

## THE VILLAIN

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Custom has it that an outline of Homœopathy should start with the Law of Similars. So it can, of course. But Homœopathy is distinguished in other ways, too, and even more-dramatically. For instance, Homœopathy cut through six or seven thousand years of misconception and delivered the first clear notion of medicine's purpose.

Without particular analysis, man took the plausible view that illness involving misery and disability was an evil working against him. At various times and places through the ages, this took a number of forms in man's imagination: evil spirits, little devils, foul impurities, invisible hordes, from which man needed refuge, or against which he needed shelter, or to repel which he needed defenses. With minor variations the presumption was that illness was some kind of attack directed against man from somewhere outside of man himself, in the face of which man had little or no power of his own.

To meet and deal with the imaginary enemy, man contrived cantations to scare off the devils, ceremonials to drive away the evil spirits, purges and fasts to clear out the impurities, prayers to the gods, war on the invisible hordes, and engaged sorcerers with mystic insights who could stand between man and his enemy, using attributes that man felt the need of but supposed he did not have.

From the mystic priests and medicine men of old descends the more studious medical profession of today, but until Homœopathy came to flower there was no departure from the ancient creed of human helplessness crouching dismayed before unseen foes in the shape of sickness. Even yet, if there are evil spirits and little devils no longer, there are still diseases coming devilishly from somewhere to impress their morbid designs on innocent health, and the business of medicine is still taken to be to ferret them out and somehow to dispose of

them. So as medical colleges gradually crystallized, they made their studies on diseases, as if diseases could be studied by themselves apart from sick people, on the supposition that if a day could be brought around when the last disease had been destroyed then health would ensue automatically.

Now, after more than a century and a half of Homœopathy, the enemy disease is still prevalently in the imagination of man as the villain in the medical plot. Medicine is pictured as a "fight" against diphtheria, tuberculosis, polio, rheumatoid arthritis or whatever else. The first problem of the doctor called to a case sickness, according to this enemy concept, is to decide which "disease" he must combat. For separate diseases and groups of diseases there are separate specialists with special weapons, and among the specialists there are also those who trace the movement of diseases over the surface of the planet, called epidemiologists. One of the principal services expected of today's World Health Organization is to foster cooperation among the United Nations so that radio communication may be the means of charting the travel of diseases at a central station and from the charts drawing forecasts warning health authorities beforehand what diseases are approaching, how virulent they are, and when they are likely to strike. Then according to epidemiology, threatened areas may be forearmed with safety measures and vaccines. Reconnoissance before the battle. If the enemy disease loses the battle, then supposedly world health wins.

In this vein and on this presupposition, newspapers announced under banner heads on New Year's Day that Dr. John F. Enders and others are likely to "conquer" cancer in 1958.

But a contributing writer tells another villain story in *Reader's Digest* for January. Beginning on page 51, he reports that a microbe known as *Staphylococcus aureus*, the villain, is a threat to many of the 25,000,000 in the United States and Canada who will be in hospitals this year. He says this microbe gets part of its name from its golden color and goes by the nickname "staph". About half of all the people carry staph with them but are not harmed so long as they are healthy, he says. And he makes an unintentional but very big point. If, as

he says, staph will not harm the healthy, and something in the state of the individual has to favor staph before it can multiply, then staph is not so much the villain as the state of the human being.

But he goes on. If the state of the human being favors it, staph will stir up a whole array of illnesses in different subjects, ranging from boils to abscesses to peritonitis to pneumonia. He relates that during World War II, doctors thought they had the sure way of "licking" staph. They had antibiotics. Particularly penicillin. But, he says, they were deceived. Staph made a change. Staph took on a different nature. Staph became able to withstand massive doses of penicillin "and ask for more". He says it took newly delivered babies in Winnipeg, hospitals who broke out with pustules, and mothers who got abscesses of the breasts, all resistant to the penicillin which the doctors presumed so reliable, to bring home the surprise. From such instances, says the author, outbreaks spread to the homes of the patients and through hospital nurses to other homes. He says that what was seen first in Winnipeg went all across the United States from Canada to Texas. He says that in Seattle, Dr. Reinert T. Ravenholt of the Public Health Department, as early as 1954-55, found outbreaks in five different hospitals and 24 deaths.

Two possible lessons might be drawn from this story. The *Reader's Digest* contributor draws one: It is now time to stop any indiscriminate reliance on antibiotics. The author suggests that such reliance has become so unquestioning and so routine that hospitals need a self-examination. He quotes Dr. Carl Walter, Associate Clinical Professor of Surgery at Harvard Medical School this way: "It's not an easy thing to accept about these fine new hospitals of ours — but there is no question about it: in a bacteriological sense, *our hospitals are dirty, filthy*. Until we get back to rigidly antiseptic methods we're going to be in trouble." (Italics his.)

The other lesson is in another direction. The knack of the lowly staph of changing itself and coming up as strong as ever, if not stronger, after being dismissed by the authorities as thoroughly "licked" might suggest that the basis of the villain

concept is a bit shaky. The author of the report specifies properly enough that before staph can become a menace something favorable to it must characterize the state of the human being. This sounds reminiscent of the postulate that germs will not flourish on healthy tissue. Dr. Rene J. Dubos, of Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, as readers of these pages will remember, says that in order for germs to infect, something in the human host has to be ready for them. Dr. Richard C. Cabot, late of Boston, told of finding in the body of an elderly man, who had never been sick but had been killed by an automobile, the evidences of several different diseases (as diseases are prevalently conceived), any one of which, if allowed to progress, would have been fatal. These witnesses are none of them familiar with Homœopathy, but nevertheless their testimony establishes in their minds the truth that prior to the germ something within the human being determines whether the germ will be able to multiply and thrive, and also determines, in case it is able in a given instance, to what extent and in what peculiar manner the human being will suffer.

Evidently to these observers, unhomœopathic as they are, the person is endowed with a power greater than the power of its supposed assailants. Ordinary medicine has not quite caught up yet, and traditionally it leaves almost out of account this vital power within the person. This is the power distinguishing the living from the dead, the power that produces growth, the power that repairs and maintains, the power that establishes and guards health, the power that governs everything going on in mind and body from the highest thought to the tiniest tissue cell and keeps it all so divinely organized that there is a conscious, sensitive, purposeful human personality.

This power works all the time in the midst of adversities and unfavorable circumstances, which normally it mets, adjusts for and overcomes, without a conscious command from the living man. Only when this vital power is weakened or confused or in disorder do morbid influences such as always surround it gain an advantage. Then health is impaired, there is sickness, and the vital power signals its distress by

means of symptoms. Unwise as we are, we multiply the adversities against our vital power by eating and drinking wrong, by thinking and behaving wrong, and by using drugs to suppress the very signals that call for help. This we have been doing so universally and for so many generations that now we have the accumulated chronic miasms, so well defined in Homœopathy, predisposing us to illness. But the vital power is there just the same, and that is the means of getting well and staying well.

It was the orderly experiments on the medical powers of substances and on the basis of selection when treating the sick, carried out so scientifically at Homœopathy's beginning, that directed attention to the vital power of the living being and brought some appreciation and understanding of it. The way to render medical service that is curative is to utilize the essential medicinal powers of substances, since these powers, properly derived, are of the same nature as the vital power within us, and are able to influence it beneficially. If we couple this with wise living, then we cease multiplying our liabilities and begin advancing toward a stronger ability to remain well. The problem of medicine concerns the inward power of the human being much more than the outward circumstances of microbes or the supposed travel of diseases traced across the face of the map. There may seem to be a geographic sweep of sickness, but the actual sweep is the prior inward susceptibilities of persons. If all medical treatment concerned itself with the inward vital power of the person and was therefore curative, it would work toward the better ability to remain well and toward a higher level of health the world over.

•—*The Layman Speaks, Feb., '58.*

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