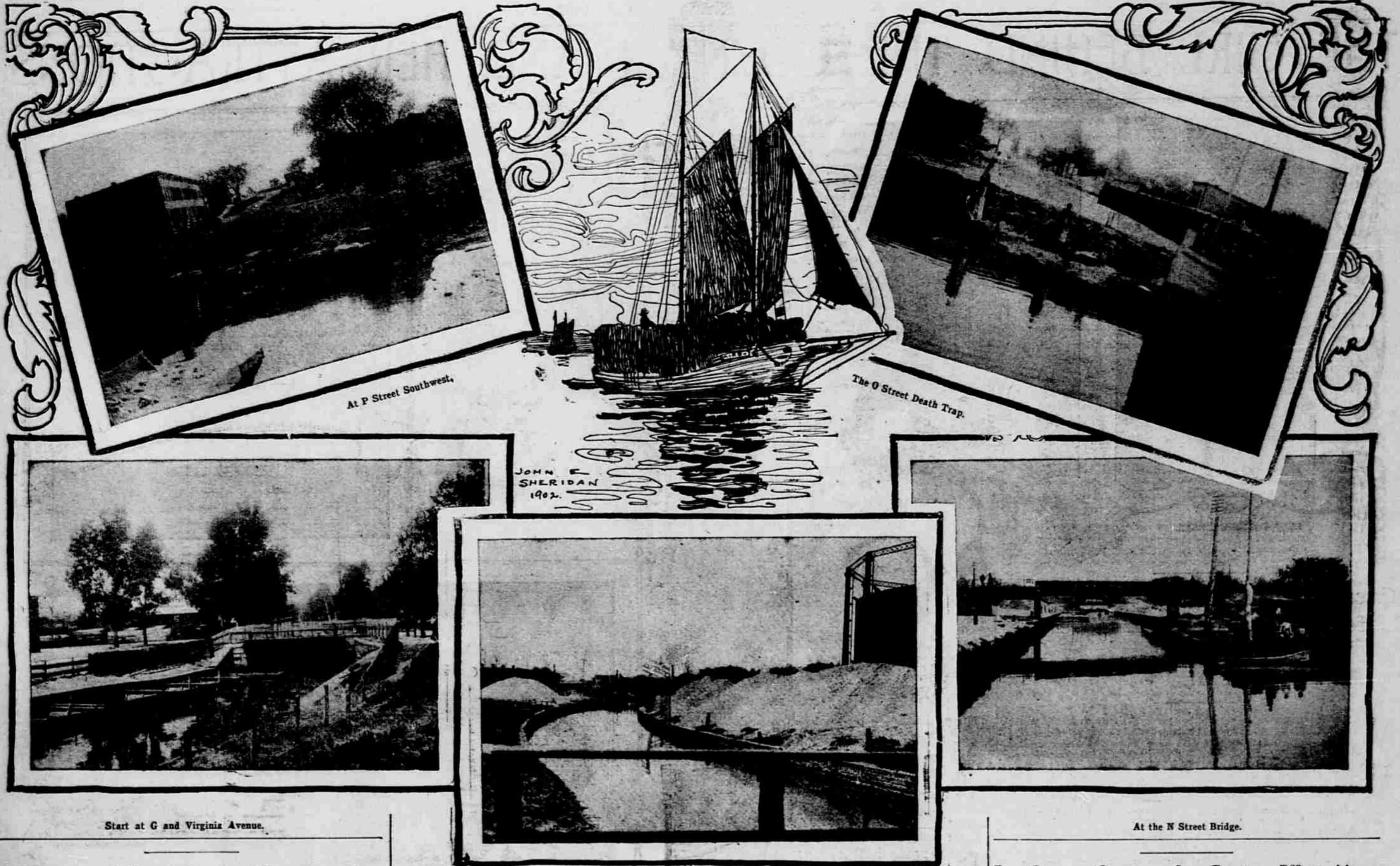


TRAGEDY AND DISEASE REVEL IN JAMES CREEK CANAL



Foul Stream of Death Flowing Through a Populous Section of the City—Pedestrians and Wanderers Have No Protection, While the Atmosphere Throughout Its Length and for Blocks on Either Side Is Poisoned by the Fumes Arising From Decomposing Filth.

SINCE the seventies the James Creek Canal has been a menace to life and health in the District of Columbia. Yearly it has claimed its quota of victims. Taking the record from July 1 of last year to the present time as a basis of reckoning it is entirely within reason to believe that upward of 200 people have met death in the abominable waterway of filth which flows through Southwest Washington.

Since July 1, 1901, ten persons have been drowned in the James Creek Canal. For ten deaths in ten months it is directly responsible. The number of fatalities which have been indirectly caused by the noxious gases arising from the putrid stream is incalculable. At least this much is true, namely, that the air in the vicinity of the canal for a distance of three blocks is contaminated with most foul odors.

People live in this atmosphere day in

and day out. Night and day they inhale its impurities with untold detriment to health. When the air is heavy and humid the stench is most nauseating even to those who have lived contiguous to the stream during many years. On a clear day when the breeze is tart and keen, even then the gas is noticeably present.

Once Popular Hunting Grounds.

From Virginia Avenue at First Street southwest the James Creek Canal extends to the Potomac, into which it empties close by the Arsenal. Originally it was called the St. James Creek, and is so designated on L'Enfant's map in Commissioner Macfarland's office at the District Building. It was a natural waterway, and the land on both sides of it was marshy, being popular among the bird hunters of the District.

In 1876 the creek was walled and since that time has existed in practically the same condition as that in which it is to-

day. Bridges span it here and there. Some of them are substantial structures, but the majority of them are dangerously flimsy and insecure. The walled sides are below the level of the street and are without a sign of a railing in any part of their extent. The land on each side is made land, and in some places slopes abruptly, while in others the descent to the canal is hardly more than a few degrees removed from the perpendicular.

As a consequence of these conditions it is the easiest thing imaginable for a man or woman to wander unknowingly, on a dark night, from the highway into the poisonous waters of the sluggish canal. As to its being a dark night, that condition is the usual one in the neighborhood through which the canal flows. The district is wretchedly lighted, oil lamps in many places still doing duty instead of gas or electricity.

The lack of any semblance of protection to pedestrians from falling into the waters is the greatest danger of those which attend the canal in its present condition. Little children playing on the high banks of garbage-made soil have, by a misstep, been plunged to the wall below and into the reeking stream. Rescue is difficult even when help is at hand. Those who have been fished out of the slime have frequently died from poisoning by reason of having swallowed large quantities of the water.

Scarcely a month passes without the James Creek canal having claimed its one victim. Often the number is larger. The soldier on his way to the Arsenal, being unfamiliar with the windings of the death trap, has time and again been swallowed up by the filthy stream as he sought his way back to the barracks. Intoxicated persons, their vision clouded and their judgment hazy, have dearly paid for a night's debauch by losing their way as they wandered uncertainly homeward along the banks of the James Creek. A turn to the right or to the left in a mistaken direction has caused many a poor fellow to walk unconsciously into the horrible stream, where he wallowed and groaned until the fifth overcame him and he was submerged in it.

The water frequently rises to the level of the top of the so-called seawall and in such seasons the danger is greatly increased.

Frightful as is the danger from drowning in the James Creek, there is another evil which is scarcely less to be feared. This is to be found in the gases arising from the sluggish waters which reek with the excretions from the sewers which empty into the canal.

For some reason not satisfactorily explained, the stream does not readily discharge the sewage into the Potomac. It is claimed by some that this is due to the fact that the canal is almost constantly

closed with snows which come up with loads of sand and lumber. Be that as it may, it is an evident fact to whomsoever may visit the vicinity of the canal, that the air is polluted with a most foul odor. The surface is covered with floating filth and is alive with bubbles caused by the gases which are constantly rising from decomposing matter on the bottom.

The Air Poisoned.

It is not possible for a visitor to this section of the city to lean over the railing of one of the bridges and inhale the odors arising from the stream beneath without feeling himself becoming ill. Nevertheless, laborers are constantly at work unloading sand from the snows and breathing in this contaminated air while they toil. The unfortunate people who are compelled to live in this vicinity are daily shortening their lives by living in this atmosphere of pollution.

This section, too, is largely populated, and in some parts with a class of people who are ignorant of all sanitary laws, which fact is an added reason for taking such measures as will better the condition of this neglected district.

Major Sylvester, Superintendent of Police, bewails the existence of the James Creek Canal in its present condition, and says that it is a source of great annoyance to his department in addition to its

being a constant menace to the residents of the section. Old timers on the police force remember the vicinity of the canal as the scene of some of their hardest fights. "Bloodfield" it was called in those days, and shooting and cutting affrays were ordinary events of the day and evening. It was a stronghold of viciousness, but the present residents are peaceable and law-abiding.

Some people are of the opinion that it was the James Creek Canal which at one time ran up through the market and out as far as the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, in Georgetown. This is not true, however, for the James Creek Canal proper was not at any time of greater extent than at present, though it was intended that it should join the old Washington Canal, which has long since been filled in in the greater part of its extent. The union of the James Creek with the Washington Canal was prevented by

the Pennsylvania Railroad, which succeeded in getting permission to lay its tracks across the place where the canal was to be made before the Canal Commission could take action.

Improvement Long Advocated.

As to ameliorating the present evil condition of James Creek Canal, most people are agreed on the point that it should be done. Improvement is being agitated now as it has been periodically since 1876. People have been drowned and inquiries held. In many instances the canal was decided to be to blame and not the individual. The Commissioners have been appealed to repeatedly in other years and they are being urged now to take steps to remove the menace, but they are themselves powerless. Appropriations have been recommended to Congress by them, and it rests with that body to relieve a portion of the Capital from a dreadful evil.

For Over a Quarter of a Century Efforts Have Been Made to Have Its Evils Abated, but All in Vain—Its Victims by Drowning Average One a Month, but Its Victims by Disease Cannot Be Numbered—Banks That Slope Abruptly Into the Water.

... RICH AND RARE ARE WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LIBRARIES ... THE GOVERNMENT'S BOTTLES OF ILLS.

"EVERY library is a university," said Carlyle. Washington has just seventy-six such universities to her 250,000 inhabitants, besides many private collections generously thrown open to the student with proper credentials. Besides housing some of the finest scientific and technical libraries in the world, she has some so unique as to deserve a chapter to themselves. The thirty-eight department libraries form a system that includes every branch of knowledge to the most abstruse. The system employed is the most perfect known. Yet there are only three libraries of general circulation, two of these being of private ownership.

The department libraries began with the publications of each department as a nucleus. Exchange with him and foreign societies increased the collection, and Congressional appropriations enabled the custodians to add to the technical literature of each until the magnificent system has reached its present proportions. The greatest of these is, of course, the Library of Congress, whose only fault is that it is so surpassingly beautiful that the reader forgets his book in studying the exquisite art shown in this palace of the muses. Its special feature is the plan for the distribution of books, which Prince Henry of Prussia found of such absorbing interest. It was fully described recently in The Times. Not all of the books belonging to Congress are here, however. Two fine reference libraries are in the Capitol, of 40,000 books each, for ready use. Besides this, there is a small room just off the floor of the House with a few thousand books that can be had in a minute or two, known as the "emergency hospital."

The fine dignity and elegance of the State, War and Navy Departments are nowhere more fully and fully expressed than in their libraries. That of the Department of State is devoted to law and diplomacy. The Navy Department library is most

beautifully housed, the reading room being paneled in malachite, sienna and porphyry, adorned with Mexican onyx, with splendid bronze groups in each corner, while a handsome piece of verde antique is above the door. The floor is of Milton tiling. The books are catalogued under eleven heads, and the shelves contain the last word on all scientific subjects pertaining to the navy—engineering, medicine, chemistry, naval architecture, seamanship, courts-martial, international law, naval surveying, astronomy, navigation, meteorology, and compasses being a few of the subjects treated. A few books of biography and history are added. Of these Napoleon is by far the most popular; naval officers taking a keen interest in the life of the little Corsican.

No less perfectly kept, though not quite so magnificently housed, is the library of the War Department, of which the most interesting work is a history in newspaper clippings of the war with Spain. General Greely has inaugurated a circulating system by which officers stationed at a distance, in Porto Rico or Texas, can draw books at no expense to themselves save return registration. This privilege does not extend to the Philippines. Books on military science are most frequently drawn out.

Across the street is the Bureau of Latin-American Republics. The Supreme Court some years ago found itself in need of data concerning South American laws and customs which could not be had in the city. In 1890, to meet this want, this bureau was created. Information upon the agriculture, laws, customs, commerce, colonization, travel and history of the countries south of the Rio Grande and the Isthmus was accumulated. The first Pan-American congress suggested that each country furnish this library with duplicate copies of its public documents, the suggestion was not acted upon, but the matter was brought up at the last Pan-American congress in the City of Mexico,

and eighteen countries pledged themselves to send these documents yearly. This will add 5,000 or 6,000 volumes to the library in a few years. The library receives its largest patronage from the diplomats of the Spanish American countries, who take special interest in the newspapers. It is hoped that soon some general literature from prominent authors of those countries may be added.

At the Bureau of Education the most interesting feature of a most thoroughly equipped and splendidly arranged library is Miss French's department. It is the duty of this lady to examine all educational publications from Europe, selecting from them and classifying for the use of schools and colleges throughout the country. This requires a working knowledge of sixteen languages. The model library of 3,000 volumes, exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair, is in this library.

The library of the Smithsonian Institution, with its 27,000 volumes and 3,000 periodicals, easily ranks as the largest library of Congress. This is the greatest scientific library in the world, with books in every written language, including Volapuk.

Most of the department libraries have a quantity of fiction and general literature for the benefit of the clerks. When Congress made appropriations for the new Public Library it cut off these supplementary collections from its list of beneficiaries. Some of the departments hailed this gladly, declaring that all works of higher nature, foreign to the purpose of the library, should be in one central building, and a messenger system should supply the individual wants of the employees. Other departments deplored the loss of the appropriation, and so far as they could, evaded it and kept up a supply of new fiction. From the nature of their work, it is held by some that the printers of the big Printing Office should have their lighter literature, and

from the fact that the handsomest room in the new building has been set aside for library purposes, it would seem that the authorities there take this view of the case, and will endeavor to secure an appropriation.

The library of the Interior Department is purely literary, 12,000 volumes in all, and the 2,000 employees in the building are very anxious to see it restored to its former status as one of the best of the general libraries. The debate over this point is a lively one in department circles just now, many good arguments being advanced pro and con.

Of the twenty-three school and college libraries of Washington, the Riggs Memorial Library of Georgetown University, with 80,000 books, is by far the largest, while Columbian University and the Catholic University of America have libraries that are ranked with the notable ones of Washington.

One of the best, largest, and least known of the great libraries of this city is that of the Sostitch Rite Order. It has many rare and superbly bound tomes, and is especially rich in folk-lore.

Of the many private libraries mention can be made of but three. The first is a collection of books and pamphlets relating to the District of Columbia, its government, its banks, its churches, its public institutions. One of the oldest volumes in this collection is an inventory of the furniture of the White House, ordered by President John Adams when he turned it over to his successor, Thomas Jefferson. Between the two gentlemen the feeling was no hotter that Mr. Adams left the Executive Mansion a few days before Mr. Jefferson was inaugurated, and this quaint inventory was left behind, and this quaint inventory was left behind, and this quaint inventory was left behind.

Mr. Jefferson. It is the only inventory of the White House ever ordered for such a reason by any President. This curious and valuable library is the property of Mr. Hood, who has spent twenty-five

years in making it the most complete of its kind.

One of the most valuable of the specialty libraries is the Burns collection of Mr. William R. Smith, of the Botanic Gardens. In his sturdy Americanism, if we may use the expression, Burns was the poet laureate of the dominant thought of the eighteenth century, the brotherhood of man, and, logically, the poet laureate of America, the finest flower of that thought and its living exponent. In his "A Man's a Man for a' That," written thirteen years after the Declaration of Independence, he struck the keynote of that immortal document. For that reason it is fitting that the finest Burns library in the world should be here in America. Mr. Smith's desire is to see his poems more widely read in America, but this will never be until an edition with a good marginal glossary is published. Of all his hundreds of editions not one suits Mr. Smith's ideas of a popular edition.

Mr. Smith is also collecting a duplicate of the library owned by Burns. The poet had \$50 worth of the best classic literature; it will be remembered that money then bought four times what it does today. Burns had Swift's works, the latest poetry, "The Spectator"—in short, a thoroughly "up-to-date" collection. So Mr. Smith will have a Burns library and a library of Burns, proving that he was not altogether the penniless plowboy he is erroneously described as having been, but a gentleman of most refined tastes, with fair means for indulging them. Mr. Smith has in press a book of poems and speeches by eminent men on Burns. After Mr. Smith's death the collection will go to his friend, Mr. Carnegie, who will erect a building in Pittsburgh for it.

The quaintest and prettiest little library in Washington belongs to Dr. Swan M. Burnett. It consists of tiny books, some less than two inches in length, two editions of the classics, exquisitely printed in hand-set and hand-set type of almost infinitesimal size, all rare to a degree. Most of the wee books would go in a man's vest pocket, but the pocket could never hold the value of the book. Many are first editions and some copies, dating back to the early years of the last century. For duty beauty this fairy library leads every library in Washington.

A COMPLETE bottled stock of diseases is carried by the United States Government on the shelves and in the cases in the Army Medical Museum. These diseases comprise almost all which are supposed to be fatal to human life—consumption, pneumonia, typhoid fever, diphtheria, Asiatic cholera, smallpox, blood poisoning, erysipelas, carbuncle, and a variety of others.

These unpleasant and morbid afflictions are kept in tubes, constantly ready to be communicated to healthy individuals; but requests for "communicating" are seldom received by the curator. Sometimes when he is questioned too long and closely, he feels that he would like to communicate one or more of the diseases to his callers. In the tube containing consumption, the curator says, there is sufficient to spread the disease to thousands of people, and all the diseases tubed for the benefit of science are about the same. In administering pneumonia to a patient, the curator said, he would select the method of putting a solution of the germs in water in a spraying vessel, and have the victim breathe the spray. The subject operated upon would contract the affection with absolute certainty every time. Pneumonia is contracted, not from a cold or inflammation of the lungs, as most people generally suppose, but from the breathing in of pneumonia germs, which are given encouragement in growing and multiplying by an unhealthy condition, such as a cold may give rise to. The months of altogether healthy people very commonly have lots of pneumonia bacteria in them. The disease signifies simply that the air cells in the lungs are ruptured and the blood flows into them, thus rendering them useless for breathing.

As for that interesting and commonly fatal complaint, carbuncle, the curator said that he could produce it any time in the most healthy individual by a simple

inoculation with a solution of the germs. Once so inoculated, you have about an even chance with death. This is very commonly called "weil-orters' disease," because men who sort wool are very apt to contract it. Sheep are frequently afflicted with carbuncle, and the slightest abrasion on the hand of one who touches the fleece of an animal so diseased is likely to communicate it. Spraying the throat with a proper solution of the germs is the method for conveying diphtheria, which can be given in this way with absolute certainty. Then it is a question of preventing the patient by artificial means from being strangled by the false membrane that rapidly grows and tries to fill up the breathing passage.

There is no difficulty in contracting the Asiatic cholera if you want it. Take a few of the germs from the appropriate bottle at the Museum and drink them in water or beef tea. If your stomach is in a particularly healthy condition you may not take the disease, but otherwise you are pretty sure to have it.

The diseases which the Government keeps thus bottled in convenient form are all obtained—the germs, that is to say—from actual diseased tissues of patients afflicted with the complaints. To propagate the germs in any quantity from these tissues is easy enough. Vegetable gelatine, from a Japanese plant called "agar-agar," is boiled and mixed with beef tea, so as to form a soft, transparent solid. A small quantity of this is put into a tube that is tightly corked with cotton at the open end. The tube is then placed in an oven and heated until all the germs in it, of whatever sort, are killed. Next, the tube is briefly uncorked and a long steel wire, that has been heated also to sterilize it, is dipped in the germs of the disease to which it is desired to cultivate and scraped across the surface of the gelatine. The tube is now recorked and permitted to stand for a few hours, at the end of which the bacteria of the disease, having found the gelatine to their taste for feeding upon, will have multiplied enormously, so as to fairly cover the surface of the gelatine. Each kind of bacteria or germs has its own form of growing in colonies, so that one disease can be readily and easily distinguished from another in the tubes without a microscope.