

THE NATIONAL HEALTH.

SUNLIGHT AND HEALTH.*

A MESSAGE OF HOPE.

The most precious gifts of life are free—the air we breathe, the water we drink, the sunlight which we so largely shut out of our great towns and cities, creating thereby a body of weaklings, suffering from the diseases bred of sunlight-starvation, to their own and the national detriment.

In his fascinating book, "Sunlight and Health," Dr. Saleeby brings us back to elemental things. "In the beginning God said 'Let there be light,'" and over and over again he urgently insists on the importance of sunlight, both to cure and to prevent disease. Not, be it noted, necessarily heat, which is so often associated with sunlight, but cold or cool air. "It stimulates. The nervous system, the muscles, the processes of metabolism respond to it. Light and cold seem to be the ideal combination. Perhaps the real merit of altitude resides not in the higher proportion of ultra-violet rays, but in the coolness of air combined with the light. It is impossible to believe that unused muscles could be found so firm and efficient as supports for the skeleton, on the Riviera, for instance, bathed in warm air, as at Leysin. If these views be sound, Canadians should be specially interested."

Sir William M. Bayliss, M.A., D.Sc., F.R.S., writes in his introduction to the book: "It will be seen that while the most striking effects of light have shown themselves in the actual cure of diseased conditions, such as rickets and tuberculosis, it is known that light prevents the development of these in circumstances in which they would otherwise assuredly show themselves. It seems clear, therefore, that we must ascribe to sunlight very important functions in the preservation of normal health.

"Hence we see the justification for the efforts being made to prevent atmospheric pollution by smoke, efforts in which Dr. Saleeby has taken a prominent part."

The conclusion which Dr. Saleeby has arrived at after studying the therapeutic effect of sunlight, as, for instance, at Leysin, where the sun himself shines and heals, is to convince him afresh that "indeed the sun is best, and that the most useful purpose of the artificial lamps, of whatever kind, is to guide our footsteps back to the light of day."

Dr. Saleeby refers to certain papers by Finsen, which show that he did not only regard the sunlight—or artificial light—as an antiseptic, but also recognised its power as "incitement"—arousing the power of resistance to disease. "That is the truth that most of us have forgotten, though the power of the general light bath, as distinguished from mere local 'antiseptic' treatment, has been employed, through the sun, by Rollier since 1903, and, at the Finsen Institute, since 1913."

Dr. Saleeby tells us that, as a medical student in Edinburgh—"Auld Reekie," or "Old Smoky," as the natives of modern Athens call it with somewhat fatuous affection—he always abominated the smoke which, *inter alia*, distinguishes the Calton Hill from the Acropolis. Further, since in 1898 he saw a typical smoke-stained urban lung in the Pathological Museum of the University, he resolved never to buy an ounce of coal for his own use—a resolution steadily kept until this day.

Dr. Saleeby states further that the tragic end of the first case in the first ante-natal bed in the world made him hate rickets (at the Royal Maternity Hospital, Edinburgh, in 1901) and when, at the Royal Infirmary, in the following

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year, he was allowed to put patients on balconies in all weathers, and when one tuberculous child of five, terribly wasted, and with an immense abdomen, recovered without surgery, but with air, light, and cod-liver oil, his natural instinct for the open-air, and for following Nature in the search for Life, her daughter, was powerfully fortified.

The whole book is a plea for the light, not the heat, of the sun as an all-powerful factor in the treatment and prevention of disease; thus "the restoration of sunlight to its primary place in hygiene and medicine must mean the end of rickets, and therefore the end of all those cases where rickety contraction and distortion of the female pelvis involves the gravest risks to motherhood and the maintenance of the race."

It is Dr. Saleeby's intense appreciation of light in the abolition of tuberculosis, rickets, and other diseases of darkness, that makes him declare war on smoke, on slums, and on all factors which prevent free access to its beneficent effects. He has studied, with increasing enthusiasm, the splendid work done by Dr. Rollier and his followers at Leysin, and "in praise of the sunlight the half has not yet been said. Who could have guessed, a year or two ago, that a few minutes' exposure to it daily will double the quantity of phosphorous in a baby's blood in a fortnight; or cure rickets as rapidly, and certainly and costlessly, as Dr. Harriett Chick and her fellow-workers, sent from London to help and to learn from the hapless children of Vienna, have lately demonstrated?"

Dr. Saleeby holds that "the restoration of sunlight to our malurbanised millions now blackened, bleached, and blighted in slums and smoke, is the next great task of hygiene in our country, and he is impressed with the idea that "the light is less valuable in killing the infective agent than in raising the bodily resistance to it, and he advocates a combination of light and cold on the evidence of visits to Canada, where a magnificent childhood, free from rickets, thrives in extreme cold, thanks, he believes, to a brilliant sun.

Another point which he emphasises is that the milk of cows fed on pastures in the sunlight maintains the growth and health of young animals, whereas the milk of cows fed in shadow, and on vitamin-free food, will not maintain life. "Our children are thus disadvantaged in winter by light-starvation, and by the defect of the milk of light-starved cows." We note Dr. Saleeby's belief that "to some extent, Antipodean sunlight, in the form of dried milk from New Zealand, comes to the rescue," and again: "We can, in effect, bring over Antipodean sunlight to this country in any quantities, treasured up for use in the form of dried milk which has been produced by cows feeding in sunlight, and on pasture all the year round; and by means of the abundant vitamins and salts which it contains we can make good the deficiencies inevitable in the milk produced by our own cows during the winter. Evidently we do not yet know whether the sunlight acts upon the fodder or the cow, or both. The Lister Institute is now investigating this important point."

What our readers do know is that "Glaxo" is the Super-Milk Food which treasures up for us Antipodean sunlight.

THE ACTION OF LIGHT ON THE SKIN.

The level at which the beneficent rays of the sun exercise their healing influence is, in Dr. Saleeby's opinion, comparatively unimportant. "The all-important fact is that, at any level at which we human beings live, enough of the sanative and therapeutic part of sunlight may reach us for the cure of disease and the preservation of health.

"The patient is cured by the action of light on the skin. After a day at Leysin one gains an entirely new respect for the skin. Generally speaking, Rollier exposes the new patient's feet for five minutes twice or thrice on the first day, for ten the second day, and so on; the legs for five minutes twice or thrice the second day, ten the third, and so on; until after about a fortnight the entire body is

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