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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

HEALTH, WEALTH, & HAPPINESS.

BY ARTHUR B. MOSS.

SCIENCE, at the present time, is merely in its infancy. Much as some persons imagine they know, the wise are ever ready to admit that the accumulated knowledge of to-day is but a speck compared with the infinite mass of knowledge that yet remains to be acquired, and that future study and labour will yield to man. Fifty years ago very little was known by the people of this country of sanitary science; the masses lived in total ignorance of the true cause of the undue amount of disease and death among the poor; and it was not till the year 1840, when a Parliamentary Committee of inquiry into the health of towns was appointed, that it was discovered to what a large extent bad ventilation, bad drainage, and impure air were the causes of sickness, disease, and premature death. If we go back some centuries, we shall find that our ancestors were, on the whole, a healthy and hardy people. This may fairly be explained by the fact that they lived a more simple and a more natural life than it is possible for us to do in these days of large towns, small houses, immense populations, excessive competition, railways, tramways, telegraph, and electricity, and when, indeed, it needs hard fighting to obtain the bare means of subsistence. To have muscular force, and the skill to use it, meant that you were well equipped for life's battle; and in the great struggle for existence the elimination of the unfit, which was continuously going on, left the robust and hardy warriors in full possession of the field. In civilised times, however, we have to look at man existing in the cities, towns, and villages, and to ask how it is that he is so often smitten down with diseases the cause of which he is too often entirely ignorant of.

Now, there are few, I presume, who will doubt the fact that many of the employments in which a considerable number of the citizens of this country are daily engaged

are of a very unhealthy character, and that very slight precautions, if any, are taken by employers against the possibility of disease arising through the warehouses, factories, or shops, in which a number of hands are employed, not being properly ventilated. It may be safely said that the lives of thousands are annually sacrificed through this means. And how is this? Is it because employers are utterly reckless concerning the health of those they employ? Is it that masters deliberately seek to ruin the constitution of their servants and to wreck the prospects of thousands of families? Or is it that employers and employes are alike ignorant of the rudiments of sanitary science, and from lack of knowledge allow this frightful evil to continue? The latter, it seems to me, is the most reasonable conclusion to which we can come on this point, for to accept any other explanation would be to tacitly imply that many employers of labour were reckless and inhuman monsters, altogether unfit to live. Let the truth be spoken. We have all of us grown up without a knowledge of the laws of health; and past Governments and individual efforts combined have done very little towards showing the means by which we may avoid disease and become healthy, active citizens. Sanitary science should be taught in our schools, to girls as well as boys; for we should never forget that our daughters become the mothers of subsequent generations, and that upon them devolves the duty of bringing up children so that they may become healthy and intelligent men and women. At present more lectures, similar to those delivered under the auspices of the Manchester and Salford Sanitary Society, are required in every town in England; lectures by ladies specially suited to the requirements of women; and health lectures dealing with the physiological aspect of the subject, as well as others, to men, by gentlemen qualified to speak with authority upon such matters.

Eminent scientists have declared that without a healthy body it is almost impossible to have a healthy mind; the one is dependent upon the other. Healthy bodies are the only trustworthy organs for healthy minds. To repair the waste that is continually taking place in our bodies—to replace the brain waste that occurs from intellectual activity, it is necessary that each individual should have proper food, and sufficient exercise to cause the food to have the most useful effect in our bodies. But it is quite possible to

develop, in almost equal proportions, the mind and the body : allow each faculty to be usefully employed ; enlarge the mind by vigorous thinking ; strengthen the memory by systematic study ; increase the perceptive ability ; develop the muscles by physical effort, by hard labour, or healthful sports ; and so become, as near as possible, physical and mental giants.

One of the chief reasons why so many of our countrymen neglect their health, and fail to cultivate their strength, is because they imagine that a thick, hard hand—a strong, well-developed frame, looks vulgar ; they will not engage in employments in which they are compelled to use physical force : these they consider below their dignity ; and the present constitution of society lends countenance to this mischievous fallacy. As a rule, men and women who employ their strength in daily labour are rendered thereby healthier and stronger individuals, while those who are engaged in merely sedentary occupations decrease in vigour and vital force. Everybody, no matter what his or her employment may be, should apportion a certain time of each day for physical exercise. Men and women alike should practise swimming and rowing, and any other healthful exercises to which their tastes may incline them.

Leaving the large question of healthy or unhealthy employments, the next step is to glance at our habitations, and see whether our surroundings are conducive or not to the happiness of the masses. Four things are imperatively necessary in every home—personal cleanliness, pure air, pure water, and unadulterated food.

Personal Cleanliness.—Cleanliness of the body is one of the surest preventives of disease ; dirt is often the mask behind which disease hides itself when assailing human beings. Against personal cleanliness disease hurls its deadly weapons in vain ; and with a clean home and a clean person one is ensured, to a certain extent, against some of the most insidious foes of human flesh and blood.

Pure Air.—Nothing is more important to man than to see that wherever he goes he breathes pure air—whether at home, or at his club, or travelling in train, bus, or tram. And what is pure air ? Most intelligent people know now that man breathes “two breaths.” The air he gives out and the air he takes in are different ; and they each have a

different effect. Pure air is generally admitted to be composed of four leading constituents—namely, a mixture of three gases (oxygen, nitrogen, and carbonic acid), and of the vapour of water. Air once breathed should not be breathed over again, for the air you give out contains a large proportion of carbonic acid gas, which is the same deadly vapour that is given off after charcoal has been consumed in a room, where all the cracks and crevices have been stopped up to prevent any of the fumes escaping. No person should breathe air heavily charged with carbonic acid gas, else he may expect that his health will seriously suffer. Most probably he will grow up a weak, nervous, pale-faced creature, unfit for the great struggle of life, his depressed condition leading him to resort to drink, in order to give him an artificial vitality, which Nature herself sternly refuses to supply. Many of the poor cause their children to breathe foul air, keeping them all closely huddled together in one small room, where disease is often generated, and where young children are permitted gradually to pine away, without one word of protest from the British public, and with absolute silence from sanitary inspectors. Oxygen and nitrogen give life and health to the human body; they feed the fire of life, which carbonic-acid gas of itself would extinguish. What is wanted, then, is plenty of ventilation in houses, to let in the pure air and let out the foul. The air we breathe, being warm, rises; the cold air descends. Thus, while we breathe out the carbonic acid it ascends towards the ceiling, while the oxygen and nitrogen descend into our mouths.

It is very unhealthy to sleep upon the floor of a room that has been made at all warm during the day, because at night the carbonic-acid gas, which has risen to the ceiling on account of its warmth, has time to cool; it then descends to the ground; and so those who sleep upon the floor absorb into their system this foul air, which has a most baneful effect upon the health.

Considering the large number of deaths annually caused among the poor through neglect and carelessness in regard to proper ventilation, it is well that something should be done to acquaint the working classes in every town in England how much this excessive mortality is due to their own ignorance and folly. Dr. Lyon Playfair once observed that a great part of sanitary science can be comprised in

one word—Cleanliness. If everybody would exercise care in seeing that everything in the home was kept perfectly clean, and that they themselves were cleanly in their habits, the world would be much freer from disease than it is, the atmosphere would be healthier, and zymotic diseases of every kind would certainly decrease.

Pure Water.—This is another essential to good health. In many provincial towns the water supply is in the hands of the Municipal body, and the people can depend upon having a constant supply of pure water; in London, however, the case is different. There the inhabitants have to put up with a very impure article, teeming with sewage matter and animalculæ, which is supplied by water companies at an excessive price.

Unadulterated Food.—Doubtless the Adulteration of Foods Act has done a good deal towards preventing the wholesale consumption of bad food; nevertheless, still more requires to be done, for, as our sanitary inspectors do not prove themselves to be ubiquitous, poor persons are sometimes duped into purchasing diseased for wholesome meat, butterine for butter, and sausages composed of minute morsels of fat, well mixed with numerous particles of mouldy bread, instead of the genuine article. Better far to have a little good meat, even if you have to pay dearly for it, than a large quantity of indifferent stuff. Some eminent men just now are persuading the people to become vegetarians, urging them to live solely on a vegetarian diet. For my part, I hope that the people will hesitate a long while before they adopt the advice of these eminent ones. Looking at the internal physiological structure of man, some have contended that he is more a herbivorous or a frugiferous than a carnivorous animal. Perhaps this is so. Experience, however, is worth a great deal more than theory. Recent chemical science has made clear the fact that more albuminous matter is digestible in animal than in vegetable food; and, generally speaking, vegetarianism does not prosper in cold climates, or in climates of a very variable character. Moreover, if vegetarianism were to become general, it would have the effect of increasing the price of vegetables, and of lowering the standard of the diet of the people of this country. This cannot surely be a desirable result to achieve. Upon the authority of Dr. Charles Drysdale, whom I know from personal experience

to have given the subject deep study for many years, I allege that a mixed diet is preferable for man. The learned Doctor says: "Hofmann found that, on feeding men with potatoes, lentils, and bread, only 38.7 of the nitrogenous matter has been digested; 44.4 escaped from the body undigested. Meineret, again, found that the whole of the nitrogen in meat was digested with the exception of 2.6 per cent.; that the same occurred with milk, eggs, and cheese." Vegetarianism pure and simple is impracticable; most so-called vegetarians eat eggs and milk, neither of which can be rightly described as vegetables.

Having done all that is possible to acquire good health, it becomes necessary for every adult person to make an effort towards securing additional wealth, and to increase the prosperity of the country in which he lives. "Money is the root of all evil," some insane moralist has declared; there are a good many, however, who would be the better if they could get a firm clutch at this root. A man may cut his throat with a razor: is the razor or the man to blame? It is the wrong use of money that is an evil. Many persons still suppose that wealth consists in the possession of so much hard cash, notwithstanding the frequency with which Political Economists have exposed the fallacy of this idea. Money is not wealth; it is merely a means of exchange; it is the medium by which one article is bartered for another. And it should be understood that it is quite possible for a nation to be at the height of its prosperity with the majority of the workers in the country on the verge of starvation. The rich may possess all the real wealth. They may have in their hands the land, which should be in all countries a great source of wealth; they may have trade, and, while reaping rich harvests for themselves, may grind down those who assist them to amass fortunes; and they may add to this the advantage which uniform and combined power gives in the Legislative Chamber. But, for a nation to be truly great, each individual should at least have the chance of acquiring the means of subsistence. In many old countries at the present time this is not the case. So many people are born that many of them perish for the want of the mere necessities of life.

Now, the only source of wealth accruing to the working classes is the surplus from wages after all necessary expenses

in support of the family and home are made. At the present rate of wages very little can be put by each week by the poor to be used at times of emergency. The demand for labour is not large ; the supply is enormous ; and the law of supply and demand, and the consequent increase or decrease of price, applies just as much to human labour as to any commodity brought into the market. Let working men remember this ; let them remember that it is no use grumbling, and forming Unions to protect themselves against employers, when their wages go down ; they have only one remedy, and that is the limitation of their offspring, by wise prudence preventing the labour market from being overstocked. Wages are low in England because there are too many labourers in the field, and in the struggle for existence the very poor are compelled to accept the lowest possible wage. In New Zealand labour is well paid because there are fewer labourers, and these, therefore, command their own price. Among many erroneous statements, Canon Kingsley said that science disproved that population has a tendency to increase beyond the means of subsistence. Saying this does not prove it. If science disproves the truth of the rather unpleasant discovery of the Rev. Mr. Malthus, it is somewhat singular that scientific men appear to be totally ignorant of it. Dr. Darwin bases the whole of his inferences in "The Origin of Species" on what the late Lord Chief Justice Cockburn declared was an "irrefragable truth"—viz., "that all animated matter has the tendency to increase beyond the means of subsistence." From ignorance in respect to this law, the poor get poorer and poorer, until many of them have to seek refuge in our workhouses, to be kept at the expense of the ratepayers. Is not this a great iniquity ? Are the thoughtful and frugal ever to be pulled down by the thoughtless and the dissolute ? Poverty and crime are twin brothers ; throughout life they are invariably associated. Civilisation means increased comfort, additional knowledge, and more leisure for the masses ; poverty, being opposed to these, is in reality opposed to higher civilisation.

Whether drunkenness is increasing or diminishing is a question that cannot be decisively answered. We all know, however, that the drinking customs of society still entail an enormous amount of misery among all classes, and that poverty is augmented by this means. Drunkenness, indeed,

is a great cause of poverty ; but it is not the chief cause. Poverty may also be truly said to be a great cause of drunkenness, or, if it is not a cause, it is certainly an aggravation of the offence. Surrounded by evil influences and a dirty home, and without the means of getting sufficient food to sustain life, persons stupidly fly to drink : the artificial excitement caused by the alcoholic liquors soon dies away, and the drunkard is left to sorrow and despair.

Men want wealth : how are they to get it ? By an assiduous devotion to their daily work ; by enterprise ; by thrifty and temperate habits ; and by a wise limitation of their offspring. It is possible for all persons to live in comfort and happiness ; but, then, they must look upon poverty, not as a blessing, but as a positive evil. Remove the chief cause of poverty—a redundant population—educate the masses, and with increased knowledge the way will soon be found by which the other evils may be removed. Health first, then comfort, arising from a possession of a sufficiency of the good things of this life ; and as pain is obliterated, and pleasure takes its place, the increased happiness of the masses is ensured. What is happiness ? says one. Does it not differ in each individual ? Does not one seem happy at results which give others pain ? To each of these questions a reply must be given in the affirmative. But we aim at the highest happiness for all, and this can only be achieved by removing all obstacles like poverty and misery to the progress of the people.

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