

Medical Matters.

THE IMPRISONMENT OF LEPERS.



Dr. Jonathan Hutchinson, who denies the infectious nature of leprosy, and believes that the disease is provoked by eating fish and other food having an excess of salt, calls attention in the *Times* to the imprisonment of 600 lepers on Robben Island under conditions which lead them to long for death. He says:—"Robben Island, I may explain, is rockbound, sandy, and treeless. Being situate within an hour's sail of Cape Town, it has during the last century been found a convenient place for the safe detention of convicts and lunatics, and finally of those who are afflicted with leprosy. Isolation is there effected by nature, for no one once landed on the shores of Robben Island can hope to escape. No walls are needed nor any cordon of police. It is true that a leper consigned to its safe custody is not manacled, nor is he put in a cell. It is true that within its limits he may roam where he pleases, that he is well fed and has a comfortable bed, and that the ministrations of those who point him to compensatory happiness in another world are abundant and most kindly offered. The lot of the women is worse than that of the men, for they are strictly secluded within a wire-fenced compound, which they can leave only under the care of a keeper. Let me repeat that a prisoner on Robben Island is there practically for life, and add that the leprosy law of Cape Colony consigns to that prison everyone, without regard to sex, age, or social position, who is found to show the symptoms of leprosy in any stage or form. Once there, release is only possible under medical certificate of absolute cure. Such certificates have, until the last few years, been scarcely ever given, and they are still exceedingly infrequent." Many of these lepers show no symptoms which, to the untrained observer, would suggest any suspicion of disease, and can attend to their own concerns.

If, as Dr. Hutchinson asserts, there is practically no risk of infection, and the cause of leprosy is an unsuitable diet, then surely it is time that scientists settled the question, and that a sentence of imprisonment for life should not be passed on these unfortunate people. In any case, the authorities should see to it that they are not compulsorily detained "under conditions which lead them to long for death."

IMMUNITY.

Dr. Stuart remarks, in a recent issue of the *New York Med. Journ.*, that antiseptics has given way to asepsis, and that asepsis is not the final word, for we often forget our greatest ally, the resistance of the tissues. The poor are delivered in safety, on a surgically clean bed, while we dread our fine class of obstetrical work. Any animal, including man, poisoned by diphtheria goes to elaborate an antidote in its own tissues, sometimes successfully, at other times not in sufficient quantity. The antitoxin reinforces the deficient quantity. Following out this analogy, one is forced to conclude that small repeated doses of a poison do develop their own antidote in all our common germ diseases.

Is the principle "away with germs," she asks, the true one? May we not, by our efforts to avoid the germ, destroy the power of the blood to develop immunity, simply by lack of use, as any organ of the body after long disease loses the power to functionate to greater or less extent? She believes that the typhoid fever patient, the pneumonia patient, and the tuberculosis patient will stand a better chance of developing his own antitoxin if we conserve his strength, and stop irritating his tissues with foreign substances. The chief point is that in our eagerness to destroy the germ, we forget to build up our chief ally, the immunity of the patient against that germ.

INFLUENCE OF THE SOIL ON THE VIRULENCE OF THE VIBRIO OF CHOLERA.

In the *Giornale Internazionale delle Scienze Mediche*, Dr. A. Paladino-Blandini made cultures of the vibrio of cholera in dry earth, in moist earth free from organic matter, and in earth that was impregnated with faecal matter. In dry earth the virulence was decreased; in moist earth it was less rapidly diminished; in earth impregnated with a considerable amount of organic matter its virulence was increased. But if between two periods of remaining in the earth it passed through the body of an animal, its virulence was very markedly increased. Both its presence in the earth and in the animal were important factors in the increase of virulence. There seems to be a coincidence between the presence of the vibrio in the deepest levels of the subterranean water, where the sun does not reach, and the coming of a severe epidemic of cholera.

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