

Curious "Cures" in China

ROBERT C. BEEBE, M.D., SUPERINTENDENT, NANKING HOSPITAL, NANKING, CHINA.

WHILE there are doctors galore in China there is no system of medical education and no regulation of the practice of medicine by the government. There never has been any systematic study of anatomy and physiology. The prevalent theories in regard to both these branches of study are ridiculously absurd, and consequently the theories in regard to disease are very often of a similar character.

While they are not able to correctly interpret the phenomena of disease, the Chinese are careful observers and have learned a good deal in regard to diet and care of the sick. When a system of western medical education is established in the empire, as it surely will be in the near future, Chinese physicians and surgeons will easily and quickly take their place in the front ranks of the profession.

Tuberculosis is one of the common diseases of China. Affliction of the joints and infiltration of the glands are frequent manifestations of the trouble, but the Chinese do not recognize it until the lungs are involved, and then it is called *Fri Yung*, or abscess of the lung. This is considered a very serious disease and is much feared. Pulmonary hemorrhages are looked upon with great alarm, and when one person who is in a controversy with another threatens to "spit blood" it usually serves as a final and effective way of bringing his antagonist to terms. There is a common saying among the people in regard to consumption that shows that long ago they had learned something about its contagion. They say of this disease, "*Kotsing kiah puh ko ling kiah*," that is, "It infects near relatives but not neighbors."

That the disease is not more prevalent than is in China is perhaps due to two reasons. One is that they do not live in close and artificially heated houses. Their homes are

open, as a rule, to a court on the south side. When cold weather comes they keep warm by putting on more clothing and getting out in the sunshine. Another reason that prevails through Central China and, I presume, elsewhere, is that it is customary for one who has a cough to keep near him a spitbox. Every sedan chair is provided with a neat little spitbox fastened on one side and a pretty flower holder on the other side. Those for the sedan chair are made of pewter, with narrow neck and wide mouth and bottom so that they will not spill if tipped over. Those carrying a hand spitbox usually line them with a kind of straw paper so that the contents and the lining is easily turned out and the box kept comparatively clean.

In regard to treatment, the poor patient, in this as in other troubles suffers much from many physicians. He usually goes from one doctor to another while life and hope lasts. Sometimes a patient gets well in spite of the doctors, as will occur in more favored countries. I was once called to see a young man who seemed to be in a rather hopeless condition. I told his parents that he had tuberculosis, that the lungs were seriously involved and that I could not guarantee a cure, but advised a line of treatment, including fresh air, nourishment and tonic. My prognosis not being a very hopeful one, they went back to the Chinese physicians and called in one with a reputation for curing lung troubles. Some time afterwards I met the father of the young man and inquired after his son. He delightedly told me that his son was entirely well and had been cured by the lung doctor. I inquired what treatment they used and he told me that the doctor had ordered a soup made by boiling the entrails of a chicken in water in which soiled cloths had been washed. He made a rapid and complete recovery.

I suppose that line of treatment would be classed as *forced feeding*.

Dr. William Osler on "the Human Steam Engine"

"Like locomotives, people are made to last a certain time, and, like them, they require repairs. Small repairs can be done inside, but for large repairs they have to go to the doctor. Sometimes this is successful, sometimes not."

"Milk was the original food of man, not meat. Many people get on without meat, if they eat porridge, which is just as good, but the trouble is that most people eat too much of both, and so injure the works."