

The Ingle Nook

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Health in the Home.

DEAR Ingle Nook Friends—During last summer holiday season I took a short course of medical lectures, in the hope that I might get some hints to pass on to you. I was not disappointed, and, now that a number of "seasonable" things have been disposed of, at last find an opportunity to write up something from my notes taken during the lectures. Of course, as the lectures were addressed to the doctors, much was extremely technical, so much so that I, without much previous training, found difficulty, often, in following, and, indeed, lost many points altogether. I was quite surprised, however, to find how much of medical lore is not beyond the grasp of the "laity," and that realization gave me an idea of how much more of it might be conveyed, clearly enough to be grasped by people in general, in lectures prepared primarily for them, and addressed to them with the definite object of bringing about better health in the homes.

The lecturer, Dr. Crane of the Western Medical College, was, by the way, a man who "keeps up to the very last minute" in medical science,—and that, as you may know, in any branch of science means *everything*. You may have heard it said that the up-to-date doctor's library should be scrapped, like the Dreadnoughts of the Navy, at least every ten years, and, for the most part, it is perfectly true. Any doctor who keeps on treating patients according to teachings of the books, written ten, fifteen or twenty years ago, is decidedly a back number, and should be gently but effectively shelved unless he wakes up and changes his ways. Indeed one of the strongest impressions I had during the lectures was that the really *alive* doctor will not trust altogether to books five, two, or even one year old, but will keep absolutely abreast of the times, taking the medical journals, buying the newest books recommended by the highest medical authorities, keeping accurate records of his "cases," and—last, but not least,—taking time for at least one annual course at some advanced institution. Dr. Crane's constant advice to students of the Western Medical School is: "Take as many courses as you can before you begin to practise, and then a course every year after." Dr. Crane himself, although he is a staff worker in the College and not a general practitioner, observes this rule as faithfully as he can, some of his courses having been taken at the famous Mayo clinic at Rochester, Minn. And one this year at the summer school of the University of Chicago. . . . Indeed, so strongly was I impressed, during the lectures with the advisability of this necessity for *aliveness*, in regard to both courses and medical literature, on the part of the practising physician, that, were it necessary for me to have a doctor in any serious illness, I would every time choose the one who keeps thoroughly in touch with the *latest* discoveries. Judging by obvious signs it is not hard to distinguish the one who does so, yet keeps solid ground under his feet, from the merely erratic man caught by passing fads, who will never make a real success in his practice. And one of the signs is that if possible he really goes away every summer for a post-graduate course in some really advanced institution. Really advanced institutions do not run to fads. They are very careful about setting the seal of their approval on things that have not been thoroughly tested.

Another lesson that I carried away from the lecture-hall, was the necessity for suspicion in regard to "patent medicines." In the first place, it is practically impossible for the ordinary person, with almost no knowledge of his inward machinery, to diagnose for his ailment. In the second place so many of the so-called "cures" are fakes, pure and simple—harmless perhaps, even helpful to the general health in some respect, yet absolutely useless in curing any serious malady or derangement of any affected organ. As an example the story was told in our lecture-room of a medical student who thought he had gall-stones

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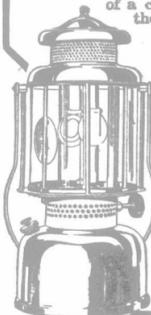


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and, partly for purposes of experiment, tried a remedy very largely advertised as a perfect cure for the disease. Indeed it offered positive proof, for the "directions" stated that, after taking the medicine, the gall-stones would be found in the stools, if one took the trouble to wash them out. The student took the medicine—and found the gall-stones, which he carried in a bottle, in some triumph, to Dr. Crane. . . . But here the story turns. On examination it was found that the gall-stones were soap,—nothing more nor less than soap! Subsequent analysis found the "medicine"

to be composed of olive oil, with something to make it "smell" like medicine, and a powder containing soda.—And now, can you housewives who have made hard soap for household use see through the trick? You know that when you make soap you boil together fat of some kind and lye (an alkali). Now medical science has shown that soaps are formed in the intestines by fatty acids and alkali. The result of giving a baby too much fat (cream) in its diet results in what is known to a doctor as "soap stools" (not "curds").—The maker of the gall-cure medicine in question, whether doctor or druggist, knew this, knew what would help to turn the olive oil (a pure fat) into particles of soap in the intestines, and so hit upon the sharp, but rascally trick of advising the sufferer to examine the stools for gall-stones. . . . The olive oil, as everyone knows, is usually good for the system, especially for people who need more fat in their diet, but the gall-stone medicine made from it certainly must fail as a cure for gall-stones. For gastric ulcer, however, olive oil is highly recommended by the best authorities, as it lubricates the digestive tract and, at the same time, nourishes the body. Fats decrease the hydrochloric acid in the stomach and so are useful when there is too much acid, as often happens in gastric ulcer and in hyperacidity.

Before leaving this subject of patent medicines it may be noted that, as the lecturer said, bitter tonics for run-down folk usually do more harm than good. A similar story might be told of scores of other nostrums, widely advertised and sold by the million, benefiting the manufacturers' and druggists' money bags, it is true, but very little else.

Having made it clear, then, that it is foolish to try to diagnose for oneself, that it is risk to try "cures" on one's own

authority, and that the best thing to do in case of bodily derangement is to go at once to the very best doctor within reach, we may pass on.

Throughout the lectures it was very apparent that physicians of the highest type lay very great stress on healthful living. Even ten or fifteen years ago one heard comparatively little of that; the course of affairs then was to let people get sick, then give them medicine, and treatment, to cure them. Nowadays the best doctors give comparatively little medicine, but a great deal of instruction in regard to living—conditions that will tend to bring back health—fresh air, bathing, and, above all things, suitable diet.

Indeed, in some localities, doctors are devoting themselves to heading off disease in the first place, before it has time to gain headway, striving to check epidemics, and to give the people such instruction about general health conditions as will tend to keep them well instead of letting them become ill and in special need of a doctor's care—the old story about locking the stable after the horse has got away. Among such doctors are those who are giving their work through the various Institutes of Public Health that are being established throughout the world.—I mean such doctors as are truly and enthusiastically devoted to the cause, not those who look upon such a position as a sinecure.—For even in an Institute of Public Health may chance to come a man who is interested only in himself and not at all in the public. Perhaps this is a danger that must be watched for in any such salaried institution, but it should not be hard, after a very short time, to know any man who neglects his duty, or who can be bought off to sanction crowded meetings, open theatres etc., during a dangerous epidemic. When a doctor, holding a public position of such responsibility proves to be one