

Copy

✓ B

The Royal Commonwealth Society

Essay Competition

Class B

Subject: Some of the important measures taken to improve
the health of the peoples of the Commonwealth in
the last hundred years.

Name: Penelope Jane Walt.

Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

Address: 106, Marriott Road,
Durban.

School: Durban Girls' College,
Musgrave Road,
Durban.

Natal.

South Africa.

The strength of a nation is largely determined by the health of its people. This has obviously been recognized by Great Britain, the mother country of a great Commonwealth of nations, from which has come, among many other invaluable teachings, the promotion for the advancement of medical and social science during the past century.

In many countries of the British Commonwealth, there has been and is still a great deal of ignorance, and the amount Britain has improved the health of her subjects, must not be under-estimated. Since the change from the British Empire to the British Commonwealth, it can be seen how these countries, now governing themselves, can stand on their own feet through the aid and guidance of the British.

Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, there was not a great deal of progress in the sphere of medicine, apart from the invention of various vaccines and precautionary measures which I shall endeavour to deal with later. This was for various reasons. Methods of communication and transport were not so advanced as they later became, and men were afraid to venture into dark, unknown territory for fear of the incurable diseases so prevalent in those parts of the world with which they were not familiar. Students were insufficiently educated, and there were few technical facilities for the advancement of scientific research. General scientific knowledge and instruments, which were accepted as part of the discoveries of later years were wholly or partially undiscovered. The workmen and technicians were unskilled, and the advantages of modern advances were non-existent.

There are various aspects concerning the improvement of the health of the people of the Commonwealth, and I wish to stress a few of them. The progress made in curing and combating diseases, several valuable discoveries, men who have contributed tremendously to the welfare of the people, and societies formed in Britain to aid health improvements.

Tropical diseases like malaria, yellow-fever and elephantiasis were dreaded by all, and very little was known about them. Malaria has often been called the scourge of the tropics and at one time it would have been correct to have called it the scourge of the world. The story of the infective agent of malaria began with a paper written in 1880 by Laveran, a surgeon in the French army. Little profit was derived from Laveran's discovery and the next man to advance knowledge of malaria was Sir Ronald Ross. Sir Ronald Ross was an English doctor born in India in 1857. He was the first to demonstrate that the mosquito is responsible for the transmission of malaria, and he studied the life-cycle of the malarial parasite. He discovered the cause of malaria and studied fever-bearing mosquitoes. Ross consulted with Sir Patrick Manson, the great English expert on tropical diseases, and then returned to India where he was an officer in the Medical Service, and embarked on an extensive research programme. He published an important book on the prevention of malaria, and was the Nobel laureate in 1902.

Sir Ronald Ross's deep devotion for this work is clearly demonstrated in a poem he wrote in about 1890, entitled —

Indian Fevers

In this, O Nature, yield I pray to me.

I pace and pace, and think and think, and take
The fever'd hands, and note down all I see,
That some dim, distant light may haply break.

The painful faces ask, can we not cure?

We answer, no not yet; we seek the laws,
O, God reveal thro' all this thing obscure,
The unseen, small but million-murdering cause.

Yellow-fever is similar to malaria. In the research for the causes of yellow-fever many men lost their lives by contracting the disease. The final step in an extensive research on yellow-fever was the preparation of a vaccine which would give protection against infection. Anyone travelling through Africa today is still compelled to have an 'anti-yellow-fever injection', which removes the possibility of his contracting the disease.

Another great British scientist, Sir Patrick Manson, who died in 1922 was sometimes called the father of tropical medicine. He was a physician who worked at Amoy and Hongkong, proving that elephantiasis was transmitted by mosquitoes. He encouraged study about malaria and yellow-fever, and with Joseph Chamberlain, in 1899 founded the London School of Tropical Medicine. Sir Patrick Manson G.C.N.G. F.R.S. had a tremendous honour bestowed upon him, by being appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society.

The fact that Laveran, Ross and Manson helped to discover the causes of tropical diseases like malaria, yellow-fever and elephantiasis, facilitated the study of treatments and cures which have lowered the mortality rate of these maladies, and increased the chances of good health among the people where these diseases are rife.

A method of obtaining protection against smallpox slowly came into use in England, advocated by Dr. Edward Jenner, and immunity was introduced in the form of the vaccination that is so valuable to the world of today. Lister's work made operations safer with antiseptics. The discovery of penicillin, during the last World War, by Sir Alexander Fleming, was a result of facilities given by Britain and has proved invaluable to medical advancement all over the world. By spraying D.D.T. from aeroplanes, malaria-carrying mosquitoes have been exterminated, and also lice, which cause the terrible typhus fever.

Britain was established as the Teacher of the Commonwealth. Medical men studied in Britain and were sent out to the Commonwealth to advise and gain new ideas. Students from the Countries of the Commonwealth went to Britain to study and then returned and taught their own people.

Bursaries were established to get students from the Commonwealth to go to Britain and become doctors, sanitary inspectors, nurses and gaining numerous other necessary ideas in the advancement of social medicine.

The people of the Commonwealth were taught to help themselves and be independent, as countries like Canada, the Union

of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. They were taught to use their country's natural resources, to combat soil erosion, the elements of organized agriculture. People were helped with the knowledge of scientific and modern farming practices, and producing their own food, and therefore being more healthy by having enough to eat. This measure counteracted malnutrition to a great extent.

An organization has been formed, known as the Sims Travelling Fellowship. Two professors, well versed in medical and social science, travel to different parts of the Commonwealth every year, one to Africa and another to Australia and the East. They inspect hospitals, sanitary conditions, and medical supplies, and try to advise. They return to their own countries (not necessarily Britain) with reforms and ideas. Britain has, through this type of organization made funds available to send medical men to give and gain information from all parts of the Commonwealth.

Missionaries have no doubt improved many conditions throughout the world, and the Commonwealth is no exception. The London Missionary Society and others, sent out men who did an enormous amount to improve the health of the peoples they taught. They guided and advanced the knowledge of basic health rules and hygiene, set up hospitals, and taught the men to doctor their own people. It goes without saying that these dedicated missionaries should administer physical as well as spiritual comfort to the primitive nations of the Commonwealth, and their work is invaluable.

One of the greatest measures Britain has taken to improve is the societies and organizations that were established. There were a great deal of them, but I propose to mention only a comparatively small number.

The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, was founded in 1907 for the stimulation of enquiry and research into causes, treatment and prevention of human and animal diseases in warmer climates. This was facilitated by the publication and discussion of original contributions and reports by supplying necessary information to Fellows, and by promoting social intercourse among scientific workers in all parts of the tropical world. At present the Society has two thousand members.

The Medical Research Council, founded in 1920 as the successor of the Medical Research Committee which had been in existence since 1913, has done a great deal for the British and nations of the Commonwealth. Its main aims are investigations by members of the Council's scientific staff, mostly working in the Council's own research establishments; temporary research grants to independent investigators in universities and elsewhere; and research scholarships and fellowships available to all people in the British Commonwealth. Just a few of the Medical Research Council's departments are those dealing with air hygiene, antibiotics, bilharzia, blood transfusion and tuberculosis.

The National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, founded in 1899, for the prevention of T.B. through research, education and propaganda has been of invaluable service to all countries of the Commonwealth.

The British Empire Cancer Campaign was formed in 1923, with the object of attacking and defeating the disease of cancer in all its forms, by research into its causes, distribution, symptoms, pathology and cure.

The Royal Army Medical Corps has sent troops to different parts of the Commonwealth during the last wars, and their guidance and teaching have increased the knowledge of the people greatly.

We must not forget that the British Commonwealth had a great deal to do with the establishment of the League of Nations and from there comes the World Health Organization.

There are many other notable organizations like the Empire Rheumatism Council, the Empire Leprosy Association, the British Colonial and Indian Medical Services, but ~~the~~ space does not permit me to enlarge on them.

I have touched on very few of the many and varied ways in which the health of the people of the Commonwealth has been improved during the last hundred years. The aspects I have mentioned, diseases, the advent of penicillin and inoculations, the great scientists and doctors who have contributed so much to medical knowledge, the teachings of Britain, the missionaries and the societies formed in Britain, are those that I consider most important. However, there have been other great advances made in medical history, which I have not mentioned.

I think the approach of Britain to her Commonwealth regarding health and the state of mind of the people, is aptly described in a quotation by Amiel which states,

"Health is the basis of all liberties, and happiness gives us the energy which is the basis of health."

Books Consulted

Odham's Encyclopedia

The Story of Medicine by Kenneth ~~Wilson~~ Walker.

Doctors by Themselves compiled by Griffith.

Blakiston's New Gould Medical Dictionary.

The Children's Illustrated Encyclopedia - Odham's.

5,000 quotations for all occasions by Henry.