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DE PARIS.

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## DUTY OF THE STATE IN PUBLIC HEALTH.\*

BY F. B. STEPHENSON, A. M., M. D., U. S. NAVY,  
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ALTHOUGH the original † of a part of this paper was written having especially in view the people and government of Italy, it is hoped that what follows may be of interest to the economists of America.

The great innovations—those which should be very advantageous to humanity—are, more than others, opposed from the first, objections being sometimes strong enough to arrest them for years, occasionally for centuries. This may be brought about through malevolence, or by the mere dislike of anything new. In medicine, particularly, obstacles to free progress of the truth appear to be more numerous than in any other branch of science. ‡ One of the greatest difficulties with which surgery has to struggle is represented by some of the most malignant diseases well known. These attack persons who have recently undergone some opera-

\* Read before the United States Naval Medical Society, April 7, 1887.

† "La Risponsabilità del Governo nella Salute Publica," by Professor C. Ruata ("Estratto dalla Gazzetta degli Ospedali").

‡ The history of pseudo schools of medicine and of patent remedies may be studied for illustrations.

tion, occurring in a frequency disproportionate to the gravity of the cases. Many instances of this kind took place under the old regime. The mortality records of some former hospitals are dire enough. With the now recognized precautions of asepsis a surgeon may approach in confidence the most formidable operations, most if not all of which would be impossible without them. Pyæmia and septicæmia from such sources are now known only (or should be) from descriptions given of them.\*

It is calculated † that in Italy, during the year 1883, eighteen thousand women died *in partu*—that is, in the flower of their age. Other losses would indirectly flow from this, first to individuals and families, ultimately to the state. Puerperal fever has been produced by experiments on animals, through injection of the septic discharges. Our author makes the surprising statement that, even in this age of enlightenment, many Italian midwives, and some physicians, too, forbid lying-in women to be washed or have linen changed for quite a number of days after labor. During the same year there were about sixty-two thousand deaths from other contagious diseases. We read that five thousand deaths annually are caused by diarrhœa and dysentery, owing, doubtless, to bad local hygienic conditions, as seen by Professor Ruata. The modes of transmission of disease-germs in typhoid fever, and the ease with which it may be prevented, are referred to. Many cases, foci of infection, pass unperceived, probably through ignorance; such ought to be noticed by medical officers, whose special business it should be to look after them. Tuberculous phthisis ‡ is con-

\* "Tutti questi avvelenamenti del sangue, così comuni altri volti, sono ormai scomparsi, e non è molto tempo che un giovane medico inglese mi diceva ch'egli non conosceva che cosa fosse piemia o setticemia se non dalle descrizioni che i trattati ne fanno."—C. Ruata.

† Official statistics published by the Italian Government.

‡ Lions have phthisis and elephants Bright's disease.—Gerard.

sidered to be infectious and preventible; reference is made to the good results one may expect from applying antiseptics to the lungs by inhalation. The breath of individuals may spread the disease; milk from tuberculous cows\* may cause it in those otherwise healthy.

Professor Ruata refers briefly to cholera and the bacillus † of Koch, with the remark, "What practical utility results? Little, if any."

Thus much, as illustrations, for the multitudes that died. But what has been the effect on those who have indeed escaped with their lives? "The expense of sickness, time lost from work, ‡ deterioration of health, misery, desolation—malediction on society!" How much more destruction of life and happiness is due to these causes than to war and other violence! And what does the government do against them? Drugs are shown to be powerless to cure any of the infectious diseases. # Our author says: "I have no hope to ever be able to cure them by such means. This is my hypothesis, but sustained by facts that leave no doubt

\* Epidemics of pleuro-pneumonia and epizootic furnish examples of loss among the lower animals, to say nothing of inconvenience and danger therefrom to man; as, for instance, ailments due to impure meat and milk.

† *Vide* "Microbes," by E. L. Trouessart, in Appletons' "International Scientific Series."

"Aucune de ces vibrions ou de ces bactéries ne peut être considérée comme caractéristique de telle ou telle maladie ou comme la produisant. On ne les trouve pas dans les liquides des animaux vivants et sains." J. Pelletan, "Le microscope."

‡ "En France, la maladie, avec ses chômages et ses frais, emporte 708 millions des francs chaque année." Congrès d'hygiène à la Haye, août, 1884; conférence de M. Rochard sur "La valeur économique de la vie humaine," "Jour. de méd. et de chir. prat.," Sept., 1884, p. 386.

# This idea is worth consideration by those who believe with Hahnemann that "drugs are the real curative agents" of disease.

of its correctness." The difficulty of destroying the *Acarus scabiei* (so easy of access, relatively) is compared with that of even reaching the alleged peccant microbes, which, we are told, have more vital resistance than the itch-insect. How, then, is it possible to come at and kill these germs in the blood and tissue without great harm to health? "Specific treatment of disease seems to be unreasonable."\* We know that in these and like kinds of sickness there is a question of poisoning merely, and that it is within our power—the power of the government—to stop infection. We have police for crimes, why not for the detection and annihilation of such poisons, far more dangerous and destructive certainly than many an open foe? Every citizen has a right to expect that the state should guarantee his life against these terrible enemies, from which he can not be made safe unless by the intervention of a force able to absolutely impede their progress. We can, by barricading our houses, guard ourselves from thieves and murderers, but for these diseases we have no means of defense save those that the central authority should give; its responsibility in such things is so great as not to admit of any half-way measures. Deaths from these sources, and the consequences thereof, are to be laid at the door of the general government in its duty to public health. Public health is made up of the health of individuals. The need of enforced legal sanitation is apparent, nay, urgent! Why not apply Listerism (asepsis), which consists not only in mere pharmacal antiseptics, but in the use of all the means within the power of society to prevent the formation of nests (*nidus*) or centers of disease that may become poisonous to persons

\* Is not the supposed cure in such cases due entirely to the physiological action of the drug, rather than to any specific effect against the cause of disease?

about? Formerly epidemics were rare because means of intercourse were few.

Places of public resort or of private gathering may be points of diffusion.\* Have we not an example of this in the epidemic of small-pox in Montreal, Canada, during 1885, where the disease was evidently spread by processions in the streets and the crowds in churches, seeking aid through ceremonial and prayer?

What is the duty of the government in such a condition of popular intelligence? The government's most productive act is to educate in the widest sense; that is, to show the people how to best use their own abilities in accordance with the laws of nature about them, from which, indeed, human life is not free. Why are there these sixty-two thousand deaths from contagious diseases? Why allow one person or family to poison another without restraint? Why is disease communicated in churches, theatres, hotels, railway-trains, and so forth?

Isolation of original cases and the endeavor to stamp out the disease in the start † would prove to be much more effective than the usual quarantine or sanitary cordon, which are, ordinarily, difficult of application and imperfect in result. England escaped cholera (1883) through the very prompt attention of her sanitary officials to the first imported cases, infection being thus hindered. The history

\* "Pensai che il focolajo d'infezione comune fosse la chiesa, dove tutti accorrevano, e che la pia madre che lasciava per pochi istanti il suo bambino ammalato per recarsi al tempio a pregare il Signore per la salvezza del figlio, seminasse in quel luogo stesso la morte per qualche altro."—C. Ruata.

† Disease in cattle, fowls, etc., may also be cut short by isolation and proper care in the beginning. This is done to some extent in America at present, but there is yet need of officials duly informed, so that infectious cases may be recognized without delay from ignorance.

of cholera in Naples shows how neglect may allow contagion, and a wise use of energy stop it. The inconvenience and difficulty of isolation have been objected. But which is the worse trouble, such temporary interference, or a ravaging epidemic? Shall the benefits of commerce, the profits of present trade, be held of more value than the great practical and future good of saving alive adult citizens?\*

With one properly qualified and authorized agent (the strong arm of the law duly sustaining him) to a certain number of inhabitants, epidemics might be avoided through separation (isolation) of the first single cases. When the disease occurred elsewhere, the health officer of that district should be there to thwart its progress.† Our Italian *confrère* thinks that it would not be hard to obtain the requisite number of fit medical men for this purpose, at least in his country; such physicians could also attend the poor. One great advantage of appointing doctors ‡ for this work might be the giving to the populace right ideas on hygiene.

Laws and regulation exist *cui bono*? An enlightened public opinion only can bring about a thorough carrying out of the most perfect legal plans,§ and this public opinion must be made through knowledge, *instruction*, EDUCATION! The following remark applies particularly, perhaps, to the smaller officials of some European countries, yet the "mus-

\* For the action, in this connection, of those in control of Egypt during 1883, we refer to "Cholera," by J. A. S. Grant (Bey), M. D., in the "New York Medical Journal" for February 27, 1886.

† Isolation of cases of infectious diseases is yet so imperfect in the United States that, during the year 1886, there was a discussion before the Massachusetts Medical Society as to the means of getting better results therefrom.

‡ Using "doctor" in the sense also of the original Latin — "a teacher."

§ Witness the power of religious and of race prejudice to nullify law.

tard-seed" of truth may be found for use in the New World: "In the eyes of the local authorities, a fine road or a monument to those who died from such diseases is of more importance than good drinking-water for the people—the people in whose health and prosperity consists the welfare of the state."

An organized body of capable sanitary officials, under the central direction of a board of public health, would be a most beneficent institution among many of which this age may wisely be proud.\*

The public health is endangered in a peculiarly insidious way by adulteration of food and drink.†

A healthy population or people—healthy in body and in mind—is the strength and riches of a nation. As a matter of wise conservation, the government or commonwealth should protect the ignorant from disease; the ignorant in such cases are not, necessarily, in the lowest rank of social life. Security—physical, hygienic, and mental—is better than material wealth. Natural liberty of the individual should not prevent the State giving medical assistance.

In all schemes of government aid the question is not as to the effect upon highly cultured or ideal men, but as to what, profitably to all, can be done for men in general, what may be expected from people as they are.‡ We can

\* For an interesting, vivid, and impressive presentation of some important details of this question (touching Italy), see "Cholera, and the Duties of Governments and Countries during Epidemics," by Professor E. Albanese, Palermo, in the "New York Medical Journal" of January 8, 1887.

† See "Modern Adulteration in Foods and their Relation to Disease," by E. H. Bartley, M. D., in the "New York Medical Journal" for July 17, 1886.

‡ In the by-laws of the International Workingmen's Association (1864) it is stated that the association recognizes "truth, right, and morality as the basis of their conduct toward one another and their

not deal with them as we would with figures on a slate.\* Reasoning, to be of value, must give deductions from observed facts of nature (including human nature), verified by general experience.

It is written of a renowned Russian general: "He listened to all told him, and gave the requisite orders without seeming to take any interest in what was said, though, in fact, alive to every tone and every change of expression in the speaker." To do otherwise than treat men and things as they are would be as futile as to expect anything real from Napoleon's plan for the government of his Europe made peaceful by conquest. An economist, besides educating himself, has much to observe.

The great influence of the Government appears in the following testimony by Malthus in 1827: "The Government of Ireland has, upon the whole, . . . tended to degrade the general mass of the people, and consequently to prevent them from looking forward and acquiring habits of prudence." Another phase is presented by R. B. Brough: "To the institution of aristocracy in this country (England) is mainly attributable all the political injustice, and more especially the groveling moral debasement we have to deplore." Malthus further says: "If the Government would remove hindrances to agriculture, and spread knowledge about it,† it would do more for the population of the country than by establishing five hundred foundling hospitals." Recent legislation in France, offering a premium for the

fellow-men, without respect to color, creed, or nationality. . . . No rights without duties, no duties without rights."

\* However this may be in theory, we dare say that few men have capabilities of mind so unlimited as to be able to base anything practical thereon at present. "Le plus grand instrument de l'homme est l'homme."

† This idea might be fruitfully applied to the life of modern Greece.

seventh child, is quite opposed to the views of this philosopher as to the wisest way of increasing the population, and thus conducing to national prosperity. Population increases when means of sustenance increase. Removals give space for new-comers, from marriages becoming possible.

The cause of poverty? Poverty exists wherever two persons try to live on the food (everything necessary) nature has designed for one—accidents apart. Whose fault brings two beings into the world where one only can find perfect life?

The effect of character on actions and of actions on character are of great economic importance. The clear consciousness of personal responsibility is the soul and center of every healthy advance. Enlightened self-interest is a wise and potent motive in social betterment. "The language of experience owes much of its meaning to the interpreter." The ways, more or less direct, in which general knowledge aids in procuring and retaining physical well-being are very many; oftentimes they are not easy to find. A learned and strong guide is most valuable. Advice, teaching, example are better than positive aid, which has often caused feelings of dependence and selfishness antagonistic to the desired individual development. The hope and effort to improve their condition are fruitful in all classes, but most frequent and constant in the grades above the wretchedly poor. As an example, where there is evident ignorance, the people should be taught how best to utilize waste of unoccupied lands.\*

The man who commits the crime may not be the most guilty, but he who causes or, being able to dispel, permits the darkness of ignorance. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth

\* See "Russians of To-Day," chap. ii, on the condition of the lower classes.

of God"—that is, being interpreted, by the highest wisdom. Much disease and years of misery might be avoided if some judicious forethought—sometimes called worldly wisdom or common sense—were used in forming marriages and in the conduct of life afterward, especially in regard to offspring. Truth is weakened by any addition of error.

A wise government will care for the temporarily weak and needy portions of the community, they being on that account not less essential to public welfare than those who are able to provide for themselves in all things.

One important duty of the state is to require registration of deaths, with satisfactory evidence that it is due to natural causes—that is, not from crime.\* The result of such action tends to educate the people so as to procure for the community at large physicians worthy of confidence, as is now attempted by the examination of men for the public service.

Whether laws (so easily and widely evaded) to regulate the practice of medicine that reduce good and bad to the same low level are a benefit, is a question upon which legislators may well bestow serious thought. Would it not be better to instruct the people so that they might judge with reason? Education for the raising of man's physical and mental condition "is rarely absolute, but relative, and should be conducted in language used by ordinary, clear-thinking men." Thorough informing of the people in regard to the laws that control mental and moral being (if, indeed, they are not identical) is needful in order to complete the work of customary education. Does not the highest education find its best use in making wise laws for social rule? The more freedom citizens have, so much the more profound must be their knowledge—knowledge of things concerning

\* Billings, "Medicine in the United States," 1886.

both body and mind—to prevent liberty becoming license and to attain the best results possible.\*

Although some of the ideas herein presented may seem to have little relation to public health, the philosophic student knows that remote causes are often of greater influence than the proximate, usually deemed most important by the *vulgus*.

\* An outline of this broad education is given in the address of Carroll D. Wright, President of the American Social Science Association, under title, "Popular Instruction in Social Science." See Boston "Evening Transcript," September 7, 1886.





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