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DYSTROPHIC MORPHOLOGY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE¹

AMONG the environmental factors which influence the structure and functions of the living organism, nutrition is of primary importance. One of the most fruitful methods of studying the process of nutrition is that of inanition. By withholding or decreasing the normal diet (total inanition) or merely one or more of the essential nutritional elements (partial inanition), we may observe effects which throw much light upon the normal process of nutrition from the standpoint of physiology, of pathology or of normal morphology. It is with the morphological aspect of the problem that we, as anatomists, are primarily concerned. We desire to learn the significance of the form and structure of the living organism and the factors concerned in its morphogenesis.

Experimental work by many investigators in this field during the past century has resulted in a large number of widely scattered data concerning the effects of inanition upon the growth and structure in numerous species. These effects of inanition have been extensively and carefully studied, not only in the vertebrates, but also among the lower organisms, the invertebrates and the plants. It may therefore be profitable to review briefly some of the principal results of inanition in these lower forms, partly because they are less well known to anatomists in general and partly because certain aspects of the problem are more clearly revealed in these simpler organisms. In general, only those phases will be considered which appear of most significance in comparison with the results in the higher animals, including man.

EFFECTS OF INANITION IN PLANTS

Plants in general, much more than animals, appear susceptible to modification by various

¹ Presidential address, American Association of Anatomists, Chicago, March 29, 1923.

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