

# Was a Microbe Maniac

Alfred Royce had duly qualified himself in the noble science of medicine. A rude French savant once flouting the famous but quite unscientific dictum that this is the science of pouring drugs of which its practitioners know very little into the bodies of which they know nothing at all. But Royce had taken his studies very seriously. He was resolved to know all there was to be known of medicine. He had done well academically. He had acquired the right of practicing after the last letter of his diploma, and you shall march to certain success."

The great doctor spoke so quietly, and with such obvious conviction, that Royce became in a moment enthusiastically anxious to go farther in this mysterious matter.

"I agree to everything," he said, "and I am ready to take your word as to the safety of the thing as a financial investment. I am in your hands, Sir Bruce."

"Then listen, and you shall know first the fundamental principle upon which is based my action in now taking you up, and before you many other smart young fellows, all of whom I have satisfactorily started in life. My aim is the loftiest imaginable; it is the cause of science. I have given up practicing, as you may be aware, in order to devote myself to scientific investigations, which I carry on both personally and also through the medium of others of whom I get to hear as possessing the necessary disposition—such as yourself. I have in this cabinet several small bottles; the contents of each is of inestimable value, and the result of years of patient labor and research. After careful personal instruction and experiment, I entrust to each of my disciples one of these. Can you make a guess as to their contents—here is one, look at it. For the love of heaven do not let it drop; so—carefully—what is it, now?"

The bottle contained liquid, in which floated a cloudy yellowish substance, as to which Royce declined to hazard an opinion without careful inspection and analysis.

"These are the microbes of a very terrible disease," said Sir Bruce; "there are sufficient here to infect and destroy the entire population of London."

"Good Lord!" answered Royce, almost dropping the phial in his amazement. Sir Bruce continued his explanation.

"Now, in the first place, I shall ask you to do me the favor to be my guest at this house for one week from—the 24th. It is part of the scheme."

"I shall be very happy," said Royce, somewhat nervously, "so long as it is not your intention to experiment upon me."

"Far from it," Sir Bruce laughed; "flat experimentum in corpore vilo! It is my own vile body that is to be made the victim. This microbe develops on the tenth day; that is why I have fixed upon the 24th. I now detach an infinitesimal particle from the mass and—no, no, you need not be alarmed; I assure you that I know very well indeed what I am about—I swallow a minute portion in water—there, it is done; in ten days you shall have a patient, but long before that time you shall have become well aware how to attack and overpower the disease as soon as it shall have declared itself. I shall scarcely be ill for a single day."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Royce, "then your system is to—"

"To teach each pupil how to be a specialist in a single terrible malady, and afterwards to supply him with the wherewithal to make name and fortune by insuring a constant demand for his services. This is a species of typhoid microbe. I shall soon teach you how to exterminate it from the system attacked." It was at this point that Royce began to suspect the sanity of the great man.

"But, my dear sir," he ejaculated, "you are suggesting to me a criminal proceeding; this is simply murder—"

"Oh, dear, no! Oh, dear, no, by no means! Murder, indeed, as if I— you are to be the saviour of many lives, young sir, not the taker; you shall never have a fatal case; each patient shall be cured, I guarantee it, as soon as treated; you shall see that this may, nay, must be so; the system is infallible."

"But what if, after I have poisoned the water, or milk, or what not, with these microbes, the first or any victim should summon some other medic—"

"In that case the patient is no worse off than he would be in the ordinary course if he should have contracted this malady; it will yield to the usual treatment, though my treatment—ours, let us call it—is both surer and quicker. It is better,

however, to commence operations where there is little likelihood of interference from a rival practitioner. I have lists of rising places unprovided with medical men, mostly in the colonies, but there are still some in England. It is an easy matter to keep your disease well in hand. Just as easy as it is to allow it to become epidemic."

"But surely there must be frequent mistakes made by your pupils, and the disease allowed to go out of hand or to claim victims whose cases are not heard of until too late."

"I choose my men. I admit my fellows have, occasionally, as you say, made mistakes; but very rarely. There was young Burmeister, who settled at Maidstone, and made a terrible mess with a phial of this very bacteria; fell ill, silly fellow, between the inoculation and the development of the disease, and was himself in hospital with peritonitis when he should have been leading the attack and laying the foundation of a great reputation. The same thing nearly happened lately in Glasgow. My young friend accidentally disseminated bubonic plague and was half way to his new practice in the far east before the consequences of his carelessness became apparent. Glasgow is his native town, you see, and he was paying a farewell visit there when he allowed the escape of a small amount of bacterial matter. Luckily he was not suspected."

For two days Royce remained as a guest in the house of the great bacteriologist. The whole of that time was employed by the latter in teaching his latest pupil the secret and infallible method of treating patients who should have become infected by the typhoid microbe, of which Royce was to become possessed of a bottleful. Sir Bruce, learned and enthusiastic, claimed special virtues for his method; the developed microbe would be attacked and defeated in a day or two, he declared, instead of fighting for many weeks, as under the ancient treatment, before sullenly retiring vanquished by the old-fashioned medical science opposed to it. Royce recognized with delight that he had become possessed of a great secret. This alone was worth, many times over, his poor little capital of nine hundred pounds. His conscience revolted against the use of the phialful of deadly organisms which were to form part of his money's worth. But then the phial and its contents could be destroyed or kept for purposes of study—the secret and priceless treatment for typhoid cases would remain.

Within forty-eight hours Royce had mastered all that could be learned, from a literary point of view, of his speciality. The treatment was simple enough. Sir Bruce spared no pains in explaining over and over again every detail connected with it; so that when Royce returned home after two days of coaching he was sure of himself.

"Return on the 24th," said the elder man, as Royce left the house; "I shall depend on you."

He did return on the 24th; returned just in time to find the old man in the full grip of the malady, temperature very high, head bursting with pain, delirious—thoroughly ill.

"Sir Bruce gave orders I was to say he left the case in your hands, sir," said the man; "I was to send for you if you wasn't here by 11."

Confident, but somewhat anxious without, Royce set himself to apply the prescribed remedies. He made no mistake. He worked hard for twelve hours, at the end of which time Sir Bruce was quite out of danger, within a day he was greatly better; in three he was convalescent; Royce had scored an entire success.

"I have never had a pupil who did it better," said Sir Bruce with admiration. "I shall see you go forth into the world without a quail; no fear of any Maidstone or Glasgow idiosyncrasy in your case! I wish I could teach you the treatment for a few other maladies, in the cause of humanity; but these phials of micro-organisms represent each one an expenditure of time and labor, the extent of which you would scarcely credit."

"I don't want the phials," said Royce. "Look here, I only wish you would take this bottle back, and teach me another secret instead."

Sir Bruce was surprised. "I do not consider one is justified," Royce continued, "in spreading a horrible disease, even though he is absolutely sure of hunting up and curing every sufferer, which, of course, one can never be. However, I should think my money was well spent in learning what you have already taught me, and if you would rather not do that which I suggest, I am content to leave it as it is."

The older man adduced many arguments, the chief contention being that for the benefit of the many it is expedient and even necessary that a few should suffer. "I do not hesitate to allow my own body to be experimented upon," he said, "and I see no wrong in causing a small amount of

suffering to others for the useful purpose of science."

But Royce was inflexible, and in the end Sir Bruce gladly coached his pupil in the method of attacking a second species of bacteria.

This time it was the cholera microbe. This time, too, the old man nearly succumbed to the attack of the terrible ravager taken voluntarily into his system. He was somewhat weakened by his very recent attack of typhoid, a fact which he had not sufficiently considered. Royce found him in a condition of collapse, from which, however, by applying his newly-learned remedies, he duly brought his patient round.

Sir Bruce expressed gratitude. "The rascals developed their attack six hours before I expected it," he explained. "But for your smartness I should have succumbed. The anguish was terrible. I do not know when I shall summon resolution to educate another pupil by personal experience."

"Take my advice and let me be your last," said Royce. "You have done enough for science and you can't want money."

"No, I have sufficient, and I think I have done well enough for science, but it is a mania with me, and I feel that I shall continue to send out pupils until the end."

"The poor old fellow is as mad as a hare!" was the conclusion at which Royce arrived. He had thought this from the first, but was not quite sure of it.

A month later, before he had started for his destination, a certain cholera-infected district in India, Royce was surprised by a visit from Sir Bruce's valet. The man came excitedly into the room while Royce sat at his breakfast. Royce knew him well and had had many a talk with him.

"For heaven's sake sir, come quick to my master," he cried. The fellow was half frantic with terror. "I'm afraid he's dying."

"Good Lord, man, what's up?" asked Royce, hurriedly putting on his hat and gloves and preparing to go.

"Sir Bruce has never been the same, sir, since having the two attacks one after the other while you were there. He's taken another pupil now, and if I was asked I should say he wasn't fit for experimenting again just yet, but this new gent was in a hurry to study his subject and go."

The two men were now in a cab together hurrying towards Harley street.

"Has the pupil lost his head, then—or why doesn't he apply the remedies he has been taught?"

"Eaven only knows, sir, that's what I hope you'll find out and save Sir Bruce's life."

Royce found the new student in despair and at his wits' end. The young man accompanied him to Sir Bruce's bedside. The old scientist lay obviously dying.

"He hasn't been conscious since it took him," said the student; "he swallowed the diphtheria microbe, and I have been applying his own patent remedy as he taught me, but the treatment has failed. It doesn't look like diphtheria to me. What do you think?"

Royce recognized the symptoms at once. The old man was in the first stage of typhoid fever. Without a word he set about applying the remedies which had succeeded so well but a little while since. But he was too late.

The old man regained consciousness however, presently, and even rallied for a short while. He recognized Royce at his bedside, and smiled. The student was out of the room. As Sir Bruce seemed to desire to speak, Royce bent his ear to listen.

"I think you were right," he whispered. "I have tried too much—typhoid, cholera and diphtheria all within six weeks—"

"There is no question of diphtheria, Sir Bruce," said Royce, "you are suffering from typhoid—"

"What?" exclaimed the old man, actually raising his weak body into a sitting position—"impossible! It was the next phial in the case—there could be no mistake—"

"Stop, sir—what of my two phials—did you not put them back in the cabinet? If so, it would have been easy to forget that you had done so, and to use the phial which lay at the top."

The old scientist was silent a moment or two.

"It is time I died," he said presently, "if I can no longer distinguish between the contents of two of my own phials!"

When the student returned to the room Royce spoke to him somewhat sternly.

"You should have diagnosed the case for yourself," he said; "any man can see there is no question of diphtheria here."

"But one does not expect the ordinary here," said the youth pertinently. "I naturally applied the remedies prescribed for himself by our friend. I took it for granted that he had swallowed the diphtheria bacillus and treated him strictly in accordance with the instructions I had

received. When I felt doubtful I sent for you—I don't see what I could have done more than I have."

Both Royce and the student did all that was possible to save the old man but their efforts were in vain, and he died within an hour, a victim to his own microbes.

As soon as the breath was out of the old man's body, Royce appropriated the cabinet in which were collected the fateful phials.

"I think I'll take these medicines with me and destroy them," said Royce, addressing the faithful valet; "you needn't say anything about it if inquiries are made, they are dangerous drugs and should not be left about."

Royce carried the cabinet in fear and trembling. What if he should slip and drop it? There were eleven phials, each filled with sufficient deadly organisms to infect and destroy the entire population of London; the thought made his head swim, and he stood a moment to pull himself together. Then he hailed a cab and drove out to Barnes Common, where he despatched it. Selecting a quiet spot far from the frequented paths that led across the Common, he collected a pile of dry grass and sticks, sufficient to roast a sheep withal. Over this he emptied first one phial, then several, and watched the flames spit and crackle as they ruthlessly destroyed the deadly fruits of many years of patient research and investigation. He allowed the fire to burn itself out, then he collected the ashes and mixed them with a new supply of dry fuel and rekindled this; he dug up and burned the earth around the fire, then he went away.

A fortnight later a tramp passed the spot; his pipe would not draw and he took a small charred twig to clean it out. Not long afterwards an inmate of the Casual Ward at Brixton was taken ill; it was found to be a case of rapid tuberculosis. The tramp died, but fortunately—so far as can be known—without spreading the mischief. A child, playing at

hide-and-seek on Barnes Common with his companions, several months after this, dropped a sweet as he ran; it fell upon the remains of Royce's bonfire. Unwilling to lose the dainty, he picked it up and popped it into his mouth. Within a fortnight the poor lad lay tossing in a river-side fever hospital, while the vestry authorities in his district were deeply concerned to discover the origin of the attack. The milk and the drinking water of the district were suspected and scrutinized, but they were innocent and the mystery remained unsolved.

As for Royce, he is rapidly making his fortune. The son of the Rajah of his district had the ill-luck to succumb to the cholera epidemic raging that season in the province. Royce, whose name was already upon the lips of the people as a doctor of marvellous skill, was sent for, and within a couple of days the young prince was well. The Rajah, who was devoted to the lad, did not consider half a lac of rupees too large a fee for this service. He has further appointed Royce regular medical attendant to his court at a salary of the equivalent of £1,500 a year as a retaining fee, illnesses to be extra.

Sir Bruce's last pupil proved utterly unworthy of the trust confided in him in the shape of a phialful of the diphtheria bacillus. He was fool enough to experiment upon himself, believing that he would be able to apply the remedies as easily in his own person as in any other. But in the languor and feebleness of the horrible illness that followed he had neither the strength nor the energy to attend to such matters. When he died the phial, containing more potential death than the grim armaments of a battleship, was put away with "other medicine bottles." The population of the town and district in which he lived, walk with naked lights over a powder magazine, suspecting nothing.—Fred Wishaw.

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