

serious illness.

Pliny narrates that falcons whose sight is beginning to fail rub their eyes with the juice of lettuce leaves, a white liquid the strength and qualities of which resemble the juice of the white poppy. This juice is also a laxative. If drunk when mixed with vinegar it cures snake bites, while the leaves should be roasted and crushed and taken with vinegar. Further it is an antidote for various poisons.

Pliny says further that if mixed with honey and vinegar and applied to the abdomen it preserves against pains in the bowels and relieves patients suffering from micturition difficulties. Pliny also recommends it for burns; if applied immediately it prevents blistering.

There is another legend that those who eat lettuces do not suffer from vertigo at the water's edge, while to dream of lettuces is a bad omen. Dioscorides believed that over-indulgence in lettuces weakened the sight, but used as a poultice they counteracted inflammations and erysipeles. He says moreover that 'the garden lettuce is a friend of the stomach and refreshing, induces sleep, soothes the abdomen and increases the milk'.

The following notes indicate the uses to which the lettuce is put today. An

infusion of lettuce leaves to which burnt sugar is added counteracts the retention of urine and cures insomnia. A decoction of lettuce leaves also encourages sleep, is a diuretic and has cooling properties. Lettuce poultices are emollient and soothing.

The sap of the lettuce, obtained by making the horizontal incisions in the stalk of a lettuce which has been allowed to run to seed and subsequently dried in the sun, was much used in antiquity and does indisputably possess sedative virtues.

According to Henri Leclerc the researches of Aubergier have proved that lettuce juice must be considered not as a substitute for, but, to say the least, as a rival of opium and resort may be had thereto when the use of opium is dangerous for the patient.

According to Pouchet lettuce juice yields the best results in child medicine: not being toxic it calms the nerves and accesses of coughing, particularly in the case of whooping cough; prolonged use does not cause depression. It has the advantage of enabling children to take opium in small quantities and of correcting the dangerous action of opium to a certain extent.

Lettuces contain several vitamins, namely E.B.G. and C.

Hunger Swelling

Famine conditions, an almost inevitable consequence of every war, are to be found at present in several regions. If one cannot speak of famine, properly so called, in the countries of Europe, nevertheless for two years the populations have been showing signs of under-nourishment.

The outbreak of diseases due to a deficiency of vitamins in the food could have been expected. In view of the recent development of our knowledge of these factors medical practitioners were certainly well informed respecting these diseases and able to diagnose them. As a matter of fact cases of hypovitaminosis are not frequent in France or Belgium. Nevertheless, an increase in rickets is reported owing to a deficiency of vitamin D and calcium in the food rations and a few cases of hemeralopia

due to an insufficiency of vitamin A. As is known this symptom consists in tardy adaptation of the vision, occurring, for example, in twilight.

Signs of factor B and vitamin C deficiency are exceptional; this is explained by the fact that war time nutrition consists largely of foods containing these two vitamins, in particular wholemeal bread, potatoes and vegetables.

Another deficiency syndrome made its appearance in 1940 and in particular in 1941-42, namely, hunger swelling.

This curious disease was well known in antiquity and invariably appears in war time. Hesiod and Aristotle have given exact descriptions of it. Cases were mentioned during the siege of Naples by the French Army in 1528.

During the campaign in Russia Napoleon's troops suffered from hunger swell-

ing. Professor d' Espine, of Geneva, reported several cases during the siege of Paris in 1870-71. Finally at the end of the war of 1914-18 and during the succeeding years this syndrome caused widespread harm in Germany and the former Austro Hungarian Empire.

In 1917 von Jaksch said that 22,842 persons suffered from hunger swelling in Bohemia, with 1038 cases of death.

In 1941, but in particular during the winter of 1941-42, a considerable number of cases was reported in France and Belgium.

Through all these periods of history this disease has not changed and the descriptions given by the ancient writers are similar to those of the French medical practitioners of today.

The following are the salient characteristics of this curious malady the chief symptom of which is a swelling.

As a general rule it attacks persons over the age of 5 years, in the main males, who have become very thin and are often obliged to perform heavy labour.

The swelling appears at the ankles, reaches the legs, extends to the thighs and may develop very considerably. It is preceded by polyuria, i.e. excessive discharge of urine. This symptom persists frequently during the period of swelling. The patients are liable to pass considerable quantities, amounting to several litres a day, of almost colourless urine.

During this period the heart rhythm slows down to 50 or 60 beats a minute. This fact shows that hunger swelling is not related to cardiac insufficiency. Sometimes the disease is not serious; the patient is put to bed and the swelling subsides: after a few days of proper nourishment he recovers. On the other hand hunger swelling is frequently persistent and, after disappearing, is liable to recur at the slightest sign of fatigue. Finally, in certain cases the disease is aggravated, complications ensue, especially of the digestive organs and the patient dies of cachexia and oedema.

Hunger swelling has made its appearance in France, in internment camps, in mental institutes, prisons, and briefly in communities parti-

cularly subject to under-nourishment, and also among persons engaged in considerable physical activities and manual workers. All these persons have lost weight.

It is probable that the disease is caused by under-nourishment; but it is not easy to specify the precise nature and understand the exact cause of these swellings.

The food rations of the patients were insufficient, both as to quality and quantity. The quantity represented 1200 to 1400 calories; in quality the rations were deficient in albumen and fats.

The albumin content can be estimated at under 50 gr. a day and of this only 18 gr. of albumin of animal origin.

In Germany the daily albumin ration in the large towns did not amount to 30 gr. during the war of 1914-18.

It is admitted today that 60 gr. is the lowest limit, and this ration would appear to suffice during several months. Below this figure, the result is certainly negative, i.e. the organism does not receive sufficient to constitute its own albumin. Finally it is indispensable that a part of the albumin in the food, from a third to a half, should be of animal origin. All albumins are not of equal value; certain indispensable constituents are not represented in all the albumins, whether animal or vegetable.

In the case of patients suffering from hunger swelling the fats ration was greatly reduced, to a few grammes a day. This is a further deficiency which cannot be fully compensated by other foods.

As a general rule this deficiency syndrome is said to have its origin in an insufficient albumin ration, and in particular animal albumin. Nevertheless, the fat deficit in the ration is equally important. It would be a mistake to think that it is enough to provide a diet with a high albumin and fat content to cure the disease immediately.

The patient suffering from inanition is subject to changes in the organs, in particular the viscera and internal secreting glands, changes which cannot be reversed rapidly and which certainly play a part in the development of this disease.