

SOME THINGS THE DOCTORS CANNOT DO

Discussing the Latest Rockefeller Gift, High Medical Authority Says No Specific Can Be Found for Tuberculosis, Cancer, or Pneumonia

By REMSEN CRAWFORD.

DISCUSSING Mr. Rockefeller's gift of \$30,000,000 for medical education and research, Dr. William H. Porter, for many years professor in pathology and general medicine at the New York Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital, remarked the other day that no specific medical cure for consumption, pneumonia, and cancer ever could be discovered. He said that the foremost men of medical science who had been delving for years to the roots of these blights no longer looked for such a specific remedy in the realms of therapeutics and pharmacy.

Dr. Porter does not share the optimism of Dr. Mayo, who recently asserted that since the civil war fifteen years had been added to the average life of man by innovations in medical and surgical advance. He holds that the chief source of decreased mortality, or increased longevity, is due to the increased knowledge concerning the hygiene and diet of infants. Reciting the progress that has been made in rural and urban sanitary regulations, he says "our sources of milk supply have been clearly scrutinized, until now enteric disorders in epidemic form are almost unknown," and this, he thinks, is one of the most important of all reasons for longer life today. Dr. Porter admits the failure of his profession to triumph over the more destructive diseases.

In response to a query about his views of the Rockefeller gift, Dr. Porter said: "Much good has already resulted from the funds established by Mr. Car-

negie, in his lifetime, and by Mr. Rockefeller, for the advancement of medical science, and I am sure that these later donations on the part of Mr. Rockefeller of \$20,000,000 to the General Education Board, created by him, to be expended for medical education and research, and of \$10,000,000 to the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, will go a long way toward enabling the American school of medicine to take its rightful place among the enlightened nations of the world.

"I am of the opinion, however, that the chief benefits which have arisen from these endowments thus far consist in the improvement of our laws requiring better qualifications on the part of applicants for a license to practice medicine. We still need more legislative safeguards, and there is room for reform in the matter of adjusting the curriculum and improving the clinical facilities of the average medical college.

Limited Field of Help.

"In the matter of research there is greater need today than ever for ample funds to extend the great work of experiment and investigation. But I believe it should be acknowledged at the outset that no research can ever possibly discover a specific remedy which will cure such diseases as tuberculosis, pneumonia and cancer. I don't believe that the experts Mr. Rockefeller has commendably brought together on his staff of medical investigators will waste much of their time, or much of his money, trying to find a cure for tuberculosis and pneumonia, for the reason

that it is now a known fact that anything powerful enough to kill the germ may be equally destructive to the patient.

"With diseases which we all 'self-limited' it is now accepted as true that we can shorten their duration and decrease their intensity. I assume, therefore, that Mr. Rockefeller's scientists will direct their research in this direction.

"This is not pessimism. It is common sense. We all remember what a thrill of elation took hold of the medical profession, and what a feeling of satisfaction seized the civilized world, when Dr. Koch, famed for his mastery of bacteriology, announced that he had discovered a cure for consumption. Many doctors and scientists took him at his word. His brilliant achievements in the past made it imperative that he should be taken seriously. In my practice and my work at the Post-Graduate Medical School I made it clear then that we were not justified in believing that any specific 'cure' could be elaborated for any pathological condition, although nature does develop anti-bodies and defensive proteins, as well as encysting processes and other means of self-limiting certain conditions which remove or overcome toxins, and, in this way, facilitate a restoration to normal conditions.

"In connection with my work at the Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital I insisted that I did not approve of any experiments involving human life with Dr. Koch's so-called cure. Years have passed, and the Koch 'remedy' has passed with the years, and so

have all the 'remedies' offered by lesser lights."

"But why despair?" the interviewer added. "Isn't there a remote possibility that some day a germ culture may be found which will spare the life of the patient? Had not the medical profession given up all hope in the case of diphtheria and in the case of tetanus, and did not research bring at last the antitoxin which effects a profound amelioration for these diseases?"

"It required long years of medical research to find the germ of consumption, and longer to discover the germ of pneumonia," Dr. Porter replied, "and many long years have been spent in the arduous search for some specific for these germs. In the case of diphtheria, antitoxin does mitigate the severity of the disease. But, even here, the patient must undergo the strain of a well-nigh lethal dose. It is well to add in this connection that antitoxin is chiefly effective in the prevention and removal of the membranous exudation, which is the principle cause of death from uncomplicated diphtheria.

"It is just the opposite in the case of a new serum now used against the typhoid germ. After a patient has become infected with the typhoid germ it is of little avail to inoculate that patient with the anti-typhoid serum. It acts well, however, as a vaccine, and produces immunity from the disease quite as effectively as the smallpox virus.

"The pneumococcus, or germ of pneumonia, was discovered by Dr. Friedlander in 1883. Since that time countless experiments have been made in the

hope of finding a specific cure. Dr. Sternberger, our noted army surgeon, has played a conspicuous part in this research work for a pneumonia cure. We have all heard the claims of enthusiasts to the effect that they can cure pneumonia by abortive means—by eliminating the disease through the liver and so forth. This claim is confused either with preventing or with decreasing the intensity and shortening the duration of the disease, for we do not have an actual pneumonia until the air sacs are filled with an inflammatory exudation, and the only way to remove this is by nature's process of fatty degeneration and liquefaction, the liquid product being removed from the lung only by being coughed up, or by being absorbed through the lymphatic channels. Once absorbed into the lymphatic channels these products are eliminated through the liver and kidneys.

"Where Mr. Rockefeller's donation will work its greatest good will be in medical educational lines, as well as along the lines of research. The medical profession in America must be made to study general medicine more. Specialism must be earned, not adopted. The specialist of the past studied general medicine and was graduated as a general practitioner. In time he found his talent, his skill, and his propensity or inclinations all led him into one particular branch, not by premeditated selection, but by natural bent. It doesn't matter what a young doctor wants to be. If he is ever to be successful in any branch of the profession of medicine he

must follow the trail of his talents, and no matter what he undertakes he will never be a successful doctor until he has laid the foundation by mastering chemistry, physics, and biology.

"Our medical colleges are not teaching enough chemistry and physiology. In this respect they are falling behind the older institutions of medical training. When I went to a medical college some forty-five years ago, we had four or five lectures a week on physiology, so that in five months we had as many lectures on this very important branch of the science as they give nowadays in two years. We were compelled to continue to study physiology and chemistry long after we had taken the regular course, sometimes going over a textbook two and three times. Life, from start to finish, from maturity to decay, is one long chain of chemical processes, and our research work must be speeded up until we get our American schools of medicine up to the very highest possible standards of efficiency.

Favors Medical Propaganda.

"I note that Mr. Rockefeller's donation will be expended directly for education and research work, and not for propaganda. I don't know whether he classes as propaganda such work as eradicating hookworm, putting down pellagra, and so forth, which he has been accomplishing to such great benefit for the South, and to such great advantage to the medical profession everywhere, but I do know that it would be regrettable should he discontinue such

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activities. I don't know whether he intends to cease his endeavors before Legislatures to bring about higher standards of proficiency in our medical schools, but I do know that this work ought not to be stopped until all institutions have a uniform standard of excellence.

"Indeed, I am of the opinion that our profession of medicine would gain more just at this time in the way of uplift by having Mr. Rockefeller's fund directed toward education and laws requiring education as well as by spending it for practical research. We need more groundwork. Let us get back to teaching chemistry, and keep on teaching chemistry with physiology, and then teach chemistry with pathology, and keep on teaching chemistry to the last lesson in therapeutics, and we may hope to put our medical college on the proper basis and hold it up to its essential standards.

"Much research has been expended by these endowed institutions in seeking a cause for cancer as well as a remedy for this condition. Only within the last few years a woman of Boston left at her death nearly half a million dollars for a commission of American, British, and French doctors to spend trying to find the origin of cancer and its cure. Those doctors studied cancer in every land and every clime, and the upshot of it all was that we stand today about where we have always stood—no positive medical or surgical remedy has been found.

"There is no cure for cancer in the realms of our present knowledge of medicine, because cancer, so far as we know, does not originate in a micro-organism. Cancer is not one of the 'self-limited' diseases, because it has its origin in an embryonic cell, or in a group of embryonic cells, caught in some tissue which, subsequently, because of irritation, or through some twist or defect in the nutrition of the area, becomes a fertile soil for the development of the growth of the cancer cell. Hence, we can see that research work in the investigation of cancer ought to be confined to those chemical processes in-

involved in defective metabolism, and in the development of a nutritive pabulum which tends to excite super-activity in these embryonic cells. If research work could develop some method by which these embryonic cells could be discovered, and if a safe way could be devised for their complete removal, then the cure for cancer might be established, assuming that this is the true cause and method of development of the cancerous process."

Poor Medical Education.

In his allusions to the way of American students in their primary lessons or preliminary courses, a hop-skip-and-jump with little regard for the mastery of chemistry, Dr. Porter strikes at what Dr. Abraham Flexner found to be one of the greatest evils in the American system of medical education. He was chief investigator for the Carnegie Institute, and is now General Secretary of the General Education Board, founded by Mr. Rockefeller, and will have in hand the task of distributing Mr. Rockefeller's late gift of \$10,000,000 to the board in such ways as the board members may prescribe. He wrote of medical colleges in America:

"Scandals in medical education exist

in America alone * * * where acquaintance with disease is derived not from the study of the sick but from the study of textbooks."

In these and similar conclusions, Dr. Flexner was sustained by Dr. Henry S. Pritchett, who wrote an introduction for his report, saying that the American system of medical education was more or less a farce, and that American colleges were almost wholly without clinical facilities.

"If the lowest terms upon which a medical school can exist abroad were applied to America," wrote Dr. Pritchett, "three-fourths of our existing schools would be closed at once."

In this connection, however, it must be remembered that in nearly all the States great improvements have been made by legislative enactment since the activities of Dr. Flexner and Dr. Pritchett and others of these Carnegie and Rockefeller endowment funds began. The "Practice of Medicine Law" of New York State, enacted in 1916, as a result of the disclosures of these men, has gone a long way to improving the standards of the medical profession in this State.