the known facts of health in the countries of the world is sufficient to lead to results which at once give us the means of arresting and expelling some of the worst maladies which now threaten the vitality of the

race. Moreover, we have still the means of coming to conclusions, practically certain, as to the relation of peculiar conditions to peculiar health, or to peculiar diseases, from the evidence of nations now living, which have been little infected physically by means of human intercourse and by world-wide commerce.

It is rather strange that more attention has not been bestowed on the power we possess of discovering the causes of disease by comparing nation with nation, and condition with condition. It is a bloodless method, inflicting no pain on any sentient creature and absolutely certain to increase national well-being, if the knowledge be reasonably applied. There is no more profitable means of attacking particular maladies and national degeneration than by ascertaining where health is highest, where disease most prevalent, and by impressing the facts upon the public, through instruction and legislation.

Governments and public authorities have a truly sacred power, equal to what was formerly ascribed to Providence, of conferring happiness or misery. As yet they have not gone far on the path of regeneration.

Results of immediate practical value are attained by the mere exercise of scientific sense in practical reforms. Thus, by the persistent campaign of a few doctors and laymen, hydrophobia, the most horrible of diseases, was in a very few years exterminated from Great Britain. Knowledge of the only common cause, the bite of an infected animal, and comparison of our own with certain foreign countries, which were free from rabies owing to the regulation of dogs, enabled these pioneers to declare that we could destroy the disease by a few simple enactments. The Government of the day, to

its honour, legislated accordingly. And so a very awful form of torture, and an anxiety to parents, have been wholly removed.

It is proved that cholera, plague, typhus, and some other diseases are banished by clean water, clean air, and clean houses; thus, if India would imitate England and sacrifice her fatalism, her multitudinous population would cease to suffer from these afflictions. Typhus only lingers in a few dirty places, it is rarely seen in the United Kingdom; cholera is guarded against by port regulations and good water-supplies, and plague likewise yields to clean conditions. On the other hand, if the people of England were to imitate the natives of some plain-living countries in their food and drink, and to remove from their dietary hot liquors and unwholesome luxuries, it is quite certain that they would not be subject to dental decay, indigestion, and weak nerves as they are now. "Brahmin skulls on the banks of the Ganges showed no case of general dental decay." Similarly, ancient skulls dug up in Britain show perfect sets of teeth.[1] Even so late as the last generation, in the remote country the fathers of men now living, whose chief food came from the cornfield, the garden, the dairy, and the spring, had perfect teeth in their old age. The teeth of most wild native races are excellent, the teeth of most Britons wretched, even in childhood or before middle age. Considering the importance of sound teeth to health, an inquiry into the dental condition of various races would be valuable to

[1] Sir James Crichton Browne has just given an instance. Eleven skulls of ancient Scottish men dug up near his native town, Dumfries, showed perfect teeth in every case. In certain schools recently examined 96 per cent. of the children had decayed or bad teeth.

this country. Meanwhile, it seems to be certain that wherever a people lives on uncorrupted grain and fruit, drinking little but water, and abstaining from tobacco, hemp, &c., and very hot food and drink, the teeth are strong and remain good till old age.

The problem of the causation of some of the worst diseases is much simpler than is generally supposed. There is a needless assumption of mystery and scientific nescience, if the phrase may be used. That is to say, that while the exact mode of origin, the chemico-physiology, and the cell interaction may be obscure, and no doubt extremely difficult to account for in detail, the detection of the practical means of causation and prevention is a matter of plain reasoning upon evidence for which we have abundant data. Thus hydrophobia was easily exterminated by preventing infected dogs from biting, although the appearance and life-history of the bacillus or microbe was unknown. Similarly, typhus is exterminated by acting on the mere knowledge of the value of cleanliness, and typhoid is reduced by acting on the knowledge of its connection with fæcal matter in the wrong place. The discovery of the means of causation usually gives into our hands the means of prevention. We possess the power, but we must also have the will to exercise it.

Is not this true also of cancer? When we find that malignant disease has only recently become common here, is rare in some nations now, increases in proportion to particular modes of living, and is almost or entirely absent in communities of other habits, we can hardly fail to bring the channels of evil into the light. Not climate, soil, or obscure influences are the cause of the

vast majority of maladies, but human habits which are capable of alteration.

Cancer is widely distributed. Some form of it appears to affect many kinds of animals but rarely; and among beasts of the higher order, such as wild cattle, sheep, pigs, and monkeys, all in the wild state, it is hardly ever, if ever, seen. Among domestic animals in certain conditions it is not uncommon, and the pig is said to be by far the most subject to cancer of all animals. Mr. W. Hunter, the eminent veterinary surgeon, has testified to the extreme rarity of cancer in the lower animals. He knew many veterinary surgeons who had never seen a cancer.[1] Dr. Vacher, however, of the Cheshire County Council, who has had a very large experience, states that cancer occurs not infrequently among domesticated animals. Dr. Bashford, of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, states that cancer has been found in the horse, dog, cat, and in cattle and hens. Among many thousands of pigs under one year old examined in Glasgow no case was found. In old cows, there was a preponderance of cases.[2] Age always predisposes.

The difference between the wild and domesticated state is mainly in the food. In the case of the pig there is the maximum difference, and a great restriction of exercise. The wild boar is a clean feeder, the pig of the stye is kept horribly dirty, and fed on horrible food, offal both animal and vegetable. A veterinary inspector spoke of having seen near London the skeletons of three cows and one horse in a pig-yard. Everything

[1] "Signs of Health and Disease in Animals" (*Journal of the Sanitary Institute*, 1901).
[2] *Journal of the Sanitary Institute*, 1906.