

DEADLY PTOMAINES.

A SUBJECT ATTRACTING ATTENTION AMONG MEDICAL MEN.

Some Facts of General Interest—The Poisons Which are Generated in Foods, Risks of Eating Stale Sausage or Fish. A Warning.

Probably no other subject is attracting so much attention in the medical world today as that of ptomaines. A ptomaine, says Professor Victor C. Vaughan, is a basic alkaloidal body formed during the putrefaction of animal matter. It may, therefore, be called an animal alkaloid. The first definite investigations on this subject were made by the learned Danish physician who presided so ably at the eighth international medical congress in 1884—Dr. Panum, of Copenhagen. Panum found that putrid blood, even after being boiled and after being treated with chemical reagents, which would destroy all germs, retained its poisonous properties. He boiled this poisonous substance for eleven hours and found that it still retained all its virulence. From this he rightly concluded that the poisonous substance was a non-volatile chemical compound. He did not succeed in isolating it, and it has always been referred to as Panum's putrid poison. Panum's work was published in Danish, and did not attract much attention for some years.

In 1868 Bergmann obtained from putrid yeast a highly poisonous crystalline substance to which he gave the name Sepsine. In the following year Zeilzer and Sonnenschein obtained a substance which resembles streptin in its physiological action, and in a medical-legal investigation Korsch and Fuschendorfer discovered an amorphous body which gave reactions similar to those of digitalin. Beace Jones and Durpo about this time also obtained from the liver a substance which, when dissolved in dilute sulphuric acid, gave the fluorescence of sulphate of quinine, and which was called by them animal cholinoid. From putrid meat Professor Brieger prepared a substance, neuridine, which acted as a poison as long as it was contaminated with other products of putrefaction, otherwise harmless. It is closely related to two substances that occur in the human system in its normal condition, namely, neurine, one of the constituents of the brain; and choline, which is present in the bile. By putrefaction, neuridine and the rather harmless choline, are transformed into the highly poisonous neurine. It is a remarkable fact that neurine, which is identical with muscarine, the poisonous principle of a toad-stool, and which is a normal constituent of the human body, should prove so destructive when introduced into the body from an outside source.

POISONS FOUND IN CORPSES. The fact that the poisons of putrefaction are of a chemical nature accounts for the poisons found in corpses. These poisons bear some resemblance to the alkaloids of the henlock, strychnine, veratrine, etc. A general was supposed to have been poisoned by his servant, in Rome, and a poison was found in his body, bearing a great resemblance to a virulent poison found in the lake-poison. But this evidence of murder was overcome by the success of the late distinguished professor of legal medicine in the university, Professor Selmi, of Bologna, in obtaining the same poison from a corpse where every suspicion of poisoning was excluded.

In 1870, Selmi began a series of investigations concerning ptomaines, which was only interrupted by his death. Selmi obtained from putrid fish extracts which gave reactions similar to those of morphine, strychnine and digitalin. But he did not succeed in isolating completely any ptomaine. Nenski, in 1876, first succeeded in determining the composition of a ptomaine. This substance was obtained from putrid gelatine. The poisons like those found in corpses, called ptomaines by chemists, are created by the putrefaction of fish, white of egg, meat, cheese, gelatine and yeast. The presence of moisture is an essential condition, hence the moist mixture of sausage filling is especially well adapted to the formation of these poisons. It is a matter of observation that a great many cases of poisoning have followed the consumption of sausage or of fish that have been kept damp. The action of the ptomaines is more virulent when they are introduced into the circulation through wounds, than when they are in the stomach. Hence, it is that cuts received while dissecting corpses often end in death.

PERSONS WHO ARE SENSITIVE. People are not equally sensitive to these poisons. Some persons are so sensitive that fish seemingly fresh will cause them to become ill. Others are likely to suffer from a peculiar eruption of the skin after eating crabs or lobsters. In the maize porridge, which is called "polenta," and which is the chief food of a certain class of Italian workmen, there is formed by putrefaction in hot weather a poison which causes "pellagra," an eruption of the skin resembling erysipelas, which grows worse in time and finally causes death.

In every day life the ptomaines give evidence of their presence. The frequent inflammations of the fingers of persons engaged in washing dishes are due to this cause. The best remedies for the evil is washing with soap, which acts as a mild disinfectant. All food, whether vegetable or animal, must be regarded with suspicion as soon as the first signs of decomposition become noticeable. Especially should great care be taken in times of epidemics. The poisons of putrefaction are colorless compounds, and it must not always be inferred that they do not exist before the odor of putrefaction is perceived. These poisons are not destroyed by boiling. Four hundred cases of sickness in Suabia have been traced to sausage poisoning from 1783 to 1853. The plague like epidemic that occurred in the Volga district some time ago was traced to the diet of the people in those regions, which consisted almost exclusively of fish.

Ptomaines are divided into two classes—those containing oxygen and those which do not contain this element.—Medical Classics.

Remodeling Our School System. I expect to meet with much opposition when I declare my conviction that our public school system will sooner or later have to be radically remodelled. It is an academic system—a university curriculum on a restricted scale—similar in kind, differing only in degree. The culture which it imparts is academic, and has but small reference to the life which the great majority of the pupils will have to lead. It kindles an ambition in them which, in nine cases out of ten, is destined to be disappointed, and engenders, as a consequence, discontent and dissatisfaction toward the state which fails to satisfy the expectations it has aided in arousing.—Professor H. H. Boyesen in The Forum.

A Fair Field's Indifference. Bollingbroke has just fervently proposed. Miss Steele—Do you play a good game of billiards? Bollingbroke—Fairly in a way! Bollingbroke—Then please play with me.

REPUBLICAN PLATFORM.

The republicans of the United States, assembled by their delegates in national convention, pass on the third ballot of their proceedings to honor the memory of their first great leader and immortal champion of liberty and the rights of the people, Abraham Lincoln, and to record also with grateful and unshakable remembrance and gratitude the heroic names of our later leaders who have been more recently called away from our camp. Grant, Garfield, Arthur, Logan and Cook. May their memories be faithfully cherished. We also recall with our greetings and prayer for their recovery to others in their stead. Professing adherence to the Monroe doctrine, it has been with little complacency the extension of foreign influence in Central America and of foreign trade every where among our neighbors. It has refused to charter sanction or encourage any American organization for constructing the Nicaragua canal, a work of vital importance to the maintenance of the Monroe doctrine and of our national influence in Central and South America, and has refused to charter any trade with our Pacific territory, with South America, and with the further coasts of the Pacific Ocean.

FOREIGN RELATIONS. The conduct of foreign affairs by the present administration has been distinguished by feebleness and weakness. Having withdrawn from the senate all pending treaties effected by republican administrators for the removal of foreign and restrictive restrictions upon our commerce and for its extension into a better market it has neither affected nor proposed any others in their stead. Professing adherence to the Monroe doctrine, it has been with little complacency the extension of foreign influence in Central America and of foreign trade every where among our neighbors. It has refused to charter sanction or encourage any American organization for constructing the Nicaragua canal, a work of vital importance to the maintenance of the Monroe doctrine and of our national influence in Central and South America, and has refused to charter any trade with our Pacific territory, with South America, and with the further coasts of the Pacific Ocean.

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country, promote trade, open new and direct markets for our products and cheapen the cost of transportation. We affirm this to be far better for our country than the democratic policy of loaning the government's money without interest to our banks.

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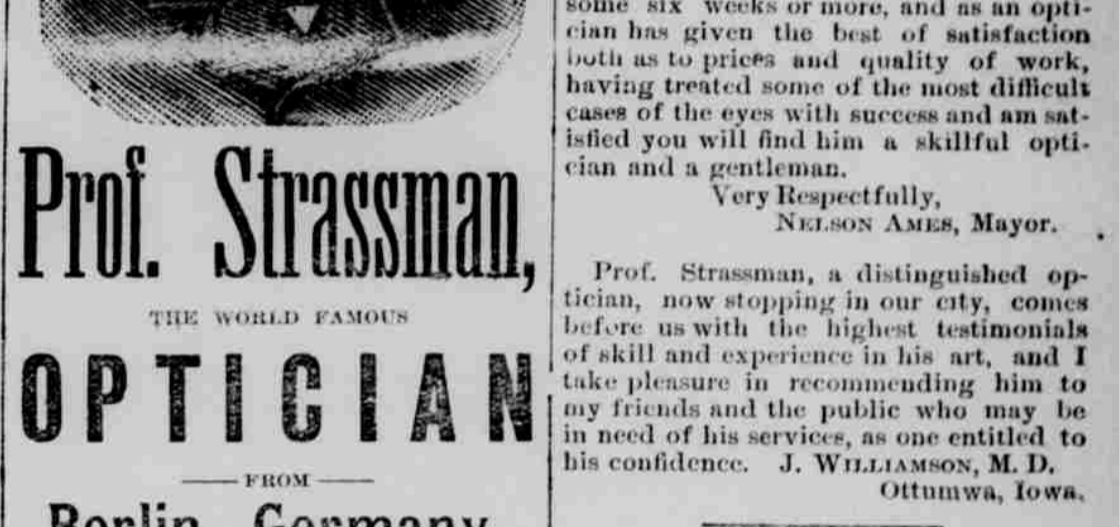
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