Books of the Day

By EMILY E. LANTZ

PROBLEMS! Everywhere the modern man or woman turns he or she confronts a problem. It gets on the nerves, it really does. One dodges the foreign immigration question only to bump into the divorce evil, escapes that issue to collide with the race problem or come up dead against the high cost of living. Not pleasant subjects, any of them, yet we are obliged to be interested in them to greater or less degree because of their effect upon our lives. So in the matter of medical research. One of the greatest problems before the medical world today is that considered by Dr. William Seaman Bainbridge in his recent work, "The Cancer Problem." (Macmillan, $4).

The attitude of the public mind toward disease has changed greatly in recent years. Individuals no longer leave all knowledge to physician or surgeon, no longer desire to enter the hospital with eyes blindfolded. They exclaim, like "The Lady of the Aroostook" in William Dean Howells' novel, "I want to know!" and proceed to inform their minds from the best sources of information. Dr. Bainbridge seems to speak, in this volume, the latest authoritative word addressed to the public upon this subject that touches vitally so many lives.

The word cancer used to be whispered with bated breath as something suggestive of horror, of plague. Now one finds so many of their elderly friends succumbing to this scurge of the human race and almost any household asking the question: "Is cancer contagious?" "Is it infectious?" "May it be inherited?" "Can it be cured?"

According to statistics gathered by Dr. Bainbridge, deaths by cancer today number half a million annually among civilized people alone, the disease is increasing with alarming rapidity and affecting ever younger and younger ages. It is considered the one major problem of medicine still defying any real approach to solution as regards prevention, reliable early diagnosis or guarantee of permanent cure.

Dr. Bainbridge's book of 534 pages is a summary of the world's present knowledge of the cancer problem. In it he touches upon practically every phase of the subject, presents theories, emphasizes facts, reviews the work and opinions of those qualified to speak with knowledge upon the problem, yet maintains throughout an attitude of "suspended judgment pending proof." His own conclusions, based upon personal experience and the vast amount of evidence examined in the compilation of his book, are interesting in relation to medical science and in many respects reassuring to possible sufferers from the disease. One of these conclusions is "that the communication of cancer from man to man is so rare, if it really occurs at all, that it may practically be disregarded." Also he makes the hopeful and definite statement that "if cancer be cut out soon enough, a permanent cure is effected."

The work is encyclopedic in scope; it contains a general bibliography of important works upon the subject of cancer and is very completely indexed. As a book of reference it will probably prove of value to medical men and will be read with interest, understanding and profit by the general public.

Turning from the baffling yet hopeful problems of medical research, one finds in "Neighbors: Life Stories of the Other Half" (Macmillan, $1.25), written by the late Jacob A. Riis, the greater sociological perplexities that confront those who, like Abou Ben Adhem, love their fellow-men and seek to understand and help them.

There are 19 short stories of actual experiences gleaned from immigrant settlements of great cities that are here told with warm sympathy by Dr. Riis and also with the optimistic spirit without which no settlement work of the slums could live. They reveal also the late writer's peculiar gift as a story teller.

But through these tales the reader gains insight into the great national problem of foreign immigration and they arouse speculation as to what will be the final consequence of the present almost unrestricted admission into the United States of people who, lacking education, money or kindred, quickly become, if they fail of self-support, burdens upon the country.

"With Poor Immigrants to America" (Macmillan, $2), by Stephen Graham, would suggest another impression upon the same subject as that considered by Dr. Riis. In fact, the two authors might have exchanged titles and their books lost nothing thereby, for Mr. Graham does not say half as much about poor immigrants as he does about his geographical neighbors, the Americans. Naturally enough perhaps, considering that the English author has distinguished himself by his tramp studies of Russia, Mr. Graham visions only one side of these United States—the tramp side. The wayside cave beneath the rock, the haymow, the farmer's back door, the bystreet of the mining town; the steerage crossing the ocean. With these experiences as his alphabet he spells all America, and a queer lot we are, according to this.

So artistically does Mr. Graham write, so clearly, with such a subnote of tenderness, we can not but wish he had chosen some different angle of view to present. We wish he had done a little better by us than to see only that class of the dwellers in the country whom he, along with Mary Antin and some others, seems to regard as the whole American people, remaining blind to the fact that America is far greater than her immigrants.

One indisputable truth the author points out, namely, that America has been represented as far too glittering to the European peasant. The latter feels toward the unknown United States as the Southern negro does to the cities of the North; they have but to walk the golden streets and everything is their own. The very first thing the negro is put to "up North" is work, beyond anything in extent or accuracy which he has before known, and the first thing the immigrant is "up against" under the shadow of "Miss Liberty" is work, hard and continuous. Mr. Graham's insight is keen, his style humorous, his treatment sympathetic, and his judgment might have been helpful had he confined it to his subject.

According to William R. Lighton in his "Letters of an Old Farmer to His Son" (Doran, $1), the agricultural college has successfully solved the problem of farming for all time. Youths will now be hastening back to the farm quite as eagerly as they once pressed away from the homestead acres, and they will return far better informed concerning the practical business of farming than has ever been possible before.

Mr. Lighton's Old Farmer, writing to the future inheritor of his fertile land, is a nature lover, an optimist and doubtless, were his genealogical chart examined, a lineal descendant of that legendary Roman, Cincinnatus—he who went from digging his fields to leading a victorious army and who resigned a Roman dictatorship to return to agricultural pursuits.

His letters to his son admit that modern farming is exceedingly modern. He points out that the oldest of all human industries has been the last to be put on a scientific footing; that Abraham's people tending their flocks, or the benighted toilers of Pharaoh's time, were just about as wise in the business as the farmer of the middle nineteenth century. But in these pleasantly personal letters, written in engaging style, he shows that within the present generation the spread of ideas upon soil chemistry, seed breeding, scientific rotation, conservation of fertility, etc., has made of farming a learned profession, with the agricultural college as a school of instruction to those possessing the treasure of farm lands. He shows how, in the matter of machinery, the ancient farm was lacking, and the making a crop literally a brute-strength wrestling match with the gods, while of scientific literature in regard to farming there was none. The almanac, folk lore and practical experiences were the only teachers.