

## VICIOUS CIRCLES IN MEDICINE.\*

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Sir Clifford Allbutt has somewhere in his usual exquisite literary style referred to the part which the modern physician plays in the relief of disease, as that of the aucillary mouse in Aesop's Fable, indicating his belief that while Nature plays by far the greater part in the relief of sickness, the well-trained physician, the iatros polypeiros of Hippocrates, is called upon many times to nibble one string of the net that enmeshes the sick lion, and so set him free to complete his own work of healing. This is another way of saying that ill-health consists usually of a vicious circle, or of many such, which must be wisely broken in upon at the selected point, so that Nature, some of whose compensatory processes are at fault, may be set straight.

We may, perhaps, before defining Health define the term Vicious Circle. The logician by this term means *argumentum in circulo*, in which certain conclusions are drawn from certain premises and used again to prove the correctness of those premises, so that as in a circle there is no starting point. The term was many years ago transferred to medical nomenclature, and means a condition in which, while the cause produces the effect, the effect continues and reproduces the cause, so that both the proverbs are correct, "*Ablato effectu cessat causa*," and "*Ablata causa, cessat effectus*."

Before going into a prolonged discussion of these vicious circles it may be well to definitely state our views as to what Health means. In the first place, it is a purely relative term, because what is to one individual sound health might be, if suddenly transferred to the experience of another, a state of miserable ill-health. The chlorotic girl with 50% hemoglobin may, like a bird in his cage unaccustomed to liberty, feel quite well and cease taking her iron; the same blood state suddenly occurring in a healthy male would undoubtedly induce an acute sensation of ill-health.

Health is perhaps best defined as the normal balance of all the interacting body processes, for the maintenance of which a whole host of circles must exist. This means that, in addition to the absence of vicious circles, health depends upon a proper balance of physiological or normal circles, the interaction of

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