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CAMBRIDGE PUBLIC HEALTH SERIES

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FOOD POISONING AND FOOD INFECTIONS

BY

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EDITORS' PREFACE

IN view of the increasing importance of the study of public hygiene and the recognition by doctors, teachers, administrators and members of Public Health and Hygiene Committees alike that the *salus populi* must rest, in part at least, upon a scientific basis, the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press have decided to publish a series of volumes dealing with the various subjects connected with Public Health.

The books included in the Series present in a useful and handy form the knowledge now available in many branches of the subject. They are written by experts, and the authors are occupied, or have been occupied, either in investigations connected with the various themes or in their application and administration. They include the latest scientific and practical information offered in a manner which is not too technical. The bibliographies contain references to the literature of each subject which will ensure their utility to the specialist.

It has been the desire of the editors to arrange that the books should appeal to various classes of readers: and it is hoped that they will be useful to the medical profession at home and abroad, to bacteriologists and laboratory students, to municipal engineers and architects, to medical officers of health and sanitary inspectors and to teachers and administrators.

Many of the volumes will contain material which will be suggestive and instructive to members of Public Health and Hygiene Committees; and it is intended that they shall seek to influence the large body of educated and intelligent public opinion interested in the problems of public health.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

FEW subjects are treated in textbooks both in such a hackneyed and in such an inaccurate fashion as food poisoning and food infections. The title "ptomaine poisoning" is maintained years after it has been proved that it is both inaccurate and misleading. Ptomaines are described in detail which have no bearing upon the question, organisms (such as *B. proteus* and *B. coli*) are accepted as the cause of attacks on the evidence of reports of outbreaks hoary with age, copied from textbook to textbook without any critical consideration as to how far they substantiate the claim, statements as to the distribution in nature of food poisoning organisms are repeated because some other textbook has admitted them and without any investigation as to their validity.

It follows naturally that, apart from those who have made a special study of the matter, the information as to the causation and nature of food poisoning outbreaks current amongst the medical profession generally, and even amongst those (such as Medical Officers of Health) who should be authorities, is to a considerable extent unsound and inaccurate. This has a very detrimental effect upon the scientific progress of the subject since it leads to outbreaks being ascribed to causes unwarranted by the facts and to inquiries into sources of infection being neglected in just those directions along which information would be most valuable. Anyone who has studied any considerable number of reports on food poisoning outbreaks will readily acquiesce in the truth of this statement.

To stimulate interest in the subject, indicate where exact knowledge is lacking and the directions where it may be sought, and to lay down lines of prevention are objects I have had in mind in writing this book.

Some of the views advanced are not in accord with those accepted in the textbooks but during the past fifteen years I have devoted much time to the investigation of the complex problems discussed and no current view is rejected and no new one advanced without the scientific data on both sides being fully stated.

The title is somewhat indefinite in scope and I have had to use my own judgment as to what to admit and what to reject as coming under it.

The subject treated from a narrower standpoint was dealt with by me in a special report to the Local Government Board in 1913, and I have to thank the Board and the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office, and in particular Sir Arthur Newsholme and Dr MacFadden, not only for their permission to make extensive use of the material in that report but for enabling me to bring my list of British outbreaks more up to date by kindly placing at my disposal particulars of a number of cases reported subsequent to 1912.

WILLIAM G. SAVAGE.

WESTON-SUPER-MARE.

October 1919.

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