

Annotations.

THE CAUSE OF BERI-BERI.

It is a curious fact how often popular beliefs are synonymous with scientific truths which are enigmas to the lay mind. For many years there has been a theory that the mosquito causes malaria, or, in other words, that the malarial zone corresponds with that of the mosquito. Brilliant scientific research has now confirmed this theory. Again, in tropical regions there has been for long the belief that beri-beri was "caused by rice." This half-truth has not until recently received the attention it deserves, but now accurate observations go to prove that this disease which works such havoc at times amongst native races is caused by rice in an unwholesome condition. The moral of this is that medical practitioners will do wisely, when they meet with a wide, though may be unscientific, and unproveable belief on the part of natives, and of residents of long standing in a country, to give this belief due consideration, and to bring their trained observation to bear upon it.

As is frequently the case, when we are on the eve of a discovery, investigations have been proceeding in different regions to the same end. Captain E. R. Roß, of the Indian Medical Service, a civil surgeon at Meiktila, Burma, has been studying the relations between beri-beri, and a microscopic germ found in rice and Jowari grain, and in the rice liquor drunk by the Sepoys, and the result tends to establish the fact that this germ is the cause of beri-beri.

Again, in May of last year, Mr. Charles Hose, D.Sc., Resident in the Baram District of Sarawak, handed in a paper to Dr. Strangeways-Pigg, of Cambridge, showing that the investigations which he had made into the origin of beri-beri in Borneo for some years past resulted in the conclusion "that the principal cause of beri-beri in Borneo is to be traced to mouldy rice." In this connection he showed (1) that the disease was much more prevalent amongst men than women, that the women lived mainly on freshly husked rice, whereas the men on their journeys into the interior carry their rice in bags, and that after a time it becomes mouldy in the damp climate. Further, the outbreaks were found to be more frequent in gaols and amongst the Chinese coolies employed on tobacco and other plantations, and both these classes are fed on imported bazaar rice. Again outbreaks of the disease

are found to occur in the Baram District in the months of April, May, and June, previous to which time large quantities of rice are imported because ships cannot enter the Baram River during the monsoon. Microscopic examination shows that a minute fungoid growth exists on mouldy rice, and it is believed that this is the cause of beri-beri. The subject is one of extreme interest, and is accentuated at the present time owing to the suggestion that mouldy maize and mouldy rice both produce symptoms of arsenical poisoning, and that a mouldy condition of the grain employed in the manufacture of beer may be the cause of the recent poisoning symptoms at Manchester.

"CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY."

Mr. Chester Holcombe, in "The Real Chinese Question," says deliberately that the result of our forcing the infernal drug opium upon the Chinese market, "constitutes a greater crime against humanity than the African slave trade," and those who care to know the truth on this question agree with him. "One Chinese writer describes it as tenfold more deadly than arsenic, inasmuch as the suicide by arsenic dies at once, while the opium victim suffers untold horrors and dies by inches. He mentions cases in which men have pawned their wives and sold their daughters in order to procure the drug. And such cases are by no means rare. The writer has seen an able-bodied and apparently rugged labouring Chinese tumble all in a heap upon the ground utterly nerveless and unable to stand, because the time for his dose of opium had come, and until the craving was supplied he was no longer a man, but the merest heap of bones and flesh. In the great majority of cases death is the sure result of any determined reform. The poison has rotted the whole system, and no power to resist the simplest disease remains. In many years' residence in China, the writer knew of but four men who finally abandoned the habit. Three of them lived but a few months thereafter. The fourth survived his reformation, but was a life-long invalid." If England is responsible for such results in China surely the insidious "gold bug" has had somewhat the same effect upon her own conscience. Every day we realize more and more that this wealth worship is undermining our once noble and humane attitude towards the weaker ones of the earth. It is a humiliating truth.

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