

SALUD Y ENFERMEDAD

HERNAN SAN MARTIN

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“The life of man is the history of his conception, gestation, birth, growing up and developing, happiness and disgrace, health and illness, and finally death. We receive a legacy from our parents and add to it the experiences and elements that are presented to us by the environment in which we live. On the background is developed the drama, of health and illness.” With these thoughts Hernán San Martín begins his book, which, in its first edition, had as its central idea to “present health and illness as ecological manifestations between man and his total environment, and consequently, show medicine not only as a biological science but also a social one.”

The book is composed of 45 topics divided into six sections. The first one is given the title of “Illness and Medicine.” In it the author seeks to demonstrate through ecology that health and illness do not constitute simple opposed states, but only different grades of adaptation of the organism to the environment in which he lives. What comes from this point of view is analyzed in a challenging way that induces the reader to think about the role modern medicine plays and its necessary association with other sciences, while developing from individual into social, and seeks to measure, interpret and actuate over all factors that interfere with the health and illness of individuals and populations. In the second section, named “Health Assessment,” “the basic concern is to explain the methodology by

which the population's health and illness problems may be scientifically observed. Basic notions on demography, statistics and epidemiology are introduced in chapters in which some experts of great renown also collaborate: Hugo Behm and Adela Legarreta (Applications of the Statistical Method to Medicine) and Rolando Armijo (Principles of Epidemiology). The chapter called "Natural History of the Population" presents a great deal of data concerning Latin America's countries, through careful tables and graphs. San Martín discusses the sources of the vital statistics data and the physician's role in their development.

This section ends with a chapter on determination of health level with enumeration of the indices used for this assessment. Some of these chapters have been introduced into this edition. Each one of them is independently of great clearness and basic in its teachings; however the sequence of the chapters could be better to demonstrate the interrelation among the subjects treated in them. The present order subjects the less-experienced reader technical methods of evaluation of health and illness problems.

"Environment and Health" is analyzed by the author in the third section of this book. He discusses the natural factors and the conditions created by man himself and how they affect health directly or indirectly. In this way San Martín introduces the basic notions of sanitation, defined as the control of outside physical environment with the aim of affording man better conditions to survive and perform his activities. So it is, as above asserted, an advancement of civilization and a definite function of the government. The contents of this section do not differ greatly from the presentations commonly observed in the texts of hygiene. It discusses the climate, water control and supplies, habitational problem, relation between animals and man's health, food control, work and health and so on. However, following the central thread of the book the matter is addressed to Latin America's conditions and problems, particularly in the suggestions on the most adequate measures to solve them. The

section ends with a long chapter concerning transmissible diseases. Several synopses help in the presentation of long lists of problems. For example, infectious diseases that produce exanthema, doses of antimicrobial agents for the treatment of diarrhetic diseases, most frequent parasites in America, among others. The measures for the control of the chief problems and the physician's role before them is discussed with great clarity.

The following section treats health protection and promotion. It discusses the evolution from the curative medicine to the prevention of diseases as well as the protection of health.

Human morbidity is high and large masses of population keep diseases unnecessarily. The attention to the healthy man and the methods to maintain health aim to enlarge the population that enjoys health, logically reducing the illness domain. The treatment and prevention of diseases, though highly necessary, are passive activities of medicine. The tendency nowadays is to search for the factors that maintain and promote health. This is the positive side that must be stimulated. These are the topics in this section, which discusses the problems of the individuals and population's health at different ages of life, analyzes specific risks of each group and the techniques of preventive medicine and promotion of health suitable to each case.

The author insists that the physician be interested in not only the diseased but also in healthy people, and that from the social point of view his chief interest must reside on the normal man. He recognizes that this is in violent contradiction to the present practice of medicine, in which the physician dedicates the greatest part of his time to restore sick people and treat irreparably damaged organisms. He justifies himself by asserting that "Health, peace, liberty and culture were declared the basic values of our life, so it is logical that health and not disease must be the fundamental motive of medicine's concern."

In this way he treats the techniques of preventive medicine and discusses prevention applied to the natural history of diseases, health examinations, education for health and so on. Besides that he dedicates some chapters to the problems of feed-

ing and nutrition, hereditary problems, mental health and a long discussion on the main noninfectious diseases and the application of the epidemiological methods to them. In this chapter, he discusses, for instance: the epidemiology of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, peptic ulcer, endemic goiter, accidents, toxicomanias, prostitution, crime and so on. Another didactic form might be the inclusion of this chapter following that on infectious diseases in the previous section, though the present distribution is utterly justified by the author.

With every respect for the already presented sections that the author characterized as ecologic, and which took a little more than half the book, the two final sections may be regarded as the greater contribution.

The fifth one treats the Administration in Public Health and the sixth one, entitled "Medicine, a Social Science," introduces themes of more recent utilization in Latin America, where the adaptation of technics and the application of the principles discussed in them are necessary to the organization of resources and services.

No doubt, the author recognizes such division in his book, when he mentions in the introduction to the fifth section: "In the previous sections the population's health and disease problems were reviewed and some varied activities were suggested which may be developed to protect and promote the individual's health, his family's and the community's to which he belongs. This section intends to demonstrate how it is possible to apply knowledge and techniques of scientific administration to all these activities, considering for such effects the conjunct of human, material and economical resources for health, suitably disposed as an "enterprise" which renders various services to the community."

The general principles of administration as well as the process of administration in public health have been elaborated by a collaborator of recognized experience on this field: Rolando Merino. The extremely complex task of offering a general panorama of the organization of health services in Latin

America—and of comparing it to structures in other countries—is performed in a satisfactory manner. This section could not do without a chapter on socialized medicine by an author in whose country a long experiment has been carried out. On this particular topic a wonderful collaboration is rendered by Benjamin Viel.

Economic and legal foundations of the health programs are discussed and the reader is introduced to the area of medical attention and hospital administration. Teamwork and the health team have a chapter in this section in which the functions of each team component is clearly defined to emphasize the value of the organized participation of each one. The study is complemented with the discussion on the community's organization for health and the history and role performed by the international health organizations.

Coming back to the positive aspect of the medicine that aspires to prevention of disease and promotion of health, the author discusses the deficiencies in the teaching of medicine and the innovating role in the teaching of preventive medicine through its private departments.

The most important aspects of medicine's new attitude—including the study of all factors that affect the individual—constitute the themes of the sixth section. The healthy or diseased man is linked to the conditions of social life, including all aspects of economic order and culture. Man considered as a social being is of mutual interest to the medical and social sciences. On approaching these aspects, the author dedicates a chapter to the study of society in conflict with biology, followed by a discussion of the socioeconomic value of human life, the lengthening of life and the population problem and birth control, viewed through a prism not always common: "Physicians must be conscious that in the underdeveloped countries the problem is not of superpopulation but of lack of economic development and that the low levels of life and health do not disappear with birth control (Neomalthusianism), but with the economic development." By making this assertion he seeks to

remind readers that the superpopulation is not a valid reason for the physician to shirk his responsibility in the prevention of disease and death and in the lengthening of human life. Some aspects are more detailed in the chapters of this section, which ends with a synthesis of the historic-social evolution of medicine.

Three appendices are added to the book: consulted works for each section, definitions used and the author's opinion about the important persons linked to the development of social medicine. Particularly in this last case, a record of names may commit injustices or not be of acceptance to all readers. Nevertheless, it illustrates the author's opinion and homage to illustrious scientists.

The detailed index of material completes the work.

We would not like to finish this description of Professor San Martin's book without expressing appreciation. Latin America resents the lack of description of its experiences and the lack of text books adequate for teaching preventive medicine. This book includes material from the majority of present teaching programs of social and preventive medicine in Latin America in a clear exposition, and may easily be read by the students.

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