LIFE IN THE ANDES AND CHRONIC MOUNTAIN SICKNESS

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Since prehistoric times congenital or acquired acclimatization has made life possible upon the high plateaus of the Andes, where the altitude varies from 10,000 to 16,000 feet. At the present time twelve million people are living on these plateaus under normal conditions, at an oxygen pressure of about 85 mm instead of 150 mm as at sea-level. In considering the steady biological changes produced by ancestral acclimatization to chronic oxygen insufficiency we must assume that dwellers in these highlands belong to a climatophysiological variety of the human race, which, as observation shows, may even be responsible for their individual attitudes and sociological behavior. Anthropological morphology does not suffice to explain life in the Andes—the fundamental basis must be found in the physiological dynamics of altitude homeostasis. If we go back to Galen we will remember that "the organism is a whole with an environment and it can not be considered apart from that environment" (Hutchins), a fact not yet established in the natural history of men in the Andes.

The claim to acclimatization acquired after a few days or weeks, "a fallacy of misplaced concreteness," misinterprets the nature of the problem and has pro-
Editor's Summary

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