

Demonic Theory

The earliest theories of disease are found among the savage races. They interpret sickness and death as due to the occupancy of the body by an evil spirit or demon. Demonic theory regards disease as a supernatural entity, not primarily as a process or condition.

Humoral Theory

Originated by Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, and was based upon the theory that the body was made up of four humors: (a) Blood, (b) Phlegm, (c) Black bile, (d) Yellow bile. A right mixture and proportion of these constituted health; improper proportion and irregular distribution, disease.

Medieval Theories

With the development of anatomy and physiology, there arose two theories of importance: (a) mechanical causes of disease, and (b) chemical causes for disease.

Germ Theory

The foundation for this theory was laid when it was proven that alcoholic fermentation was caused by a living plant (yeast).

The germ theory was firmly established by the work of Louis Pasteur on wine, silk worms and anthrax. The studies and demonstrations of Pasteur stirred the entire scientific world and led to the extension of the germ theory to the problem of human disease. It led to the birth of the present day science of bacteriology.

References: Sedgwick, W. T.--Principles of Sanitary Science and Public Health, Chapters 1-4.
Rice, T. B.--Conquest of Disease, Chapter 1.
Binder--Health and Social Progress.
Bossard--Problems of Social Well-Being, Chapter 7.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is your own definition of good health?
2. Give your own conception of disease.
3. What would you consider the most important objective sign of health? Why? Subjective sign of health? Why?
4. Why have the theories of disease controlled the progress of health work?
5. Do you recognize any survivals of ancient theories of disease in the medical terms or superstitions of today?
6. Which one of the theories of disease is the basis for present day defensive hygiene measures?