

The effect of the practice of the principles of scientific sanitation has already been to enormously diminish the death-rate among infants, and to prolong the duration of human life, as evidenced by the continued decrease in the rate of mortality and the consequent increase of the population of the world. Man is not born to wither and die in a few days—his term of life is measured in Holy Writ at three score and ten, and may even extend far beyond that limit. Accident and circumstance alone disturb that order. The saving power of sanitary regulations in the prevention of the spreading of contagious diseases, is well illustrated by its operation in 1892 in New York Harbour. There were eleven cases of cholera at one time in that great mercantile “rendezvous” of the world, and not one single case of secondary infection took place. In England, so great is the public dependence upon the controlling power of Boards of Health, that little or no attention is now paid to the accidental introduction of a case of cholera or other dangerous epidemic disease.

The principle contained in Pasteur’s germ theory of the cause of fermentation and decomposition, was applied by Lister to the prevention of suppuration in surgical wounds, with the result of immediately revolutionizing the whole system of surgical practice the world over. Its application to surgery has proved to be even a greater boon than it was to medicine, and Lister’s name will be blessed for ages, by countless numbers of human beings whose lives have been saved by the genius of that great man.

What a debt of gratitude the whole world owes to those three great heroes of science, Jenner, Pasteur, and Lister? What a world of hidden treasures disclosed do their names suggest?

We have in the lives of these great men the history of the whole progress of medical science in relation to the prevention of diseases—a progress that has never been equalled in degree or importance by that of any other profession in the known world. When we consider the science of medicine in respect to the application of its powers, as a “Healing Art,” we find also that great advances have been made. Improved methods of diagnosis, a better knowledge of the pathology of diseases, new and elegant preparations of the active principles of valuable drugs, the recognition of the medicinal properties of certain animal substances, &c., have all tended to strengthen the physicians’ hands and to increase his powers for good.