

Jews in Medicine Through the Ages.

By JACK LEVIN, B.Sc.

All too frequently a study of the Jewish contribution to medical science begins and ends with the story of a series of famous Jews who have made important discoveries in this field. But in this way a great deal of the assessment of the Jewish contribution is lost, for probably the greatest portion of our great gift to mankind in the medical sphere lies in the Bible, the Talmud and in Jewish traditional practise—and it is perhaps only to-day that this is being realised.

Emerging from the great discoveries in medical science of the 19th and 20th centuries is the invaluable importance of prophylactic or preventative medicine—the practise of devising such means and measures in society whereby the individual will be able to prevent, to a large extent, many diseases he would otherwise be prone to contract purely by his ignorance of the fundamentals of prevention.

To one who knows of the personal hygiene, the dietary laws and the advice on health advocated in Jewish life and literature it is indeed illuminating, in view of its resemblance in many ways to modern views and its date of recording thousands of years ago.

In the Bible in Leviticus we learn of the way in which the priests carefully distinguished between the skin wounds of leprosy and those of ordinary boils and such-like, so that the suspect might not be condemned to a leper camp by a wrong diagnosis. The priest is instructed to observe the man for successive periods, to note his condition and to confirm and change his decisions concerning the disease. Should the suspect be infected he must be removed to a leper camp and isolated. It is significant, too, that the Hebrews of old recognised that the disease heals spontaneously in certain cases and that such a healed person could return to his family. Also they observed strict rules concerning the disposal of the leper's clothes and all other material that might have been infected.

The whole passage dealing with this question of leprosy gives one the firm impression of a scientific observant approach, especially to the diagnosis, but also to the practise of isolation, prevention and spread of the disease. Here is certainly not the haphazard guesswork so characteristic of medical practise of the ancient world, but one of a number of examples of the prevention of disease and sanitation to be found in the Bible.

In the Talmud there are countless instructions on healthy living. I quote a few instances: Fruit and vegetables are recommended for convalescing and weak people. We know to-day that these foods contain high proportions of the vitamins and mineral salts, hailed as important in normal diet and for their tonic effect, which leads to a return to good health. The Rabbis constantly recommend definite hours for food, resting and exercise, and emphasize a balance between these for a satisfying and serene life. It took science centuries to discover that many infections were being carried by contaminated water, yet the Talmud said it was not safe for health reasons to drink water which had not previously been boiled. We know to-day that amongst the finest cleansing agents for the teeth and mouth is common salt. The Talmud advises the use of salt to keep the mouth healthy and free from bad breath.

Our Rabbis often showed a deep understanding of the physical nature of man and the subject of sex relationship. They dealt with this difficult question in a manner which would be thought ultra-modern even to-day.

A discussion on health and the Jew must include mention of the laws of

Kashrut. This is a heritage which has earned us the praise of numerous Gentile medical authorities such as the Englishman Price, who have affirmed that Jews are relatively free from such preventable diseases as tuberculosis and parasitic diseases transmitted by the meat of the pig. Science has endorsed the values of the soaking and salting of meat, or the careful laws appertaining to the recognition of sickness in an animal before and after slaughtering.

Our study as a contribution to civilization is strengthened by the knowledge of the great Jewish physicians of the ages—their discoveries and their works. Of a multitude of names that come to mind is the outstanding figure of Moses Maimonides, "a light in an age of darkness." His medical writings and discoveries are considerable, and even up to six centuries after his death were standard texts in the study of diagnosis and treatment. Among his most important discoveries is the fact that the sun is one of the finest disinfectants and has great healing properties. His teachings in the duties of the physician to his patient, as it appears in his prayer to God for strength to heal the sick, is proclaimed to-day as equal and perhaps superior to the famous Hippocratic oath. It was recently published in a local newspaper.

Before Maimonides and for centuries after him the high standards achieved by Jewish physicians is recorded by the fact that they were constantly found as doctors to kings, princes, Popes and noblemen. Maimonides himself was physician to the Sultan in

Cairo and refused an appointment to Richard the Lion Heart because of his persecution of Jewry. Notable examples here are Dr. Nathan ben Joel Falaguero, physician to the Vatican in the 13th century, and Michel de Nostradamus, acclaimed for his prediction of contemporary events, was physician to King Charles IX of France. It is not generally known that a Jew, Dr. Frederick Treves, was surgeon to Queen Victoria and Edward VII. Of interest, too, is that the late Professor Heinrich von Neumann, consulted by many of the kings of Europe, was in 1936 urged to treat Hitler for a throat infection.

Jews feature prominently in the landmarks of great discovery in medicine. For instance, Dr. Paul Erlich, Nobel Prize winner, discovered the treatment of syphilis by arsenical compounds, and it was also a Jew, Dr. Wasserman, who devised an ingenious diagnostic test for it, and later Drs. Kahn and Rappaport devised others. In the field of pathology Professor Conheim became famous in the 19th century. To Franz Jacob Henle is attributed much of the present-day knowledge of the kidney and other organs. Outstanding in the field of psychological medicine is the late Dr. Sigmund Freud who is accepted as the father of psychoanalysis. It was Dr. Funk of Warsaw who coined the name vitamin and Dr. Mendel who discovered vitamin A. The cure for Pellagra, vitamin B, was also discovered by a Jew, Dr. Goldberger.

Among the prominent Zionists who were or are prominent in medicine, is the late Dr. Otto Warburg, also a Nobel Prize winner, best known for his researches in cancer, and Dr. Samson Wright, head of the J.N.F. in the British Isles, who is regarded as being one of the greatest living physiologists.

At the Hebrew University is to be found one of the greatest living authorities on endocrinology, Professor Zondek, who is co-discoverer of the

famous pregnancy test. Of equal fame is Dr. Saul Adler, the great authority on tropical medicine.

The role of Jewish physicians and their work is legion. In the words of Sir William Osler, the great surgeon, "In the medical profession the Jews have a long and honourable record and among no people is all that is best in our science and art more warmly appreciated."

Our contribution to civilization and medicine is a reflection of our great love of humanity and all that is sustaining in life and because of it our pride in our national rights is thereby given greater strength and value.

Youth Month Calendar.

- May 4th: Sunday: Cape Town (opening function).
- .. 11th: Sunday: Sea outing (farewell to Drom Afrika).
- .. 18th: Sunday: Grand Trial.
- .. 20th: Tuesday: Woodstock - Salt River.
- .. 21st: Wednesday: Durbanville.
- .. 22nd: Thursday: Claremont Northern Districts.
- May 25th: Sunday: Maitland (Oneg Shavuoth).
- .. 26th: Monday: Shavuoth function —Zionist Hall (arranged by Habonim).
- .. 27th: Tuesday: Muizenberg, Histadrut Ivrit function.
- .. 28th: Wednesday: Observatory-Mowbray Bnoth Zion.
- .. 29th: Thursday: Goodwood; Wynberg.
- May 31st—June 1st: Rally at Stellenbosch-Strand.
- June 3rd: Tuesday: Repeat performance of Grand Trial, Paarl.
- June 4th: Wednesday: At Home by W. P. Z. Council to members of the Cape Zionist Youth Executive and other Youth Month workers.

We Present Our Artists.

In another article of this supplement reference is made to the popularity of Hebrew songs in South Africa, and it's only fair to explain to our readers that it was through the services rendered by our singers and songsters that many Hebrew melodies became popular amongst the Zionist youth of this Province. With Youth Month in full swing the Jewish community of this town will have the pleasure of hearing most of these artists at the various functions organised.

From left to right:

Ray Kantor, the popular alto, who has entertained audiences since her childhood.

Freda Levin, a well-known artist, whose dramatic soprano voice has often thrilled audiences.

Bottom row:

Sarah Rabinowitz whose version of 'Perach Levan' has made the song popular.

The Goldin Twins, Sheila and Lola, who have often appeared at Zionist meetings with their charming duets; and **Bilah Berret** who, with her sweet voice, has held many audiences.

In addition to the artists special mention must be made of **Mr. Herzl Konvisser** who is already widely known, especially for his rendering of 'Ich fohr Aheim,' and **Mr. Hilel Rivlin**, a beautiful deep base, who has popularised the song 'Artzenu Haktantonet.'

