

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

VI. THE NEWNESS OF GOD'S OLD LAWS.

Text.—"These things happened unto them : and they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (I Cor. x. II).

[Book of the Month : MOSES, THE FOUNDER OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE,* by Wood =W. Other reff. *Divine Hygiene*, by A. Rattray, M.D. =R. *Diseases of the Bible*, by Risdon Bennett, M.D. =B. *Sanitary Code of the Pentateuch*, by C. Gillespie. =G. A. Macalister's art. "Medicine," in *Hastings' Dict.* =DB. Creighton's art. "Medicine," in *Encycl. Brit.* =E.B. Moulton's *From Egyptian Rubbish Heaps.* =M. Kellogg's *Leviticus* =K.]

Dr. J. H. Moulton renders this verse "'To us the toll of all ages has come as our inheritance.' We are the heirs of the spiritual wealth of all the ages past" (M. p. 30).

W. is filled with admiration for the sanitary efficiency of the Pentateuch. "This book is a product of the great War" (W. p. v.). And "A state of war, actual or contingent, gives occasion to special developments of medical and surgical practice" (EB xv. 797). "Under the head of military hygiene we may include the general subject the sanitary arrangements of camps, and the various forms of epidemic camp sickness" (EB xv. 797). "When, having to give a lecture on sanitation to the officers of his battalion, the author chanced to think of the plague of flies as recorded in the book of Exodus ; and as he read through the whole series of plagues with his mind fixed on the subject of his lecture, a new meaning seemed to light up these events" (W. v.). "But for the war, the author could not have gained an insight into the problems which beset every army in the field" (W. v.). "Moses was the founder of preventive medicine. All that is new in this book is the method of displaying wares as old as the hills in the garb of comparison with modern experience" (W. vii.). So also "the Mosaic sanitary code

* By P. Wood, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., Capt. R.A.M.C., S.P.C.K., 3s. 6d. A fine, straightforward piece of writing, with inferences deeper than are drawn.

may be said to constitute the basis of modern sanitary legislation " (B. 10). It is full of " minute detail, the value and import of which it is for the most part easy to see " (B. 10). This is worthy of attention in a Book which claims divine authority for its instructions.

" It might seem at first sight unreasonable to seek for any principles of preventive medicine in the four books of the Bible which deal with the period of Moses " (W. 4), " and yet the surprising fact emerges that there did exist a definite system " (W. 4), in spite of the other fact that " the medical knowledge of the Biblical peoples was small in amount and crude in character " (DB III. 221). " The divine purpose is stamped upon every line of the history of these Israelites " (W. vii.), and yet for the modern devout student there is " an added interest in demonstrating how natural were the agencies through which that purpose was wrought " (W. viii.).

" The Levitical code contains a large number of *Hygienic enactments*, with regard to food, sanitation, and the recognition of infectious diseases " (DB. III. 321). " Mainly by the strict enforcement of these sanitary agencies " claimed as " designed by Jehovah, but faithfully carried out by Moses, the sanitation of the Hebrews was kept in perfection " (R. II. 149). " They were taught from the outset that uncleanness was unholiness " (W. 15). " The inculcation of the laws of hygiene was attained by appeal to religious instincts " (W. 16). And in contrast W. claims that the plagues were traceable on the human side to insanitary conditions: " The object was to undermine the public health of the Egyptians until their physique and morale were so reduced that further resistance was out of the question " (W. 24). This mode of attack is subtle, and " something without parallel in human endeavour " (W. 24). Included in this we find that " the water supply was fouled. The air and ground were polluted. The people and their cattle were verminous. The food supplies were diminished and seriously contaminated." (W. 27).

W. calls special attention to the regulations on—

A. HYGIENE.

- I. Preservation of water and food.
- II. Disposal of decomposable material, which means prevention of flies and contamination of food.
- III. Personal Hygiene " (W. 35).

I. *Preservation of water and food.* See Lev. xi. 32, 39; Num. xix. 14, 15. This last "is one of the most remarkable examples of hygiene in the whole of the Mosaic code" (W. 37). "Moses refers specifically to an open vessel without a cover" (W. 38). "Food and drink thus exposed would quickly be contaminated by flies after they had settled on the corpse" (W. 38). Moses calls it unclean, we say infected. But it means the same in the end.

II. *Decomposable matter.* "Few understand the close relationship between flies, organic refuse, food and disease" (W. 40). Moses evidently did. "The best modern method of destroying refuse in an army on active service is burning" (W. 42). See Ex. xxvii. 3, Lev. iv. 11. "Outside the camp was a large incinerator" (W. 43). See also Lev. i. 16; iv. 30; vi. 10. "The only reasonable inference is that all this highly decomposable material was taken straight to the incinerator and burnt" (W. 45). Further (Deut. xxiii. 14) "the deduction is irresistible that it was applied to all decomposable material" (W. 46). "There is another method, i.e. that of burial" (W. 45), for which see Lev. xvii. 13; Deut. xxi. 23.

III. *Personal Hygiene.* Frequent ablutions (e.g. Ex. xxix. 4; xl. 31). W. also mentions circumcision; it was pre-Mosaic, of course, but "whatever be the origins of circumcision, it remains the fact that it is a health measure, beneficial in many ways that need not be specified here" (W. 49), though some writers on morals attribute the remarkable achievements of Jews in all ages to it. "It is certainly true that practically all modern instructed opinion regards it as of considerable value" (W. 49).

Take also tables of kindred and affinity like Lev. xviii. and xx. "After many years of first-hand dealing with his flocks he may have learnt some principles of eugenics by noting the bad effects of close in-breeding, which would have helped him afterwards in his compilation of the 'table of kindred and affinity.'" (W. 13).

B. THE CONTROL OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE.

(1) *Isolation.* "The task of the sanitarian is definitely aided by consideration of the means provided by the Divine wisdom for reducing the general susceptibility to disease among the people, and for stamping out sources of infection" (G. 92). "In the practical life of a community revering the Fatherhood of God, the Mosaic system of sanitary law appealed to every man as his brother's

keeper. And it is interesting and helpful to see that the broad outlines of such treatment as the latest investigations have shown to be the most effective, even under conditions so widely different in structure and detail, are clearly indicated in the sacred sanitary code of the Pentateuch " (G. 92). " The control of infectious disease is one of the most important links in the chain of preventive medicine " (W. 51). In this light consider such texts as Lev. xiii. 46, 4, 50 ; xiv. 45, 41, 48 ; xi. 39 ; Num. xix. 11, 14, 20 ; ix. 10 ; v. 2. " At a time when all the world believed that disease was a ' visitation ' sent by an offended Deity, or even the caprice of some malicious spirit, and thousands of years before superstitions of this and of a kindred nature had died out from our own country, Moses recognised that some diseases were infectious and, what is far more striking still, that they could be controlled by human forethought and care " (W. 59).

(2) *Disinfection*. See e.g. Lev. xiv. 8 ; Num. xix. 17 ff. " It would pass the wit of any modern M.O.H. to devise a more thorough or searching cleansing than this " (W. 61). See Num. xix. 2-6. " This was a case of disinfection, as pure and simple as it could be in those early days " (W. 65-6). See again Num. xxxi. 14-16. " The close link here between the immorality and the succeeding plague points strongly to the cause of the plague being venereal disease " (W. 67). " With a vivid recollection of the source of the disease which had ravaged his people once before, and horrified at the probability of such a dangerous epidemic becoming rampant amongst them again, he pre-emptorily directed that every Midianitish woman *not a virgin* was to be put to death. Viewed in this light, there can be no doubt that the order was neither more nor less than a very strong measure of preventive medicine " (W. 67). Num. xxxi. 19 shows that " the whole army and its captives and all its spoil had to be submitted to seven days' quarantine and thorough disinfection before being permitted to re-enter the camp. It will not be overlooked that the most efficient of all the methods of disinfection, i.e. sterilisation by heat, was not unknown to Moses " (W. 69). " But his fundamental principles were so sound, as sound now as they were then, his laws so clear, his attention to detail so marked, and his spirit so undaunted to the end, that when there was failure, the blame should rather be laid at the door of the ' congregation ' " (W. 111). " The code of Hammurabi,

about eight hundred years older than the Mosaic code, deals only with civil and criminal matters. There is no preventive medicine mentioned in it" (W. 112). But this of Moses is "one of the most remarkable pieces of work ever accomplished, so remarkable that it is amazing that, for thousands of years, it should have been lost sight of" (W. 110). "Each priest became a state medical officer" (W. 71). "Moses laid down such principles as notification, isolation, frequent inspection, quarantine, and disinfection" (W. 71). "The control of infectious disease is to-day, in essentials, precisely the same as that originally established by Moses thirty centuries ago" (W. 71).

C. FOOD CONTROL.

"Food control is a very necessary branch of health administration" (W. 75). "It is not surprising to find this subject looming large in the Mosaic code" (W. 75). "Underlying nearly all of them may be detected a strong basis of preventive medicine" (W. 76). E.g. Lev. xi. 3, 9, 27, 29; Deut. xiv. 11, 21; Ex. xxii. 31.

The conclusions are that we have here no dead code: "it tells of living realities, of men who underwent the same hardships and faced the same problems that confront us to-day" (W. viii.). It exhibits "minute acquaintance with abstruse physiological, pathological, sanitary and other medical subjects, far ahead, often by centuries, of the then existing knowledge, which was practically nil" (R. I. 116). "In this day, when, at last, men of all schools, and those with most scientific knowledge, most of all, are joining to extol the exact wisdom of this ancient law, a wisdom which has no parallel in like laws among other nations, is it not in place to press this question: Whence had this man this unique wisdom? There are many who will feel compelled to answer: 'The Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron'" (K. 304).

