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TUBERCULOSIS INFECTION FROM DISEASED ANIMALS

To the Editor of the Guard:—Considerable discussion has been going on of late as to whether tuberculosis in cows can be communicated to human beings through the use of milk from the infected animals. This is so important a subject that I thought a few words might be of interest to your readers. Indeed, when we recall that the existence of this disease ascends to the most remote times, that it is diffused throughout the entire earth, and that it has baffled the skill of the wisest physicians, and is even now the most fatal of all diseases, no one can over-estimate the importance of a thorough discussion of the subject. To the veterinarian the disease has a double interest, first because of its relation to bovine health, and secondly because of its possible communication through animals to man.

It is well known to all that there are certain diseases originating in the lower animals that are transmissible to man. These are, I am sorry to say, increasing in number. They may have been in existence for all time, but our perfect means of more lengthened, and probably not more painful form of death to that now visited upon them. We know that if animals be fed for a certain time with tuberculosis matter serious changes will take place in their bodies although they may appear to be in perfect health. I do not know that the moralists of this country would tolerate experimentation upon condemned criminals, but I think that those who go off against human society as to take human life could thus make amends to some extent for the wrongs they have done to society. I trust that our legislators may find some means to use to some extent the life now taken on the gallows or in the electric chair to solve these great problems in disease. We must remember that consumption destroys one-sixth of the human family, and is more likely than any other known disease to finally exterminate the race. No effort, therefore, should be spared to learn all about it and to diagnosis and examination enables us

to identify as the same what were formerly thought separate diseases. Diseases, too, which one time were considered non-contagious are now recognized as highly contagious. Looked at from the case with which it may be transmitted from man to man, tuberculosis is a most serious disease, but if in addition to this and its insidiousness and fatality, it may also through one of our most common foods be communicated to man, it may well be regarded as the most fearful of all diseases.

I trust that we shall be able to arrive at some conclusion as to the best sanitary measures to be adopted to prevent the spread of this disease through our bovine population, and through them to ourselves and our children. Hitherto it has not been recognized as a malady properly subject for the legislature to deal with, and unfortunately information which must have been derived from a systematic and long-continued observation of the disease among animals has been lost. It is certain that the disease is marked by the presence of an organism which has distinctive features. The transmissibility of this organism from one animal to another is proved beyond any doubt by the experiments of the pathological laboratory. This is demonstrated by the ingestion and inoculation of tuberculosis matter and by giving animals the flesh and milk of tuberculosis cattle. There is no doubt that the serum of animals afflicted with tuberculosis is virulent. It also spreads as glanders would spread—that is to say, if an animal suffering from the complaint were removed from the shed where it has been kept and a healthy animal placed there the latter would probably become afflicted with the disease. The facts which point to this are becoming more frequent and marked. Veterinarians believe that it is infectious in the ordinary way in which we apply that term. With the human species it is a matter of doubt among high authorities whether phthisis, or tuberculosis, is infectious. While I should not like to trench upon the domain of the practitioner in human medicine, I believe the disease to be infectious in the human species, although not as much so as in the bovine species. It is infectious from the human species to animals, as is proved by the inoculation of rabbits and other like animals with the virus from the human being. It has been abundantly demonstrated that there is a close relationship between the human and the bovine tuberculosis. A great difficulty that we meet with is that while we can experiment with animals to prove that the malady is transmissible from one to another, or from man to the animal, we cannot do so to prove a malady transmissible from man to man, or from animals to man. It has sometimes struck me that we waste human life, that we throw away good opportunities for experiment by the way in which we dispose of our criminals condemned to death. I think that a better use could be made by experimenting upon those condemned to death, to ascertain the truth regarding the disputed facts as to the transmissibility of disease. No doubt many of these criminals would prevent its spread. Perhaps the higher we breed our animals the more liable they are to tuberculosis. I am afraid results will be most disastrous unless our herdsmen have careful examination made of their animals as to tuberculosis before breeding from them. In the bovine species the malady is rarely apparent in an acute form. This is a most dangerous feature. An animal may appear to be in perfect health, may give large quantities of milk, may exhibit no sign of disease, and yet be in an advanced stage of consumption. It is usually too late when the veterinarian is called in.

Now a word as to bovine tuberculosis as affected by local conditions. It is well known that cleanliness and pure air are as necessary to animal health as to human health. Insufficient air and filthy barn conditions are the most serious menaces to the health of cows, and a constant and dangerous source of contamination to milk. Our climate, with its long rainy season, which makes, unless greater care is taken than has been as yet, every barnyard a wide stretch of muddy filth, greatly augments the dangers of tuberculosis. Inspections of barns and examinations of dairies must be had if the milk produced is to be sold as human food. Too great care cannot be exercised. The community must be wide awake as to the dangers and officials vigilant to ward them off.

Since writing the foregoing my attention has been called to the report of the Royal Tuberculosis Commission, just announced through the newspapers. This commission finds that Dr. Koch's assertion that bovine tuberculosis is not transmissible to man through milk is erroneous, and asserts that cow's milk containing tubercular bacilli is largely responsible for the spread of tuberculosis. This has been the belief of the best-informed veterinarians for some time.

Very respectfully,
J. CHRISTIE, V. S.

ADVERTISED LETTERS.

Eugene, Or., March 6.

Baker, B. H.
Blair, Sarah E.
Carson, G. W.
Edwards, Frank.
Farrish, J.
Fick, A. and Annie.
Fuller, N. H.
Grubb, Susan, heirs.
Haley, A. C.
Harlow, C. A.
Hathaway, Miss Rachel.
Hill, Sam.
Lane, G. T.
McCraty, H. L. (2)
McDaniel, A. G.
McVay, Miss Bessie.
Naka, Fred D.
Newton, L. A.
Price, J.
Pedal, F. A.
Russell, Ralph and Arthur.
Ryne, Charlie.
Seigel, Jas.
Smith, A. B.
Strong, Ethelwyn and Harold.
Wallace, S. W.
Wassman, J. H.
Watson, A. B.
Wilcox, Loran.
Williams, Ed.

J. L. PAGE, P. M.

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