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The Adversary Within (excerpts)

Fred M. Taylor

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Editorial Note: Largely because the public shrinks at the sight and thought of malformed babies, the recent case concerned with the use of thalidomide has, nonetheless, served to bring before the public the need for proof of safety before new drugs are released. For emphasis, we excerpt pertinent paragraphs of an article by Dr. Fred M. Taylor of Houston, Texas appearing in the May 1960 issue of our journal.

THE ADVERSARY WITHIN

Physicians and laymen both tend — indeed often it seems — to accept with alacrity each and every therapeutic proposal which is offered assuredly and eagerly. . . .

. . . The fact that a product may actually have no important therapeutic worth; or that the value of a newly advertised product has not even been established, nor substantiated, before it was put on the competitive market seems not to be of moral importance. . . .

. . . As a general rule, we imagine that we alone alleviate and cure the horrors of disease. How often do all our superb products really accomplish what we think they do? How really common is it for most ordinary infections just simply to "run their course," wholly unaffected by multiplicities of therapy? How frequently do we make effort to comprehend our own motives in therapeutic excesses? How often do we say: "Here try this," instead of taking time and trouble for serious talk with patients? . . . As a result there often is failure to exercise restraint in assessing the surcharged promotional reports of all the superior results of therapy. This serves to foster not only early misuse of potent drugs, but laxity in exact dosage. This is especially apt to happen when, in the fevered

race to market fat drugs, the safe dosages, exact indications, and incidence and nature of toxic hazards simply have not been adequately determined.

. . . Is it right to promote almost compellingly, potent products for benign and self-limited conditions when they should be used sparingly and infrequently? . . . Is it morally justifiable to prescribe powerful products, knowledge of which has been gained solely from advertisements and detailmen? In what manner does this practice really differ from human drug experimentation?

All medical disciplines will, no doubt, grow more complex and difficult. Yet, it should still be fashionable to continue to aim for lofty standards, and to minimize deterioration of thought and ideals. There is enormous need to avoid the superficiality of medical automation . . . Human beings desire relief. . . . our concern for man must be pure. As we grow in the understanding of the science of medicine, we need to know more of the spirit and emotion of man. It therefore does not seem abnormal, as medical science grows more complicated, to stress again the need for attitudes of critical inquiry; nor foolhardy to maintain a

critical mind toward all evanescent therapeutic manias.

Moral and ethical virtues underly long-standing precepts in medicine and in science, and are continuously involved in the conduct of both. Aims and achievements in medicine and the therapeutic-product industry are impressive. Indeed, they are outstanding; and are capable of

even more. But they also are right or wrong only in relation to their good for human beings. It is dangerous to put a premium solely on a technologic, or scientific medicine. The sense of the person, and thus of humanity, must not be lost sight of. . . .

From THE LINACRE QUARTERLY, 27: No. 2 (May) 1960.

Congratulations!

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION EXTENDS BEST WISHES TO REVEREND IGNATIUS W. COX, S.J., ON THE OBSERVANCE OF HIS 60TH ANNIVERSARY IN THE SOCIETY OF JESUS. THE OCCASION WAS CELEBRATED AT FORDHAM UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK, ON OCTOBER 21.

FATHER COX GUIDED THE FEDERATION IN ITS FORMATION AND SERVED AS FIRST MODERATOR FROM 1932 UNTIL 1945. WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL FOR HIS ENCOURAGEMENT IN THOSE EARLY YEARS WHEN THIS YOUNG AND UNCERTAIN ORGANIZATION WAS STRUGGLING TO BECOME ESTABLISHED.

THAT HEALTH AND SPIRIT BE GRANTED TO HIM TO CONTINUE SERVICE TO GOD IS THE HEARTFELT PRAYER OF HIS MANY FRIENDS IN GUILDS THROUGHOUT THE LAND.