

THE SANITARY JOURNAL.

VOL. VII.

JUNE-JULY, 1885.

No. 8

HYGIENE OF THE AGED.

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MONTHLY, JULY, 1885.

Different epochs in life are marked by the frequency or infrequency of certain morbid phenomena constituting that departure from the normal standard of health which we denominate disease.

What is life? is the unanswerable question the human race has ever sought to solve. Bichat called it "the sum of the functions by which death is resisted." Physiologists of the present day offer little more that is satisfactory in their definitions, calling it "the aggregate of the phenomena peculiar to living organisms." The inscrutable mystery which surrounds the principle of vitality renders any attempt at definition illogical and unsatisfactory. We have to deal with the phenomena of life, and the functions through which these phenomena are manifested. In the child we have an exuberance of life. Manhood is the period of repose; waste and repair seem to neutralize each other; and calmness, deliberation, and quietude prevail.

With old age comes disturbance, waste without repair, destruction without building up, action without reaction, decay and death. These phases of animal life are constantly repeating themselves. In discussing the diseases of old age, we have to deal with the phenomena of life, the perversion of functions which have counterbalanced each other. The prime of manhood and stability is passed; internal resistance now fails to maintain itself against external force. Nutritive action does not respond to the demand to renew effete material. The equilibrium being destroyed, decay and the products of decomposition become the most important factors in the study of the diseases which now threaten to disintegrate this hitherto self-sustaining system.

It will easily be seen that the diseases which disturb the formerly evenly balanced organism tend toward what pathologists call destructive metamorphosis. Blood-changes, tissue-changes, and secretory changes, are subjecting us to constantly varying standards of health. How to maintain the equipoise as long as possible, and prevent the too rapid decline of the vital forces, as well as to suggest measures—when care and forethought can ward off the blow—is the province of the thoughtful medical man.

Threescore years and ten should certainly be reached by most of those who attain adult age, provided no inherited taint weakens the vital forces. It is difficult to determine the exact period of life at which the decline commences. In fact, there can be no absolute standard from which we can predict with unvarying certainty the gradual failure of the physical powers. Some seem to inherit a vitality which almost defies the ravages of time; but, although they are apparently in the full vigor of life, close scrutiny rarely fails to detect the fact that the scale is tipping downward. We do not grow old in a night, although we often make the remark that So-and-so has grown ten years older since the occurrence of some great grief, or some disastrous reverse in business. The eye-sight gets poorer, the hair and beard greyer and thinner; the form is more bent, the walk more uncertain the *arcus senilis* appears in a cornea. After all, this is not old age; these are all warnings, but the heart is still warm, the eye still bright, the muscles still firm. The world looks as inviting as it did in early manhood or womanhood—a little larger print to read, a smoother road to walk on, a few more flannels at night, and a little less labor during the day, with perhaps a greater disposition for quiet, a greater fondness for home-life, and a disinclination to encourage the enthusiasms which time and experience have so often proved to them to be illusive.