Diet Increases Tropical Disease

Medicine

Too much starch and sugar, too few vitamins, and too little of fatty and proteid foods are found in the diet of tropical peoples. This faulty diet is reflected in the health of the people, Dr. Seale Harris of Birmingham, Ala., told members of the American Society of Tropical Medicine at their meeting in Miami.

"Ignorance and laziness are the chief reasons why the inhabitants of tropical America live largely on white flour, white meal, polished rice, dried fish, coarse tubers and white sugar products, because with a very little effort they could make their fertile lands produce a delicious and wholesome variety of foods," Dr. Harris declared, adding that the faulty diet was not confined to the poor classes alone in the tropics. Rich and poor alike devote themselves to raising the money crops of sugar, bananas, tobacco and coffee, with little or no farming of the protective foods, such as vegetables, fruits, grains, chickens and cattle, for home consumption.

The family diet is probably a predisposing cause of many of the tropical diseases, even when the latter are known to be caused by definite organisms, Dr. Harris said, citing the work of many scientists in support of this theory. He said he believed the food factor was important both in the number of cases and of the high death rate from all diseases that prevail in the tropics.

"It appears not unlikely that the ravages of malaria and hookworm may be reduced by improving the nutrition of residents in countries in which these diseases prevail," he stated. Following the theory that the prevailing faulty diet is a factor in the causation of certain tropical diseases, Dr. Harris outlined diets which might be used effectively in combating these diseases.

The liberal use of fresh fruits and vegetables with whole wheat flour and whole grain cornmeal bread was strongly advocated by Dr. Harris in the treatment and prevention of these diseases, including pellagra and sprue. He considers these foods of far more importance than yeast. Considerable difference of opinion among scientists and physicians still exists on this point, however.

The interesting fact that the diet of the poor in rural New York is almost identical with that of the poor in the rural South was brought out by Dr. Harris.

"There were no cases of pellagra found among the poor in a New York rural community who lived on practically the same unbalanced, vitamin-deficient diet as is eaten by the poor in the South," he said. "Nor were there any cases of sprue in New York, yet the diet was as unbalanced and as deficient in vitamins as that of the poor and rich in Porto Rico where sprue is prevalent. Note also that in New York the disease which was found among the undernourished individuals was tuberculosis, a disease due to a pathogenic organism that is well known, i. e., the bacillus of tuberculosis, and that while malnutrition is no doubt a predisposing cause of pellagra and sprue, their specific origin has not yet been discovered, at least not to the satisfaction of many clinicians who have had a large experience with those diseases that prevail in some—not all—tropical and subtropical countries."

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Summarizes Biological Literature

Biology

Biological Abstracts is just completing its second volume, Dr. Frederick V. Rand, associate editor, recently announced in the new French learned journal *La Coopération Intellectuelle.*

Designed to make the gist of all new biological announcements in any language available to scientists throughout the world, Biological Abstracts boils down and digests the contents of some 4,000 scientific periodicals, and will soon expand the list to 6,000. The first volume contained 1,289 pages, giving abstracts of 14,506 scientific articles. The present volume, now nearing completion, will be even larger than this.

The task of getting all the new biological knowledge of the world into smaller-than-tabloid form occupies the full time of a considerable staff of editors whose main headquarters are at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, with a branch office at the U. S. Department of Agriculture, in Washington. In addition to these, there are some 3,500 collaborators scattered all over the world, who look over and condense the contents of the scientific magazines and books that are assigned to them.

Biological Abstracts serves as successor to several similar but smaller abstracting journals published both in the United States and abroad. It received its first financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Chemical Research Foundation. Beginning this year, it has received also an appropriation of $10,000 a year from the Federal government, which makes possible the new branch office in Washington. It is assisted also by the cooperation of the National Research Council and of a number of other scientific and educational institutions, both foreign and American.

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Hailstorms are frequent and severe in sub-tropical regions and are rare in the coldest parts of the earth.

The average motorist in the United states spent $293 last year in operating and keeping up his car.

Rats Harbor Typhus

Public Health

One more just cause for war on the rat and mouse may be seen in the suggestion made by the U. S. Public Health Service that these rodents are a reservoir of deadly typhus fever.

Typhus, or jail fever, as it was once called, has always existed in mild form in countries of the Old World and in Mexico, but only lately it has been found almost constantly in cities in this country. Occurring in mild form, only one or two cases at a time, it is nevertheless a cause for concern because of the ever-present possibility of its flaring suddenly into an epidemic of a severe type.

"The typhus which has been occurring in our eastern seaports does not depend upon direct importation from across the sea. It belongs to the North American continent," reported the U. S. Public Health Service.

In the Old World, man has been the principal reservoir of the disease, and the human louse the principal carrier. In this country, however, the rat and mouse and possibly other rodents are being implicated as the reservoir of the disease, with fleas, mites or ticks as the most likely carriers.

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