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33

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Medicine Among the Yumas.

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It was my first intention to prepare a paper covering the class and number of diseases incident to the Yuma Indians and their peculiar methods of treating them, but concluding that this alone might not prove interesting to all, I have touched on a few of their habits and customs as well.

To my brothers of the medical profession, the title of this paper will doubtless seem a misnomer when applied to the methods of treatment that have come under my observation and which I shall attempt to briefly describe, but as it is meant to designate their treatment of the sick I presume we will have to so dignify it, however erroneous it may prove to be.

Let me say by way of introduction that I write from Fort Yuma, California, justly celebrated as the most hospitable place on earth, in that it extends to its visitors the warmest welcome (especially in the Summer) and that during my sojourn there I have observed with much interest the many strange habits and practices of the Indians on the reservation among which none are stranger than their treatment of the sick.

Physically the Yumas compare fav-

orably with any tribe in the United States. Tall of stature and erect in carriage, with good muscular development and vivacious temperament, their endurance under the most adverse circumstances is very great and their immunity from disease considering their happy disregard of all hygienic laws surprising, that it would astonish the zealous advocate of the enforcement of strict sanitary laws goes without saying, but the fact remains the same, in the midst of filth they multiply.

The digestive apparatus of the Yuma must be copper-lined to enable him to devour, with avidity and apparent relish some of the delectable dishes of his menu; dishes that to civilized people would seem not only unfit to eat by reason of uncleanness, but poisonous as well.

It was with a variety of emotions I remember that I first viewed an Indian meal and it is needless to say, it made a lasting impression on my mind vividly recalling the old saying that "one half of the world knows nothing of how the other half lives." Surrounded by his squaw and five children, the head of the family was assiduously de-

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voting his attention to the cutting up of a piece of beef, but, owing to the dullness of his knife (not a scalping knife by the way) or the uncertain age of the animal to which the roast had previously belonged, his progress was necessarily slow; he had for a cutting block a piece of wood lying loose on the ground and as it was of small dimensions it required great skill to prevent the pieces cut off from falling in the sand and not a few met that fate; but a little thing like sand did not seem to lessen their fondness for bits from the family joint, the Indians doubtless considering the sand a Providential blessing as aiding digestion and preventing dyspepsia. In addition to the meat mentioned, a mysterious compound which I afterwards found consisted of flour and water and to my mind recalled the paste used by paper-hangers stood in their midst in a five gallon can, into which each member dipped his hand for a morsel and afterwards wiped his fingers with his tongue; spoons forks and napkins being considered superfluous in that family. Favoring a meat diet these Indians consume large quantities when available and notwithstanding their residence in a hot climate seem to suffer no inconvenience therefrom.

Among the articles of diet highly prized by them is the watermelon, they eat freely of this fruit in all stages of its growth and suffer no pangs from that terror of civilized children, cramp-colic. The Yuma, young and old, needs no paregoric or essence of ginger to allay the contortions of that malady so familiar to us during the

green fruit season. I have known these Indians to live for months on a diet of watermelon and bread and to all appearances enjoy the best of health. They are true children of the tropics and will lie in the open air under the rays of a burning sun and sleep sweetly, undisturbed by a temperature of 116° F., in the shade, or any fear of sunstroke, which by the way is unknown among them. The hottest nights of Summer seem to be preferred for the indulgence of their various dances, which they continue throughout the night giving as a reason therefor that the danger of contracting colds and other kindred complaints after such violent exercise is much less in hot weather than in the Winter or the cooler months, a fact they have doubtless proved by experience.

The Yumas are very superstitious, a sudden or unexpected death among them is usually ascribed to the agency of witches and in former years woe to the poor wretch accused of possessing these supernatural powers. Many of you may recall a case that occurred a few years since, wherein the murder of a Yuma Medicine Man was followed by the trial and conviction of four Indians who committed the deed. It seems the medicine man had been treating a sick Indian on the reservation for several weeks and notwithstanding his prognosis to the contrary the patient died, at this time an unwritten law existed among them making the fourth failure to foretell correctly the outcome of an illness a capital offense, punishable with death at the hands of the relatives of the

deceased, unfortunately the medicine man he wished the cure of his patient to accomplish this the limits of caustic error of expressing man's recovery and erroneous prediction was pronounced a rule I rejoice to see in my case and I never popularity gained. Happily this case since undergone a later and the only allowing an error curtailing of all future case. But some are shrewd enough collecting their facts the case progress the event of a man relatives have an to say.

The methods are peculiar, the ideas held on the part of the practitioner do not the trappings used in dime novels but the gentleman of his trade at the side of the an air of consequence engendered by proceeds with his consists in laying out the flesh over the gan, burning of with the ashes, the performance of the hands and

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deceased, unfortunately for this medicine man he wished to gain credit for the cure of his patient and in working to accomplish this result overstepped the limits of caution and made the fatal error of expressing some hope for the man's recovery and this being the fourth erroneous prediction, the edict of death was pronounced and executed. This rule I rejoice to say did not apply in my case and I never envied them their popularity gained at such a risk. Happily this condition of affairs has since undergone a change for the better and the only punishment now following an error of judgment is the curtailing of all fees for attendance on case. But some of the medicine men are shrewd enough to evade this by collecting their fees in installments as the case progresses, but whether in the event of a mistaken diagnosis the relatives have any redress I am unable to say.

The methods of the medicine man are peculiar, contrary to the usual ideas held on this subject, the Yuma practitioner does not avail himself of the trappings usually ascribed to them in dime novels but attending as a gentleman of his tribe he takes his place at the side of the patient and wearing an air of consequence, no doubt occasioned through a feeling of importance engendered by traditional value, proceeds with his treatment which consists in laying on of hands, kneading the flesh over the affected part or organ, burning of sticks and anointing with the ashes, blowing of breath and the performance of gymnastics with the hands and arms over the patient.

Food and drink are strictly prohibited as well as all clothing, the unfortunate patient being laid on the bare sand and a piece of muslin or calico thrown over him. I saw in one instance a case of incipient cold develop into pneumonia within a short time, the patient dying after enduring great suffering through such treatment. Imagine the suffering and agony of a fever patient deprived of water; notwithstanding all this, no complaints are uttered the patient displaying remarkable fortitude and the poor unfortunate meekly submitting, bows to the inevitable from which he makes no effort to escape.

In another case, one of pyaemia or blood poisoning due to inflammation and the presence of pus in the pleural cavity, the patient was liberally dosed with an emulsion of pumpkin and water melon seeds, it is needless to say however that he did not recover. Soon after my arrival I was called to attend an Indian who had sustained a severe and extensive scalp wound, I had but a short time before left one of our eastern hospitals and imbued with the more advanced ideas of modern surgery proceeded to dress the cut after the most approved methods, employing all the antiseptic measures at hand to procure a good result. Having had occasion to pass that vicinity a few hours later I called at the hut and found—the children playing tag with my antiseptic bandages and the wound covered with a coating of blue mud. I hardly think anyone will blame me for not replacing them especially as mother earth proved an efficient rem-

edy in the case, and I met the Indian shortly afterwards on his way to Yuma none the worse for his experience.

I desire to say in this connection the dry climate of that region seems especially fitted for the speedy healing of wounds of the flesh.

These Indians lack all knowledge of surgery, as a case in point I recall that of a boy who fell from a horse and sustained a fracture of the wrist or what is known in medical parlance as Colles' Fracture.

I saw this case about two weeks after the accident occurred, the parent bringing him to me with the statement that three or four medicine men had tried to cure him, but I found no attempt had been made to correct the deformity or confine the fragments of bone to their proper places. I did what I could but as I lost sight of the case, cannot say anything as to the result.

Cases of deformity are very rare among them, however. I have heard rumors of the parents destroying the cripples but have not been able to verify them. An amusing experience was occasioned by an Indian who came in one day suffering from a severe toothache; after dramatically explaining the symptoms to me, I prevailed upon him to permit of the extraction of the offending molar, which he afterwards reduced to powder between two stones. He then requested salve for a sore on his wrist which on inquiry I learned had been caused by a medicine man burning it severely with a live coal of fire on the end of a stick, presumably a counter irritant for the

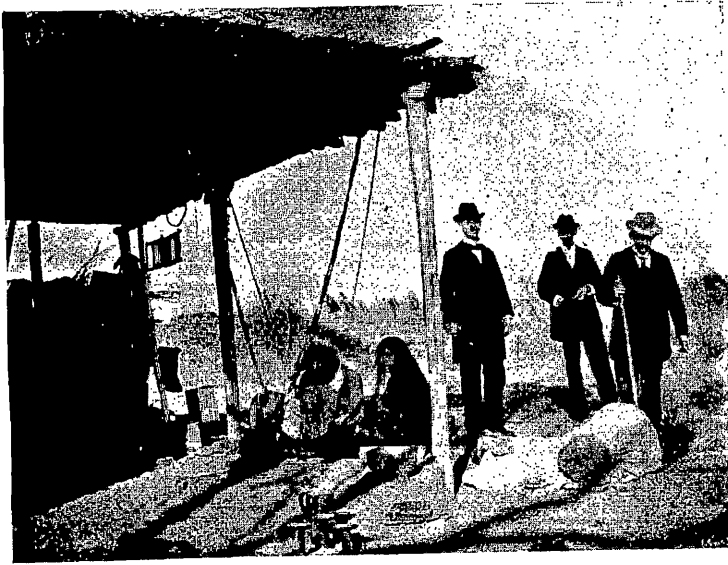
aching tooth, that being the statement by the patient.

This same method is also in vogue for treatment of pleurisy or pain in the various parts of the body, and I attended one patient who had twenty-eight of these burns in a space of about twelve inches square, which from their size and depth, must have caused excruciating pain in their infliction. Perhaps the most novel method of treating diseases of the digestive organs is that of the knee massage or kneading process, and I well remember the first case of this kind that came under my observation.

An Indian divested of all clothing except the inevitable and never absent (G) string was lying on his back on the ground while a medicine man knelt on his abdomen and from time to time proceeded to vault about on that organ in a series of circles, to the accompaniment of doleful grunts from the long suffering victim; providing the patient could stand such treatment, it might prove beneficial in some cases, but imagine the result in a case of general inflammation, its utility as a curative agent being at best doubtful, the suffering it entails should doom it to eternal banishment from the archives of Modern Medicine.

They are not all conversant with the medical properties of the plants that grow in their immediate neighborhood but adopt these more vigorous measures to accomplish their end, and, I regret to say usually that of the patient as well.

The Yuma avails himself of nature as an agent to disinfect the sick room



On the Yuma Indian Reservation,



Playing Indian, Fort Yuma, Cal.
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and clothing of the diseased, and he proceeds to perform this act in a most thorough manner. After the death of the invalid a funeral pyre of logs and brush is built on which the body is placed together with all personal property, quantities of provisions, clothing of the immediate family and relatives including voluntary gifts from friends and acquaintances. The fire is then lighted and in a short time nothing remains but the ashes, which are scattered to the desert winds.

I am reminded here of the customs of the ancients in placing coin or other property with the bodies of their dead to pay the charges of the ferryman across the river "Styx." Doubtless if it were known some such intention actuates this generous contribution of property to the flames.

The Yuma Indian firmly believes that cremation of the body is essential to gain for the soul of the departed entrance into the spirit world.

I was surprised some months ago to witness the cremation by proxy of an Indian named Palone who was killed by a train too far from home for his friends to recover his body. To guarantee eternal peace to the spirit of the departed, his relatives procured a log, wrapped it with calico and muslin placed it under an improvised shed and mourned for several hours over the fantastically adorned figure intended to represent the Indian who was killed, after which it was consigned with due ceremony and respect to the flames, thus securing to the spirit of Palone an entrance into the charmed circle of warriors gone before.

Whether the grief of the mourners was sincere or not may be questioned, but a few of his intimate friends certainly contributed considerable property to the flames and also provided a feast for all those who took an active part in the ceremonies.

These cremations usually take place at night and the mournful crying and rocking to and fro of some, together with the almost frenzied gesticulations and howling of others, the light from the burning pile streaming back over the surrounding multitude, giving to everything that unnatural ghost-like appearance, and the whole shut in by a wall of darkness, furnishes a weird and impressive picture, one does not easily forget.

Having attended the patient to the end, let us now draw the mantle of charity over his many mistakes and take a glance at the coming generation of his people.

This crude material fashioned after God's own image, subjected to the civilizing influence of educational training, presents a far more pleasing picture and leads one to indulge the hope that a few more years of earnest work will cause even the memory of such practices to appear as a troubled dream.

In justice to those engaged in the educational work at the Fort Yuma School, I cannot close without referring to the extent of their work and far reaching influence and benefit of their example. A residence of five years among them has shown me the results of earnest efforts, selfdenial and patient and faithful attention to details.

I have watched with pleasure the gradual transformation of dirty ragged and half starved Indian children, wild and untamable as their own bronchos, into well clothed, well fed, clean and respectable girls and boys, a credit to the Institution that has wrought the miracle and to a system that in so short a time can change the child of the savage into a peace loving, well disciplined, and industrious member of a civilized community.

If it is the desire of our government to exchange the tomahawk and scalp-

ing knife of the savage for the more peaceful impliments of agriculture and trade, in my opinion the school-room promises the most fruitful results, and the instruction of the children of to-day will exert a beneficial influence on generations to come. The prejudices of the present are fast giving away before the good results already obtained and the magnitude of the undertaking is greatly lessened by encouraging signs of victory and the achievement of all that can be desired in the near future.

Hemorrhage from the Navel.

MARY B. MALLORY, M. D., Auburn, Cal.

On the afternoon of July 6th 1895 I was called to see Mrs. L——. Found her in labor, well advanced. In about an hour and a half she gave birth to a fine daughter, weight about nine pounds, plump, healthy looking excepting a bluish white tinge, instead of the usual red color of the skin, breathing normal. Ordered it wrapped up warm. Called to see patient again the 8th. Found mother notwithstanding the excessive heat doing finely, babe, better color and remarkably bright. The people were in limited circumstances and had only employed me to safely conduct the labor. As they lived several miles away I heard nothing of them until the babe was eleven days old when about 5 P. M., I received a note that the baby had been bleeding for several hours from

the navel; and if I thought it anything dangerous, to come right away. I hastened to see the patient, and found it soaking in its own life blood and instead of the plump little infant it was, nothing but a skeleton. Inquiry elicited the fact that for several days the infant had been subject to attacks of palpitation of the heart which they had laid to the heat. I also learned that the detachment of the umbilical cord had not been normal, but when it came off, as they expressed, "it left a something that looked like the stem of a bean." The blood vessels of the umbilical cord had never properly contracted or become impervious to the flow of the blood, consequently when this hard filament came away hemorrhage took place. I applied styptics and compresses, and finally

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