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Hanchett (H. G.)

THE

PROPHYLACTIC

AND

THERAPEUTIC RESOURCES

OF

MANKIND.



—  
A Paper read before the International Congress of  
Anthropology, held at Columbia College,  
New York, June 4-7, 1888.

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BY HENRY G. HANCHETT, M. D.

Member N. Y. Academy of Anthropology, Author of "Modern Domestic  
Medicine," "Sexual Health," "Teaching as a Science,"  
Etc., Etc.

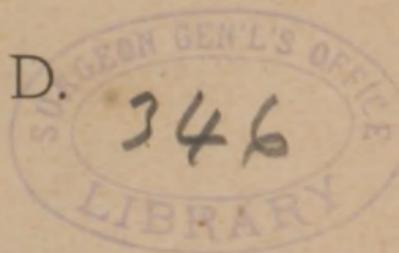
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NEW YORK MEDICAL TIMES,  
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UNFORTUNATELY in our study of anthropology we cannot overlook the sick man, and it is the purpose of the present paper to inquire into the preventive and remedial resources upon which men have drawn, with a view specially of discovering what influence, if any, increase in intelligence and culture has had in directing the mind toward aids of real and permanent value in combatting disease.

The first physicians were the priests, because the untutored mind, ignorant of the true causes of disease, naturally counted them among those unknown things with which it is the office of the priest to deal. Superstitious rites of some kind were the earliest remedial resources, and very probably the highest antiquity may be assigned to incantations.

It is at least unlikely that swallowing poisons was an early method of treating disease, because the accidental eating of poisonous herbs and berries might easily have caused the first form of sickness, and the primitive man could hardly have argued that, having swallowed a poison, the best thing to do would be to swallow more poison—such reasoning would imply a long series of scientific observations, and logical powers of a high order. He would be more likely to conclude that his cramps, spasms and evacuations were

evidences of the anger of some deity, and that the thing for him to do was to see the priest and get him to placate the offended spirit.

But in very early days polytheism prevailed, and since now recovery and now death would certainly follow the incantations of any priest, we can readily imagine that a specially fortunate medicine-man would soon gain for his deity credit for an unusual number of cures. This would attract multitudes of the sick to the ministrations of this priest, but his incantations being followed by death in many cases, he or his deity might soon come to be credited with cures of a certain class of troubles, while other classes would seem to meet more successful treatment from some other god. In some such way we may without violence conceive the first step in medical progress, namely the establishment of specialization, to have been taken. Certain it is that among the Egyptians at a very early day there were physicians for all diseases; each of whom limited himself to his own specialty. The idea was generally accepted that there was a deity peculiarly in charge of each separate portion of the body. Our almanacs preserve evidence of this superstition in the representation of a human figure presided over by the zodiacal signs, each one of which was conceived to be the home of a god who cared specially for one region of the body. In the Roman church, too, not so very long ago, a list of saints was accepted, to each of whom prayers were to be offered for recovery from a particular ailment.

The next medical resource of the race was probably the talisman, and grew out of the early

astronomical observations. The zodiacal signs, the homes of the gods, being out of sight for a part of the year, men attempted to design something that should represent them during their absence. These representations or substitutes were the first talismans, and were found to be quite as efficient remedies as the constellations themselves.

The step from the talisman to the amulet was short, as the latter was simply a talisman which to be of value must be carried about the person. But the history of amulets shows some real advances in medicine resulting from the fact that among the vast number of substances that were worn about the person as charms, some were composed of drugs which could gain access to the system by absorption and inhalation, and thus exert a true pharmacological influence. Camphor, arsenic, mercury and some other drugs were certainly employed as amulets at a comparatively recent period. Even early amulets, although composed mostly of inert substances, had yet so much of value as resulted from their power of calming and assuring the credulous mind. No intelligent man to-day doubts the power of the mind to so influence the body as to protect it from, and even to cure it of, many forms of disease, and therefore whatever puts the mind in a position to use that power is a cure or preventive of such disease. Not only did talisman, amulet and charm accomplish just this for the credulous—every medical resource that man has used in any age down to the present has acted in this manner in a larger or smaller number of the cases in which it has been tried. And this is

exactly one of the facts that has made the study of pharmaco-dynamics so difficult. It can never be exactly known just how much of the apparent effect of any medicine is due to the influence of the mind of the person taking it. Confidence and hope are the best doctors, and by their aid many a quack has been enabled to pose as a benefactor of his race.

The great step in advance involved in the swallowing of medicines may possibly have resulted from the use of amulets. Whether with the idea of securing efficient contact with the person or not, it is certain that some substances advised as amulets were held to be specially valuable when ground to powder and swallowed. Lapis lazuli, garnet, coral and gold are among the substances so employed.

Although they are still in use even by intelligent persons to-day, it may be truly said that the death blow was given to reliance upon superstitious cures when that greatest physician of antiquity, Hippocrates, showed that diseases depend upon physical causes which may be discovered, understood and in many cases removed or conquered. He taught that disease was due to an improper balance of the four humors of the body, and was caused by seasons, climate, environment, diet, exercise, etc. In thus directing men's minds to a natural cause of disease, he gave the great impulse to the study of rational therapeutics. He himself introduced or at least used the dietetic treatment which has been a favorite medical resource ever since. We have sought to strengthen the liver by eating liver, and the blood by drinking blood. We have fancied we

could concentrate the virtues of a whole market in a few cans of patent food, and save sick nature a deal of digestive trouble while giving her better results, by artificially prepared peptones and pancreatic emulsions. We have analyzed the tissues and devoured phosphorous to make brains and iron to make strength. We have tried Schüssler's biochemical system, and provided the salt whose deficiency or bad behavior in some tissue has originated the disease in hand, trusting nature to assign our contribution to the organ in which it could do the most good.

Then some genius discovered that it devolves upon the physician to maintain the four humors of the body in proper equilibrium. From this idea arose the theory of plethora and the plan of treatment by bleeding, which had such an enduring hold upon the medical mind, but has now sunk to an obscurity which further investigation may determine to be not wholly deserved. Then followed depuration; and purging, vomiting and sweating are the items thought necessary for the recovery of the sick. That such results would follow the ingestion of certain substances must have been learned from the accidental swallowing of poisonous fruits and herbs, another possible way in which the plan of taking medicines into the stomach may have been introduced. One of the objects of the alchemists was to discover a substance which would cure every disease, and trying all the products of creation, they must have become acquainted with many emetics and cathartics even if they observed no finer effects of the drugs they sent into inoffensive stomachs in far from infinitesimal doses. Certain it is that

at one time or another almost every substance to be found in the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdom, from the granite rock and upheaved lava to the parasites, moulds, pathological and putrefactive products, and animal excrements, has been swallowed as a medicine with results pronounced to be most gratifying.

But the alchemists could hardly have investigated the many substances they are known to have tested, without noticing at least that different drugs produce different effects. Armed with this knowledge, the various medical theorists, as they studied anatomy and tried to develop therapeutic systems from its revelations, had some basis for their arrangement of medicines into classes to suit their changing theories. Thus when health was thought to depend upon the "state of the juices" of the body, medicines were classified as solvents, expectorants, alteratives and the like. When all diseases are grouped as either sthenic or asthenic, medicines must be either stimulant or depressant—the former class including musk, volatile alkali, ether, opium, animal food, spices, moderate warmth, wine and exercise; the latter, blood-letting, purgatives, emetics, vegetable diet, sudorifics, cold, rest and abstinence from food. When disease is supposed to depend upon irritability of nerves and muscles, medicines rank as tonic, astringent, antispasmodic, emollient and the like.

But the progress in the study of medical resources which these classifications imply is inconsiderable in comparison with the strides that have been made since the general adoption of Haller's suggestion, that the action of drugs

ought to be studied by careful and systematic physiological experiment. This idea, first practically and extensively worked out by Hahnemann, is now regarded by the whole profession as the only sound basis of scientific pharmacology.

But man in his fight with disease has resorted to many prophylactics and remedies not calculated for introduction into the stomach. Hippocrates himself taught that climate was a cause of disease, and hence that change of climate was a means of cure. This idea has never lost its hold upon the medical profession, and in its development we have sought to analyze climatic elements and apply such of them as the received theory of disease seemed to demand, to any given case at the patient's home. Thus we have oxygen and other gases in various combinations, condensed into receivers and dispensed for home inhalation. Small inhaling tubes are filled with salts and sold as "Italian air," not only for the treatment of bronchial and laryngeal affections, but also to enable singers to acquire such voices as have made Italy famous in the annals of music. Patients have been advised to frequent stables and gashouses for the purpose of inhaling the air; pine-needles and other fragrant substances have been made into invalids' pillows. It has been asserted quite recently regarding certain districts of London where factories have introduced smoke-consuming appliances, that throat and lung diseases have noticeably increased. Treatment by inhalation has developed the idea of forcing into the intestines gaseous enemata. To the variations in atmospheric pressure noticed in different localities medicinal powers have been ascribed,

and they have been imitated and modified in pneumatic cabinets.

Light and heat are climatic elements that have been used to restore health, and the plain sun-bath has been modified by the intervention of blue glass, while to various other colors, especially red and yellow, therapeutic powers have been ascribed. The Turkish bath has brought the torrid zone within easy access, while the Russian bath offers us a damp climate without chilling effects. Heat and moisture in various combinations, and applied by numerous methods, constitute the resources of the hydropathist, who usually calls to his aid that great clarifier of the atmosphere, electricity, now more and more relied upon to develop new life in bodies wasted by disease, worry and overwork.

Mother Earth herself has been utilized as a medicine, not merely in the form of mud baths, as applied in some hydropathic institutions, but *in propria persona* by the plan of burying a patient up to the neck in fresh earth to cure the effects of lightning stroke.

Man may be included among the therapeutic resources of our race, for the sick have called upon him not merely for his sympathy, knowledge and advice, but for something believed to be inherent in his body. The royal touch was an important medicine for centuries; mesmerism, under various names, has puzzled the profession and induced results satisfactory to many patients during generations, while old King David and Baron Rothschild are probably not the only ones who have sought new life and vigor from contact with the body of a young virgin.

The mind of the sick man ranks high both as a prophylactic and curative agent, never more esteemed than at the present day, when there are not wanting those who assert its power to heal the body of any and every ill to which flesh is heir. To it appeal is made when study, travel or entertaining diversions are prescribed, and also when faith, prayer, the so-called "Christian science," and spiritualism are the nominal curative agents. Art and especially music have ministered to the mind diseased, and aided it to effect a mind-cure of the sick body ever since the time when David was appointed court physician to King Saul.

Imagination has been a favorite remedy for many years, having been extensively used by various methods both intentionally and unintentionally. Bread pills have achieved results equalled by few other prescriptions, but their record seems likely soon to be matched by the wonderful powers discovered to reside in the high dilutions of ultra homœopathists. That the use of the latter has often occasioned an unintentional appeal to the therapeutics of imagination pure and simple, is shown by the results of very recent investigations in Germany, which proved that a large number of pharmacists in that country are in the habit of filling homœopathic prescriptions indiscriminately with blank sugar and alcohol. The testing of body temperature by placing a thermometer under the tongue proved in one case to be an excellent and curative remedy for paralysis, and it is well known that the cure of rheumatism by metallic tractors was quite as successfully accomplished when the tractors were

made of wood, but only so long as the patients thought them to be of metal. A large fee through its influence on the imagination is often a valuable consideration to the patient as well as to the physician. "Sympathetic cures" of wounds hardly fall under this head, for in that method—which consisted in the application of a salve or ointment to the weapon by which the wound had been inflicted—the physician required the injured part to be thoroughly cleansed and then left entirely at rest. In this way nature was allowed an opportunity to heal the wound without interference, and nature was a vastly better operator than the meddlesome surgeons who preceded the sympathetic curers; nor did she grudge to the latter the credit of which they robbed her.

Although the expedients of surgery and obstetrics cannot be examined within the limits of the present paper, surgical operations must be allowed a place among therapeutic resources, since removing obstructions, improving natural or providing artificial outlets from the body are methods that have often been tried for the cure of diseases, and mechanical appliances are among the most reliable and satisfactory of remedies. Even spectacles, by correcting deformities of the eye and thus preventing nervous strain, are held to have proved curative in headache and nervous dyspepsia; and respirators, supporters, protectors and devices of clothing must be ranked among prophylactic if not among therapeutic resources.

Exercise, athletics, passive movements, massage, jolting, many sorts of deprivations, rest more or less absolute, matrimony and vice are

each entitled to a place in our list of remedies, but perhaps the strangest medical resource of all is disease itself. Without counting those cases in which pre-existing maladies have been cured by diseases accidentally contracted, as small-pox, which has cured both typhoid fever and catarrhal phthisis, there are a number of diseases which have been advised as medicines. Hemorrhoids and varicose veins have been induced for the purpose of curing insanity. Erysipelas has been engrafted in the hope that it would eradicate cancer; eczema has been used as a remedy for asthma, and strangest of all, since it is selected solely as a prophylactic, throughout the civilized world to-day the most intelligent persons are to be found deliberately mingling with their own presumably healthy blood a vile pathological product, the result of a loathsome zymotic disease in a beast or fellow-man, and doing it with the avowed intention of making themselves sick with a malady abundantly capable of destroying life and sure to depress the vital energies of the body perhaps permanently. They are not only doing this, they have passed laws in some of the freest States and are endeavoring to extend such enactments to others, compelling their fellows *volens volens* to submit to this same infection, and all this in spite of the fact that proof after proof has been brought forward demonstrating incontrovertibly that this vaccination, as it is called, is utterly without avail in protecting either the individual or the community from the dreaded variola.

It would seem as if disease was the ultimate medical resource, but man has gone a step

further, and appealed, if not to death, at least to apparent death as a cure. As a remedy for hydrophobia—not in the stage of fully developed convulsions, which are conceded to be incurable, but while the disease is latent in a person known to have been bitten by a rabid animal—it has been advised to submerge the patient in water until he has ceased to struggle and is actually drowned, after which he is to be resuscitated by artificial respiration. This is probably the ultimate limit beyond which medical investigation is not likely to be fruitful of results.

In studying man's efforts to find an antidote to disease the singular things are that his hope and credulity have been so perennial; that his faith in drugs has led him repeatedly to poison himself to death, while blindly charging the tragedy upon his innocent disease—a thing which has been done to such a fearful extent that many eminent physicians have said that medicines have done more harm than good to the race; that he has so often rediscovered an old and abandoned expedient and trusted to it as something new and promising; and that he has so uniformly insisted upon finding some one resource or class of resources that should meet all requirements. Not content to let one case be cured by purgatives, another by homœopathy, another by the water-cure, and another by "Christian science," he has insisted upon treating all cases, all diseases and all individuals by the method in favor at the time, and in denouncing all other methods as valueless or damaging. But perhaps the most singular thing is the persistence with which he has kept his eyes fixed on externals, and preferably on remedies

rather than prophylactics, and has refused to avail himself of the power within, which a loving Heavenly Father has provided to withstand and conquer disease. The man who asks a physician's advice looks aghast at the idea of paying a fee if no medicine is ordered. He is willing to take anything prescribed by the doctor, the druggist, the astrologer, the priest or the old wife, but not to trust the *vis medicatrix naturæ* divinely implanted within him.

Self indulgence has ever been the prime obstacle in the path of sanitary science. To-day, when that science has reached its furthest advance, popular interest in it is concentrated upon its efforts to destroy bacteria, to shut out sewer gas, to purify drinking water and to quarantine contagion, and hears languidly or not at all its indictment of tobacco, gluttony, drunkenness, luxury and laziness. Most men prefer to see the lancet transfer reeking filth—dignified by its Latin name of vaccine virus—to their own and their children's veins, rather than deny themselves the beer, pork, pudding *et id genus omne* which make small-pox possible. And most women are better pleased to dose themselves, and allow gynæcology to rank as the most profitable medical specialty, than to eat, dress, breathe, exercise, sleep and rear children on nature's plan. So long as these things are true, so long we may expect to see additions made to the pharmacopeia; but when the last resource is exhausted, the last remedy found, it will still be true, as ever before, that the best antidote to disease of whatever name is to "fear God and keep His commandments."





