

Scientific and Useful

THE SNAGS OF LIFE.

The question, "What is life?" has been asked many times, but it has seldom been answered in the manner chosen by a Parisian medical man in the French "Journal of Health."

He has defined life in terms of disease, and his analysis proceeds thus:—
First year: Infantile complaints and vaccination.

Second year: Teething, croup, infantile cholera, and convulsions.

Third year: Diphtheria, whooping cough, and bronchitis.

Fourth year: Scarlatina and meningitis.

Fifth year: Measles.

By now, he says half the children are dead. The others live on as follows:—

Seventh year: Mumps.

Tenth year: Typhoid.

Sixteenth year: Chlorosis and spinal irritation.

Eighteenth year: Neurasthenia.

Twentieth year: Cephalgia, alcoholism, and vertigo.

Twenty-fifth year: Marriage (included among the diseases).

Twenty-sixth year: Insomnia (probably the first baby).

Thirtieth year: Dyspepsia and nervous asthenia.

Thirty-fifth year: Pneumonia.

Forty-fifth year: Lumbago and failing sight.

Fifty-fifth year: Rheumatism and baldness.

Sixtieth year: Amnesia, loss of teeth, hardening of arteries.

Sixty-fifth year: Apoplexy.

Seventieth year: Amblyopia, deafness, general debility, loss of tone in the digestive organs, gouty rheumatism.

Seventy-fifth year: Death.

PTOMAINE POISONING.

"When people speak of ptomaine poisoning they are commonly making use of an expression which conceals an ignorance, by no means confined to unscientific circles, of the chemical reaction which has, in fact, taken place," says the "Morning Post." "A paper recently read by Dr. William F. Boos, summarises rather effectively some of the known facts concerning the actual poisons which can be distinguished when so-called ptomaine takes place. Of these the most important, and, in fact, the only one which has been isolated in the pure state, is 'sepsin,' and twenty milligrammes of this would probably poison anyone. The symptoms and effects of it are very similar to those of arsenic poisoning. By heating to about 60 deg. Centigrade for an hour 'sepsin' is changed to 'cadaverine,' and rendered innocuous, from which one might jump to the conclusion that, since the poisoning from bad meat is due to the presence of 'sepsin,' cooked meat ought never to be poisonous. That is not quite the case, because in ordinary cooking processes the interior portions of the meat or fish may not reach a temperature sufficiently high to destroy the poison if present. Besides the poisoning by ptomaines, the question of bacterial poisoning has also to be considered, though there is no essential difference in the poisonous effect.

"Cold storage is sometimes blamed, and not altogether without reason, for effects of poisoning. Low temperatures will not destroy all bacteria, and will not even prevent their multiplication while the material in which they live is liquid.

SPIDERS' WEBS VARY.

"As fine as a spider's web" has long been a standard of comparison, but it makes a difference as to what sort of spider's web is meant.

All spiders' webs are not alike; nor are all the threads of which they are made. These may be dry or sticky, fine

and regular, or coarse and rough, according to the will of the spider, and the use he wishes to make of it.

One kind of web is that seen on the grass on dewy mornings. This is merely a level floor on which the spider runs and catches his prey. The thread is not sticky, and the web may last, if undisturbed, a whole season. Attached to it is a tube of web, in which the spider hides.

Another web is in large meshes, but of indefinite shape. Insects get entangled in the mesh, but are not held by any glutinous nature in the thread.

Then there are dome webs, in which the spider runs about to catch the insects which get entangled. In addition, there is the familiar geometrical pattern. In making these, the insect first places the radiating lines in position. On these are woven the circles of sticky thread, which, however, never reach right to the centre. These are the webs which catch insects by their stickiness.

There are, in addition, many varieties of spiders which build no web at all, but catch their prey by running after it.

PLANTS HAVE EYES.

Potatoes have "eyes," as most people know, but how many are aware that certain common garden and wild flowers are similarly equipped.

The nasturtium, begonia, clover, wood-sorrel, and bluebell, among others, have eyes placed on their leaves. They are tiny protuberances, filled with a transparent, gummy mixture, which focuses the rays of light upon a sensitive patch of tissue behind them.

A nasturtium plant has thousands of such "eyes" on its leaves, but it is not yet known if the plant can actually see. Are the sense impressions telegraphed to some central nerve corresponding with the brain of the animal kingdom?

In addition to this visual organ, many plants show a touch of sensitiveness that points to further resemblance to animals; while certain seaweeds and mosses in an early stage of their existence are able to actually swim through the water.

WITHOUT A BRAIN.

The medical evidence given at an inquest at Southampton on the body of an infant which died soon after birth showed that the child had no brain at all. The coroner remarked that in his lengthy experience he had never before heard of a child being born without a brain.

THE TELEPHONES OF THE WORLD.

An estimate made on January 1, 1907, showed the telephones in the world to number 7,398,800, distributed thus:—United States, 5,008,800, or 68.5 per cent; Canada, 130,000, or 1.7 per cent; Europe, 2,000,000, or 27.1 per cent; other parts of the world, 200,000, or 2.7 per cent. These totals are of necessity approximate, for it is very difficult to get figures from different parts of the world. In countries also where the telephone service is under government management the returns are apt to be particularly delayed in the giving out. In Europe the number of telephone subscribers doubles once in every six or seven years, a considerably slower rate than that in the United States. However, it shows that the telephone is increasing in popularity on the Continent with reasonable rapidity. Germany, at the commencement of the present year, had 678,855 telephones in use, Great Britain 481,018. All told, however, there were in use in Europe, with a population of nearly 425,000,000, but 40 per cent as many telephones as in the United States, with a population in the neighbourhood of 85,000,000.—"Scientific American."

Arthur Nathan's

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