Prevention of Disease
the Prime Duty of the Physician.

By Thomas Cains.

In treating this subject we shall first offer a few observations in support of the proposition and then consider by what means the duty itself is to be fulfilled.

And in the first place we allege that the prevention is much more attainable than the cure of disease. For by far the majority of cases that come under his care, the Physician addresses himself only to symptoms. Now these are often so complicated and obscure as to give no indication of the real nature of the malady. In such cases, it is obvious that the Practitioner must either remain wholly inactive, and thus tacitly acknowledge the insufficiency of his Art to enable him to form a diagnosis—the very first essential in the management of disease—or make his treatment a matter of pure experiment. But even when a correct diagnosis has been attained, the prognosis is necessarily of the most uncertain character. For while diseases of the same type generally receive the same kind...
kind of treatment, no two cases are in all respects alike. No are therapeutical remedies always followed by the same favourable result. Peculiarities of constitution, habits of life, and a variety of other circumstances all cooperate to modify as well disease as the action and effect of curative agencies. Thus it happens that what has been productive of relief and ultimate recovery in one case, is followed by increased suffering and death in another. No must it be forgotten that even in those very cases of recovery, the merit is often due neither to the skill of the Physician nor the healing power of his appliances but entirely to the "vicissitudes of nature." In short, by way of cure, active treatment can do extremely little. Its chief benefit is the mere alleviation of suffering and even that not infrequently at the expense of aggravating the real malady and shortening the term of the patient's existence. Nor moreover does disease as a general rule admit of any active interference. It has to run a certain course in obedience to certain fixed laws which cannot be violated with impunity. And if officious procrastination with her operations, the efforts of nature towards a cure, will only be impaired if not altogether defeated. But secondly, it is more rational and humane conservation under any circumstances greatly superior to repatriation, but preeminently so in the case of a complex organism like the human frame. Here, part is most intimately related to part
and function to function so that the derangement of the one is that of the whole; while as we have just seen the evil itself often defies alike detection and removal. And when moreover recovery does happily occur, the organs principally affected, must necessarily be specially liable to renewed attacks of disease even after—must discharge their functions in a comparatively imperfect manner and thus prove a constant source of disturbance to the general system—aggravated by the effects of the drugs which have been administered in the course of treatment. These are important considerations: but certain other circumstances connected with disease less than additional forces. For disease involves suffering—brail, on the part of the patient, mental or in the part of the friends and his relatives—expense also, often very great, and which, among that class where disease chiefly prevails is frequently the commencement of a state of absolute poverty with all its con-

-constant evils—attacking upon the parties the utmost degree of hardship and wretchedness from which, despite all their laudable exertions, they can obtain no deliverance.

Thirdly: it is more honourable to the Profession. The idea has long been and still is most deeply rooted in the public mind that Medical men have particular enjoyment in the existence and prevalence of disease; that they are never happier than when exhibiting drugs or applying the knife—the only two things which they associate with them in their professional capacity. Says some men believe, that "Doctors do not demand to live direct
Means at times, both to create and to prolong disease. And there can be no doubt that these erroneous and absurd notions are largely, if not mainly, due to medical men themselves. For so long as they take no active measures to preserve public health, so long as extent of practice—that is, prevalence of disease—is made the standard of success (as it universally is) in the Profession; the public can scarce by avoid coming to such conclusions. Conclusions which virtually charge the Practitioner with an utter indifference to human suffering, and a total want of every principle of morality.

Were it always possible to bring matter to a successful termination by the use of active remedies and to obviate all subsequent bad effects, greater honor would unquestionably redound to the Medical Art from the cure than from the prevention of disease—the former implying a much higher degree of power and intelligence than the latter; but as the enemy with whom we have to deal is one that defies control in this way, the course that will procure the highest distinction in these circumstances, is, to bid defiance to his invasions as far as it is possible.

This much for the proposition itself, and the grounds on which it rests. Now, in the next place, is the duty to be fulfilled? Before we attempt an answer to this question we must first direct our attention to two points which at once suggest themselves in connection with it. First, is the duty itself distinctly recognized by the Profession? We are bound to confess it never has been and it is not now. This is sufficiently well shown by the letters, applied to its Members, conveying as they all do both in the ancient and the modern tongues the radical idea of healing.
The whole system of Medical Education also, proceeds from beginning to end on the direct understanding that the duties of aspirants to the Profession are to consist in the treatment of disease. Anatomy is studied and studied solely, with a view to this end. So is Chemistry. So is Physiology. The other branches point so obviously in the same direction that it were but a waste of time to allude to them. And, as we have noticed above, the number of Patients that pass through one's hands in the course of a year together with the amount of fees realized is made the criterion of success. To have a large practice and a correspondingly large income, is next to a Professor's Chair to be at the head of the Profession. This is the true state of matters. To labour after prevention or diminution of disease is as far from the Profession as a body as can well be conceived. Briefly then, the first point to be desired is a recognition of the duty on the part of the Profession. Let it be understood, that their grand function is to prevent and not to cure disease: let it be realized, - as the result of their direct operations - become the standard of success instead of its prevalence; and let it be impressed on the minds of all Candidates, that, from the moment they enter upon their Medical Studies, they are to consider themselves consecrated to the work of preserving health - an object which they are, to keep before them and strive after by every means within their power, as their highest and most imperative duty. But secondly do the Public recognize the Practice as standing...
to them in the relation in which we are instructing.

Here also we must answer in the negative: and hence arises another prerequisite to the fulfillment of the duty, viz. the enlightenment of the Public as to the proper and true relation in which the Physician stands to them. They must be taught to view him in exactly the same light in his proper station, as they do a Clergyman in his; that as they acknowledge the latter as the curator or guardian of their souls, so must they him of the health-care of both their soul and body together. Effectual means must be taken to direct them of the time when and proper seasons occasion that his function is limited to the application of the knife and the administration of drugs, and that his services are only to be called into requisition after they or their have been laid aside as the victims of disease.

And we humbly opine that the means best adapted to accomplish these ends is to tell them the plain and simple truth regarding the supposed efficacy of med-

icinal treatment. The honesty displayed in this, and the disinterestedness in a regard for the continuance of their health will tell with no little power upon their minds and in due time produce a favourable result. But this gained, to discharge the duty. Under consideration, the Physicians will still require to be furnished with the requisite resources; not meaning by these professional qualifications which we assume him to possess: but
Unlimited power and authority to enforce the measures which he deems necessary to secure the end in view. His instructions must be carried out; his commands must be obeyed; he must be recognized as absolute lord and master in every thing affecting in the remotest degree the health of the community.

These points premised, we are now in a position to attempt an answer to the main question, which, in a word is, to prevent or modify as the case may be - to the largest possible extent the various causes, which observation and experience have shown to operate directly, or indirectly, in producing disease.

The chief of these we proceed to notice, beginning with -

1. Improper marriages. By these, we mean marriages contracted within certain degrees of endogamy - under a certain age - without the mutual consent of both parties - in circumstances of extreme poverty or where either party is labouring under constitutional ailment. Such unions formed as they are in violation of the most sacred laws, are, as they cannot but be, most fruitful sources of disease, not only to the immediate parties but also and especially to their unfortunate issue. And, knowing their injurious tendency, the Legislature are bound to interfere, either to impose the Legislature for some effective remedy, or failing in this to take means to influence public opinion in such a manner as shall tend to lay a check upon the evil.

2. Mismanagement of the young. Of this, the Public Prosecutor
of Death's affords too abundant evidence. An idea indeed is abroad that the period of infancy in general and of destitution in particular is essentially liable to disease, and that a large amount of fatality among the young is therefore necessarily to be expected. But this we conceive to be a grave error, and to have been drawn unwarrantably as an inference from the mere fact of the fatality itself. The fatality, being limited as it almost entirely is to the young of the lower classes, is due in our humble opinion, not to any peculiar condition nor to destitution as the lower animals pass thro' the same so-called critical period with no apparent disturbance of the general system, but to the abnormal manner in which they are brought up to the want of proper nourishment, clothing, and attention, and other circumstances incident to general mismanagement. Homer, speaking of Aektawon Physicwm to the Army of the Greeks in the Trojan war, beautifully styles Itaianwv ο Ποιμην τατον, "the shepherds of the people." And this is a title singularly applicable to the Physician as regards his relation to the young. For, it is his to see that they are properly nourished and duly protected from all those causes which have a tendency to engender disease amongst their class; his to instruct the Mother during the period of lactation as to her diet; to apprise her of the intimate relation that subsists between the emotions of her mind and the quality of her milk, and to guard her against the use of any article of food or drink or
exposing herself to circumstances that would prove prejudicial to the health of her child. For this all,
for them also properly, appertains the important function
of determining when the child shall commence its edu-
cation, the time, nature and amount of study, the
kind and degree of recreation and exercise; and the
period of entrance on together with the amount of active labour.
These are points which, as they all directly involve the health
of the individual, fall within the province of the Physician;
and demand his attention the more urgently, as they
are all but universally neglected.

3. Destitution. Related as this most intimately is to disease, it
necessarily comes under the Physician's supervision.
Altho at first sight it may not seem to do so. Hitherto
indeed the Profession have acted as if attention to this matter
formed no part of their duty, of which we have a striking example
at the moment in the reported destitution in Ireland. For
while non-professional men have been giving the greatest
interest in the case, Medical men, so far at least as we
can gather from the public prints, have been looking on
with the most culpable indifference. To inquire into
and ascertain the truth of such matters, belongs primar-
ily, and essentially to them, and also to take the initiative
for the timely application of the appropriate remedies.
But their special function is to grapple with the causes of
destitution: And this, they cannot prevent the failure of tho
Corps, they can point out and urge the necessity and importance of having several staple articles of food, so that a deficiency or failure of one may be borne with impunity. And so in cases of ordinary destitution: if they can do nothing more towards preventing its causes—such as early marriages, low wages, improvidence, extravagance, intemperance, speculation and such like, they can at least and ought to encourage their own conferences and invite their disinterestedness to the public by protesting and appealing against them on the ground of their injurious influence on health.

6. Inefficient accommodation. Habitations situated in low-lying and damp localities, crowded together, in a dilapidated condition and tenanted by twice or thrice the legitimate number of inmates are the key hot-beds of disease. The sources whence come the vast proportion of the miserable wretches who fill alike our prisons and our hospitals. Breathing an atmosphere polluted with noxious emanations from their own bodies and the filth which is generally found associated with improper dwellings. The occupant must necessarily not only become the victim of disease themselves, but sources of contagion to the whole surrounding neighbourhood. No arguments are required to establish this. Every one knows—every one admits it. Even the Ragged School boy in these days is taught enough of Chemistry and Physiology to be able to tell us that the exhalations from his lungs and skin decomposes.
ing organized matter are injurious to animal life and that a certain amount of pure air is just as essential to health as food. And this being the case, the duty of the Practitioner becomes apparent—nothing short of securing the latter demulcent of the present houses and the erection of commodious dwellings, supplied with icy conveniences requisite for ensuring proper ventilation and cleaning. An arduous task most assuredly, and all the more so, because by dint of a little practice it could be easily accomplished and because the result would be productive of real and substantial good: An apparent paradox by no means difficult of explanation, seeing daily observation and experience teach us that those objects which command the largest amount of contributions and the greatest number of enthusiastic agents are just those, which, while invested with a degree of mandarin sentimentalism and romance are in the majority of cases wholly unattainable—and when they are not only of no real use to the parties concerned but the very reverse. But Physicians are or should he men of philosophy and Science; and while the spirit of the one should elevate them above the "ignoble vulgus" in respect of principles of action, devotion to the other should impel them towards the achievement of objects which bring it renown, especially when conjoined with the well being and happiness of humanity.
5. Unwholesome food and drink. The advantages so called human progress are generally counterbalanced by corresponding disadvantages. And in nothing perhaps is this more manifest than in the matter of food. For the discoveries of science have been made to subdue the purposes of adulteration to such a degree, that scarcely one article of diet can be obtained of a genuine quality. And tho' the substances employed may not always be of a positively deleterious character, it is certain that they often are, and at all events are always deficient in nutritive properties. The extreme length moreover to which the cultivation of vegetable productions and the fattening of animals are carried, the common use of milk from diseased cows and that of diseased flesh to which we add impure water must all act injuriously on the system-causing deficiency or excess of nutrition and the direct introduction of poisonous principles.

And so it is incumbent on the Physician to protect the objects of his care from the bad influences of the weather by proper places of abode, so also to see that they sustain no damage in the matter of food and drink. And we see no reason why the Profession should not take the initiative in having the young taught at School to determine the quality of what they eat and drink. This
together with instruction in the laws of health, generally would surely be of infinitely greater advantage to them than a vast deal of what they are taught at present being of no other use than to burden their poor memories and make a display at certain periods of examination. But the profession ought to exist on being recognized, and appointed by the public as the proper and only duly qualified parties to superintend and watch over the entire department of food throughout the country.

Effects of Civilization. This also while unceasingly productive of manifold blessings to humanity is at the same time the source and origin of countless evils. In saving it destroys. The greater the power it gives the peoples among whom it reigns the weaker they become. The higher the elevation to which it raises them, the more they degenerate morally and physically. Many thinking men of the present day are loud in their assertions as to the fact of the former in reference to the people of our own country and nation; and a large proportion of the profession stoutly maintain the latter, even alleging it as a ground for treating certain forms of disease in a directly opposite manner from what was formerly.
formerly practised. With the views of both parties we most cordially agree, believing them to be consistent alike with observation, history, and sound philosophy. And how in these circumstances ought the Physician to act? Should he try to stem the tide of so called civilization and run the hazard of being stigmatized as an enemy to the progress of the human race? In many circumstances we believe he ought to do even at the supposed risk. But would his efforts be without success? Let us take an example. It seems tolerably evident that these things called “harmful” so extensively employed in the present day are injurious to the poor infants for whose use they have been invented; and there can we think be no doubt that if the Profession were perseveringly to condemn them they would, one long fall into utter des-creed. And so, in respect to many other things. By sternly denouncing indulgence in these articles which only minister to acquired and depraved appetites, by condemning others of an unnatural character known to contain poisonous ingredients such as Paper Hang-ings—by prohibiting the pollution of our Rivers and the Atmosphere by certain Factories—by
Advise means to protect the health of Artisans engaged in unwholesome occupations; and by assiduously watching every new invention—studying its bearing on health and acting accordingly, the Physician could do a vast deal in the way of averting and keeping off disease.

7. Prostitution. This is one of the effects of civilization and ought strictly speaking to have been excluded under that head; but from its great importance it merits a separate consideration. Its influence as a cause of disease is apparent. How then is the Physician to deal with it so as most effectually to prevent its mortifying effects? Following the suggestion of some should he lead his efforts towards its suppression by law? Certainly not; for this is one of the many evils which law cannot reach. It might suppress, but it certainly would not extinguish it. On the contrary it would impart to it new life energy and power. Its existence from the earliest historical period; its increase in a corresponding rate with the advancement of civilization, and as profession of morality and religion seem to indicate the impossibility of it ever being banished from our midst. "Midnight Meetings," regulations of tea and cake, religious ad-


dresses, Magdalen Asylums and such like may then its ranks a little—a very little—and that only to clear the way for new and fresh supplies. Eradication of the evil implies a total removal of the causes which lead to it—an achievement devoutly to be wished most truly, but in the nature of things simply impossible. For tho' true that a few of these causes are at least capable of being greatly modified, the chief and most numerous are utterly unapproachable. In these circumstances all the Physician can do is to adopt such means as shall best serve to obviate or diminish the consequences of the system. And here two courses are open to him. In the first place he may bring syphilisation into use and in this way render the system to some extent proof against the disease. This course we are aware is in the opinion of some open to great objection; but in all such cases the last word to settle the matter is, to consider which of two evils is the least. Now as syphilisation is out of all comparison a less evil than syphilis the objection that line has brought against it fall entirely to the ground.
He may take means to bring the whole system under legal and medical supervision, and in some degree modify the evil in this way; public solicitation being prohibited and the diseased remanded from their vocation and kept strictly under confinement until convalescent. Objections have also been urged against this plan but they have even less force than the former. It must not be forgotten however that the physician can do a vast deal in a private way to check the evil. Moral suasion coming from him will produce effects when it falls powerless from the lips of a clergyman. And he is highly culpable if he does not take every opportunity of giving forth words of warning and exhortation in this matter, especially to young men. The humane and benevolent physician will of course do a great deal further. Actuated by a supreme desire of preventing disease in obedience to the dictates of his profession he will even bring himself into contact with the poor sufferers in the hope of rescuing them from their unfortunate condition—a matter, we doubt that would sound strange and ridiculous in the ears of most of the profession; but not in the least degree more so as we believe than what itself inculcates.
Mental Excitement. If there is one form of disease more than another which it is the duty of the Physician to try to avert, it is that caused by mental excitement. The reasons are obvious. No disease is more intractable or obstinate in its character: none sinks the patient to a more abject or humiliating condition: none plunges his relatives into greater distress, and none entails greater expense upon the Public. Such considerations invest it with peculiar interest and importance, and demand the most strenuous endeavours towards its prevention in so far as this is possible. And it is possible to a considerable degree, were the Profession brought to a proper sense of the true extent of their duty, and imbued with sufficient zeal, energy and moral courage to carry out their convictions. There are few of them, for example, who are not convinced that what are called "Revolving Meetings" are productive of the most baleful effects in this matter. Yet beyond adapting to them in their own Periodicals or in a casual manner in the Class Room they take no notice of them whatever, and that while they are ever day swelling the number of inmates in our Lunatic Asylums. This surely is not as it ought to be. The matter is one purely of health.
These "Get up Revivals" are epidemics as truly as either Influenza or Cholera. And we maintain it is the bounden duty of the Profession to take effective means to instil into the proper Authorities in their real nature and influence and secure their cooperation in at least preventing Revival Meetings, considering the dire effects they invariably produce. Measures also be taken to prohibit the sale of these cheap vile Periodicals which now issue from the presses in such vast numbers. Filled as they are with the most exciting tales of thefts, robberies, seductions, suicides, and murders, and most greedily devoured by thousands of the people they can scarcely fail in many cases a most pernicious influence on the moral system. And no less the detailed and laboured accounts of these things in the ordinary newspapers the Editors of which ought also to be prohibited from inserting, or at all events from entering so minutely into details as they make it a point of doing, and with no other view than to pander to that morbid appetite for the "horrible" so remarkably characteristic of the present age. An objection indeed may be brought against the imposing of such prohibitions and restrictions on the ground of their infringing on the liberty of the subject. But to this we answer in general that if a man chooses to live in a civilized
country he must make up his mind to sacrifice personal liberty; civilization and liberty being two things which are utterly incompatible; but in particular we maintain it is no infringement whatever on the liberty of the subject to keep him in lands up out of circumstances which impair alike his reason and his life. Hospital decay, another cause of this form of disease proceeding as it generally does from incompatibility of disposition between the two parties might be largely prevented if means were taken to teach the public the true conditions of conjugal concord and happiness, and the impossibility of these conditions being realized except by the nearest chance unless the parties have had considerable previous acquaintance with each other and in a great variety of circumstances, fitted to elicit the several features of each other's character. This, to some extent will enable them to determine whether or not they are suited to each other; but not altogether, for there are feelings in operation that are powerful enough to hinder the manifestation of certain traits which afterwards they are not, and which moreover are often the determining features of the entire character. Phenology we believe would here render essential service if parties were only willing to avail them-
desire of it. But after all it appears to be only by
had earned experience that they will submit to be
taught, and in these circumstances we see no other
remedy for the evil than to secure such an ad-
justment of the Civil Code as would leave
parties at perfect liberty to cancel the marriage
bond whenever they made the painful dis-
ccovery that they were not suited to and
could not consent happily with each other.

9. Bad Habits. As examples of these there may
be mentioned inefficient mastication, irregular
in meals, sitting late at night, sleeping with the
head under the bed-clothes, sleeping too long;
the immoderate use of stimulants, Masturbation,
sitting down on the cold ground and such like.
To one or other of these causes the ailments of many
patients may often be directly traced.

Circumstances and the dictates of prudence
must guide the Practitioner as to the proper time
and manner of giving counsel to the particular
parties whom he observes to be addicted to any
of them; for counsel is here the only means at his
disposal. But he ought assuredly to take every op-
portunity of giving it: not allowing himself to be
indulged encouraged by the laws of mere etiquette
when the health and consequent happiness of a
human being are involved. Most Practitioners seem to act upon the principle of giving ad-
vice only in a strictly professional capacity and as a purely commercial transaction. And as a
general rule perhaps this is quite proper and fair:
for they are most worthy of their fee. But we cannot
by any means admit that a rigid and uniform
adherence to this principle is right and proper.
On the contrary we hold it to be most unworthy of
the profession—may most culpable: particularly when
we know that the greatest amount of good may be
often achieved just in these very cases where the
services of the Practitioners are alike entirely vol-
untary and gratuitous. For to preserve, say one indivi-
dual from uterine haematocele and another from
hip-joint disease, by counselling them not to sit down
on the cold wet grass on which they are about
to take up their position, is conferring upon them
an amount of benefit with which the utmost
good that can be done them after the diseases
have been established—cannot bear the very
slightest comparison.
Such then are the principal causes of disease the
modification or removal of which are within reach
of the Physician. We might also have gone on to consider
the various circumstances which lead to the per-
version of the moral sentiments, as admiring of
helpful treatment, and as falling, properly under
his jurisdiction, inasmuch as many of those phen-
omena which are characterized and dealt
with as vices are really and truly diseases; but
having reached the limits usually assigned to a
Paper of the present nature we shall not
further enlarge.