

# **SANITARY HOUSES, AND HOW TO SELECT ONE**

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# SANITARY HOUSES

AND

*HOW TO SELECT ONE*

BY

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE subject of this pamphlet is of vital importance to every one. It is essentially a question of life and death ; yct if not absolutely of life and death, still of how long we are to live or how soon we are to die—subject to certain other conditions to be taken into consideration. It must be self-evident to most that the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, and the house we live in, must each in their way help to determine the length of time that all the component parts of that complex machine, the human body, will continue to work in unison. There were some people in former days who thought, and I am afraid there are many who from ignorance still say—if not in absolute words, at any rate by their acts—that it matters not whether the air you breathe be sweet or foul, the food you eat be good or bad, the water you drink be pure or impure, the house you live in be wholesome or the

reverse ; you must die some time, and these things cannot make much difference one way or the other. Lord Ripon, in a speech he made at Delhi, says, " I very well recollect, a few years ago, the late Lord Palmerston telling the House of Commons, when he was advocating sanitary reform, that there was always in every town in England a clean party and a dirty party—a party that was in favour of a good water supply and good drainage, and a party opposed to measures of that kind." Science here steps in, and shows that due attention paid to sanitary laws will undoubtedly tend to long life, and the neglect of these very laws will as surely bring disease and probably death in their train.

Each of us knows, from personal experience, how bad smells affect our stomachs, and make us feel sick ; a very foul stench smelt just before a meal will take our appetites quite away ; with some of us it will go further, and disorder the bowels, and, if there be any specific poison in it, may lay the seeds of a very severe illness.

Few of us consider what an important part air takes in our existence. Dr. Angus Smith, in his work on Air and Rain, tells us that we take into our bodies by means of our lungs one to two thousand gallons of air daily. Our atmosphere is composed of

a combination, in certain proportions, of a number of elementary gases; any deviation from the proper admixture of these gases, or the undue introduction of any foreign element so as materially to alter the proportions of the mixture, must have a corresponding ill effect upon the bodies that take in that composition. Thus we can quite understand that a small amount of poison disseminated in that air would soon contaminate the whole system. It will be remembered that foul air killed an immense number of our own countrymen and countrywomen in the Black Hole of Calcutta.

Certain diseases have been shown and proved to be due to an insufficient supply of air, and consequent fouling of the atmosphere by exhalations from the human body. It has been indisputably proved that the lower animals suffer and become diseased by being confined in spaces which do not admit of the air remaining pure. Rossignol says that previous to 1836 the mortality of the French cavalry horses varied from 180 to 197 per thousand. The enlargement of the stables and the increased quantity of the ration of air reduced the loss in the next ten years to 68 per thousand;\* thus showing that a purer air increased the length of life of horses. What is true

\* Parkes' Practical Hygiene.



in regard to the lower animals is also true in regard to human beings, so far as their animal life is concerned. So that the air we breathe cannot but be an important matter to us in the consideration of the best means of maintaining a high standard of health, and consequent length of life.

As already shown, our bodies obey in many respects the same laws as the bodies of animals; and as one kind of food fattens, nourishes, and keeps them in health, so another kind will have the opposite effect, the more so in certain states of the body and at certain seasons of the year. These facts are well known and acted on by all who graze cattle and fatten them for the market; they take advantage of a certain dietary for their fattening purposes. Just so in the human body, we see the effects of different diets on different bodies. We judge of the food at a certain institution by the general appearance of the inmates. Mark the great eater by his full and bloated appearance; the man of spare habit by his thin face and attenuated limbs. The subject has been studied at our prisons by Dr. G. Wilson,\* and the value of the different diets has been noticed on the prisoners; the amount of work they can perform, and

\* For further particulars, see "A Handbook of Hygiene and Sanitary Science," by George Wilson, M.A., M.D.

what certain quantities of particular foods are capable of producing, have been reduced to a mathematical calculation. As appropriate food is a necessary means of maintaining our bodies and supplying them with those ingredients which, by a process of alteration and assimilation, maintain them and keep them in a healthy working condition; so an inappropriate diet, with or without absolutely noxious ingredients, is capable of disarranging our functions and inducing a state known to us as disease. Poisons are introduced into the system by means of food. The ova of parasites also obtain entrance into our bodies, and grow and derange our functions: familiar instances of this are worms of all sorts, especially tapeworms. Besides these, the flesh of diseased animals. This is one that has not been fully worked out. Still we have got so far, that the flesh of an animal suffering from any form of disease, let it be what it may, is considered unfit for human food. The flesh of any animal infected with a specific poison, if taken into the body as food, is liable to produce grave disorder, even if it does not reproduce the specific disease. A diet, like the composition of the atmosphere, should consist of certain substances in certain definite proportions; an excess of any one over the others, if continued in, is sure to produce some change

in the animal economy. Some portion will be developed at the expense of the others, one organ will be acted on more than another; and if that goes on certain changes will take place in that organ which may lead to disease. Here we are not speaking absolutely, for it is well known that nature is very tolerant, and, within certain limits, will stand almost anything. Time develops habit, which in its turn becomes second nature. This, however, does not militate against the broad principle that whatever tends to alter the even working of the machine produces more wear and tear in one part than in another, and, when the human body is the machine concerned, that part becomes more liable to disease; thus showing that it is not a matter of indifference what food we eat. A bad or unsuitable diet will, if persisted in, soon clog the machine and the person may die.

The water we drink has of late years been shown to play a much more important part in our longevity than our ancestors had any idea of. Death was in the cup of many a bright, clear, sparkling water, which might have been taken by the uninitiated as the very emblem of purity. It is not long since that the holy water of a Mohammedan well in the East, which is carried as a sacred relic by the faithful to all parts of the world and the drinking of which is considered by