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THE PUBLIC AND THE CANCER PROBLEM¹

By Dr. JAMES EWING

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PUBLIC interest in the cancer problem is now at the highest point in history. Evidences of this interest appear on all sides and many occasions. The radio audience listens to grave references to cancer about as frequently as the average public taste for reality will endure. In one state ninety radio talks on cancer were delivered in one week. Nearly all classes of magazines find that their clientele will accept some, even several, serious discussions of cancer every year. In the yellow journals and so-called health magazines preposterous tales about the nature and cure of cancer are eagerly consumed in proportion to the unintelligence of the readers, while the emotional susceptibilities of the ignorant are fed by hideous devices depicting the ravages of the cancer dragon. Pseudo medical journals not infrequently decry against the standard methods of treatment of the medical profession and

lay open a broad field for the exploitation of the public by numerous cancer charlatans. Many books, some serious, others incompetent, attempt more comprehensive messages mostly on the nature and social significance of cancer, but an adequate popular treatise on cancer yet remains to be produced and is urgently needed.

While the public interest rests ultimately on human experience with the disease, the radical change in public sentiment during the past twenty-five years and the advancing standard of general knowledge are largely due to the efforts of the American Society for the Control of Cancer, and other similar organizations in other countries, which have labored systematically and rather effectively to spread the knowledge of the main facts about cancer, emphasized the necessity of early diagnosis, stressed the warning signs of the major forms of the disease and in every way endeavored to establish an intelligent progressive attitude toward

¹ Evening Lecture before the National Academy of Sciences, Washington, April 25, 1938.

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