GLEANINGS FROM OLD CHINESE MEDICINE

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PEKING, CHINA

DURING the medical conference recently held in Hongkong, a group of scientific men had occasion to meet with one of the famous men of China, who has specialized in old Chinese medicine. One evening during our association meetings this gentleman invited us to dinner and entertained us most royally. After dinner he gave us a talk lasting about two hours upon some of the finer arts of Chinese medicine.

There were discussed two particular diseases with which Western science is unfamiliar, and concerning which I find no record in Chinese literature. Hence it would appear important to have these diseases recorded, together with the method of their diagnosis and treatment.

Chuang Hung Ping

The Chinese terms "Chuang Hung Ping" (the mingling of the bloods) were given as referring to a disease said to result in the male after copulation just at the start of the menstrual period. It was explained that man naturally would not seek sexual intercourse during menstruation, but when the act was attempted unknowingly and the onset of menstruation took place at the same time, the male would subsequently become ill. The name means a knotting of the bloods, that is bloods of the male and female. The disease does not reveal itself until the end of three months when the patient has a bloody sputum and is attacked by general malaise. It is said that foreigners invariably confuse the symptoms with those of pulmonary tuberculosis. This seems a strange statement, seeing that Western scientific practice bases its diagnosis upon the bacterial findings. However, the exact diagnosis of this disease is said to depend upon the condition of weakness of the lungs and other organs as diagnosed by the mystic art of pulse-feeling.

Pulse-feeling. The art of pulse-feeling in China is a very ancient one dating from before B.C. 500. By placing three fingers side by side on the left and right wrists respectively of the patient, the Chinese physician claims to be able to obtain six indications of possible diseases in the internal organs. Extensive accounts of this art have been written by many writers. In general the left wrist indicates diseases of the kidneys, the heart and the sexual life. The right is felt for the lungs and so forth. At a small gathering of Western scientists on a later occasion our host demonstrated to me upon a number of people the method of pulse taking. He was a man of unusually quick powers of observation and I was very interested in his diagnosis of my own condition. In particular after taking my pulse, he picked out my lungs as being weak, which is quite in accord with my experience of pneumonia with empyema some few years ago. My balance of good health he said was maintained by especially good kidneys and wonderful bowels. The spleen was large, hence I had a good digestion. This last statement would be encouraging if true. Other persons present were similarly examined by a simple touch upon the wrists and diagnoses of a highly interesting character were put forward.

The extreme left pulse is tested for diseases of sexual "emotion." The extreme right wrist is felt for the lungs. These two pulses are the chief points for the confirmation of the above disease, though of course the final conclusions of the doctor are based upon a proper correlation of the nature of these two pulses with the others felt upon the two wrists. It would take a very long discussion to make intelligent the varying descriptions of the pulses, as for example, the drifting character of wood floating on water, a hollow pulse like an onion stalk, or slippery like a pebble rolling in a basin

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which indicates three months pregnancy, and so on.

Treatment. There are two types of prescription for the disease of Chuang Hung. Mild cases are treated by the simple administration of a decoction of one head of lotus seeds (*Nelumbium speciosum*), which is said to be sufficient for a complete cure.



A B

A. PICTURE OF SHEN NUNG, THE FATHER OF CHINESE AGRICULTURE AND ITS USE IN THE HEALING ARTS, HOLDING A STALK OF MILLET, B.C. 2838. B. PICTURE OF FU HSI, THE FATHER OF MYSTIC RITES IN CHINESE MEDICINE, HOLDING THE DIVINING DIAGRAM, B.C. 2838.

More advanced cases require treatment with the drug Ch'uan P'o Shih. This I have been so far unable to identify. Its appearance is like the sliced stalk of some common plant.

CHIA SE PING

A second disease, called "Chia Se Ping," the disease of the embrace, was described. It was of the nature of a particular kind of cold entering the system of the male during sexual intercourse, apparently on account of too little covering. The patient's symptoms occur as a pain in the small of the back, violent and persistent headache and a general feeling of weakness. The physician's diagnosis is assisted by the taking of the pulses, which reveal weakness in the kidneys, the lungs and other internal organs. The most interesting character of the disease is that if untreated the patient will most certainly die within two weeks. It should be noted that this is not in any way regarded as a common cold but is a specific disease associated with cold winds and sexual intercourse.

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Hot and Cold Winds. Old Chinese medicine regards disease as an upset of the internal harmony of the "yang," male, and the "yin," female, principles, the greater the medium and the lesser types in any or all of the internal organs. This disturbance is caused chiefly by what is termed hot and cold winds. This nomenclature not only refers to Western ideas of colds and chills but applies to practically every form of disease. There are other less intelligible types of diagnoses, such as possession by a cat-devil. In this connection the Pent'sao gives what is regarded as a reliable prescription for exorcising cat-devils. "Use one bean each of castor oil seeds, croton oil seeds, and jequirity seeds with a small amount of cinnabar and wax. The patient after administering the medicine is surrounded with ashes and placed before a cinder fire. The medicine is spitten into the fire, and as it bubbles up a cross is marked on the surface of the fire, when the cat-devil dies."

Treatment. For the above "sexual cold" a prescription containing the following ingredients is recommended: Betel nut leaf (*charrica betel*), green peas (*phaseolus mungo*), tea leaves (Chinese *mo i brand*), olives (*canarium album*), lichi nuts (*Nephelium litchi*), licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and talcum powder.

It would be instructive to look into the individual properties of these drugs with regard to their ability to save a man from such a fatal disease. Betel nut leaves are commonly used throughout the countries of the Malay Peninsula as a kind of envelop in which is wrapped a slice of areca nut with chunam. It is universally partaken of and certainly does not appear to contain any potent principle. It is used in Yunnan province as a condiment. In medicine it is considered to have stimulant, corrective and prophylactic properties.

The green beans and the tea leaves are given for their cooling properties. The peas in particular are highly regarded for their value to counteract practically all poisons. They are considered to be resolvent and carminative. They are prescribed in obstinate dysentery, bladder difficulty in the aged, and in the sequelae to smallpox.

The Chinese olive is said to be stomachic, sialagogue, antiphlogistic, alexipharmic, anti-vinous and astringent. The pits incinerated and reduced to powder are thought to have the power of dissolving fish bones accidentally swallowed and are used in a similar way in the treatment of fluxes and eruptive diseases of children.

The lichi fruits are much esteemed by Chinese physicians. They are used as a sweet-meat at feasts and often given as presents to the newly married. They are not regarded as entirely without deleterious properties, for they are said to produce feverishness and nose-bleeding when eaten too freely. They are recommended in all forms of gland enlargement or tumors, being specially prescribed in orchitis and neuralgic disorders. Our host's brother, who is a physician trained in Western medicine in one of the best European schools, states that quiescent cases of gonorrhoea can be aroused by the administration of two or three of these fruits and they are of valuable assistance to him in diagnosis of sicknesses related to it. Western scientists have made extensive examinations of this well-known table fruit and no evidence has been obtained to warrant the above claims for this drug.

Licorice root is too well known in the West to need any elaborate description. It is greatly prized in the East on account of its great virtue as a tonic and for its alexipharmic alterative and expectorant properties. It is used to allay thirst, feverishness, pain, cough and so forth. It stands next to ginseng in importance, being credited with the property of rejuvenating those who consume it for a long time. It is applied with honey to burns, boils and other sores. It plays an important part in gun shot prescribing, hence it can be readily understood why such extraordinary virtue should be ascribed to it.

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THE PROPERTIES OF CINNAMON

A long talk was given about Chinese cinnamon and its wonderful power in preserving and restoring the harmony of nature. It is a most exceptional drug in being able to restore both the "yang" (male) and "yin" (female) principles. Hence it enters into a large number of prescriptions and is found extensively upon the Chinese market. It was said that there is such a demand for it that it is impossible to secure genuine cinnamon in Hongkong or Singapore, South China and other tropical countries. A sample was exhibited, measuring about 35 cm. long, 12 cm. wide, and 6 to 8 mm. thick, for which was paid one thousand dollars Mex. Eleven other types of the same bark were exhibited and explained. For a scientific study of cinnamon the reader is referred to the work of K. K. Chen. The doctor told us that in all his maternity cases, after childbirth to prevent the onset of any kind of disease he always prescribes 2 drams of cinnamon powder in half a cup of water. Its unique power in maintaining the correct amount of the male and female principles in the system is necessary to the healthy mother. We learn more about this drug upon consulting the Chinese Dispensatory (Pent'sao). This book is the standard authority today for all Chinese medical practitioners. The following is an abstract of the monograph contained therein:

Cinnamon has stomachic, stimulant, carminative, astringent, sedative and tonic qualities. It is especially recommended in colic and excessive sweating. Postpartum difficulties and retained fetus are among the troubles for which it is prescribed, as also are snake bite and Rhus poisoning. The prolonged use of the better qualities of cinnamon is thought to improve the complexion, giving one a more youthful, rubicund appearance. Pao P'u-tzu said that if cinnamon was taken with toad's brains for seven years, one could walk on the surface of the water and never grow old or die. Chao, the hunchback, took the drug continuously for twenty years, with the result that hair grew on the bottom of his feet; he was able to walk five hundred li (200 miles) in a day and lift a weight of one thousand chin (1333 pounds).

The above diseases, described with their methods of treatment, are of peculiar interest at the present time on account of the work conducted in America and central Europe upon menotoxin, the toxic principle said to occur in the perspiration of women during the menstrual period. Dr. David Macht at the Johns Hopkins Medical School has conducted numerous experiments upon the subject, as published during the past two years in the *Journal of Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics*. It would be of interest if his findings were taken up by clinicians to see if there be any further evidence to be obtained, similar to the disease Chuang Hung described by this Chinese physician.



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