

**Life in a Plague-stricken District.****A Book of the Week.**

An interesting lecture on the above subject was delivered recently by Dr. Marion Hunter, late Plague Medical Officer, Poona, at 17, Pembroke Square, by the kind permission of Miss Gladstone. Dr. Gladstone, F.R.S., presided. When Dr. Hunter arrived at Poona, eighteen months ago, the plague was at its worst, and raged from November, 1897, to March, 1898. In October, 1897, 70 cases were notified daily, and the total hospital accommodation did not exceed 350 beds. In November, therefore, the plan of dealing with it was remodelled. The methods adopted were isolation of the patients, and treatment of the houses. The city was divided into ten wards, which were visited daily by sub-committees consisting of an English doctor, thirty soldiers, and some civilians. Corpse inspection by an English doctor was also enforced, as in India the semi-qualified doctor had to be reckoned with. Several plague hospitals were erected, containing 500 beds in the wards, as well as 100 in tents; there were also various native caste hospitals, in which there were no English doctors or nurses. The only regulation enforced with regard to these was inspection by an English doctor before leaving, otherwise patients might be discharged with open wounds. Segregation camps were also established, and health camps, to which the inhabitants of crowded villages were encouraged to migrate, and allowed two annas a day to live upon. The search parties started on their rounds at 5.30 a.m. daily, a nurse, perhaps, accompanying them if there were purdah women to be visited. If a case were found, it was conveyed to hospital, the family segregated, and a doubtful case placed in the observation ward. Then the whitewashers and disinfectors were turned into the house, and a window, if none existed, was made in it. The efficacy of the search was sometimes frustrated, inasmuch as a sharp look out was kept from the housetops, and, if the alarm were given, the sick were carried along the housetops to other houses. Various stories were circulated concerning the hospital, one being that the Queen had sent a woman doctor because she was cleverer at killing than a man. The patients were exceedingly jealous as to medicines which were carried from ward to ward, and given to those who had none. One difficult duty was to safeguard the babies. Some parents, who had lost all their children, would look about for a convalescent plague baby, and kidnap it. Some of the chief symptoms of plague were loss of muscular power, great restlessness, and often death from heart failure. One attack does not confer immunity from another, and a second, or even third attack, may occur in six months. It is conveyed not only by rats, but by fleas, flies, ants, and squirrels. The efficacy of Haffkine's solution was tested in one marriage camp of 800 people, with the splendid record that not one of the inoculated developed plague, though they mixed freely with plague patients. This is strong testimony to the virtue of the solution.

Some interesting remarks were made by Dr. Herbert Birdwood, C.S.I., and Sir William Robinson, K.C.M.G., late Governor of Hong Kong.

In answer to a question from the latter, Dr. Hunter stated that she had had no practical experience of the vapour treatment, but she believed it had been tried with good result in Bombay.

**A DOUBLE THREAD.\***

It is not at all surprising that a new book by the author of "Isabel Carnaby," should reach its ten thousand almost immediately on publication. And to say that "A Double Thread" will maintain the reputation of its author is not to say quite enough. For this book is quite as full of epigram and smart conversation as its predecessor, and the plot is rather stronger. There is more ground for the quarrel between Jack and Elfrida, than there was between Isabel and Paul; but then, in this book, Miss Fowler asks us to believe what many people will declare to be a simple impossibility. Now what that impossibility is, I am not going to say; for the knowledge of it would go far to spoil the pleasure of the book. Old and hardened novel-reader that I am, I own that I had no suspicion of the nature of Ethel's secret until the author chose to divulge it; and it is my belief that most people, if they really play fair, and do not look on ahead, will be as surprised as I was.

Instead therefore, of letting out secrets, and spoiling the reader's pleasure, let us admire one of the minor characters, Sir Roger Lemesurier, misogynist, cynic, and landowner. Miss Fowler has probably read, or seen, "Cyrano de Bergerac," for she employs, in this book, with wonderful skill, the tragedy of the man who is not ugly, but worse,—ridiculous.

Sir Roger's fine qualities have been enclosed in a small and round body, with a chubby face, and a squeaky voice; and the woman he loved could not take him seriously. So life was poisoned for him; and thus he speaks to Elfrida:

"My dear, you have never been a man, too feeble for men to fear, and too grotesque for women to love. Who would realize that 'King Lear' was a Tragedy if it were bound in the cover of *Comic Cuts*? And who would refrain from laughing at Hamlet if he were made up as PUNCHINELLO?"

Elfrida did not speak, but stroked Sir Roger's hand. After a moment's silence, he added, with an amused smile: "It is funny of me to be telling you all this; but I think I could always have told a woman anything, only no woman ever had the patience to listen to me."

"I am sure that you exaggerate the importance of appearance."

"Perhaps so. We are inclined to think that the people who are dying of starvation exaggerate the importance of bread. Bread does not make us happy; then why should the absence of it make them so extremely the reverse? If you want to know how much a thing is worth, ask the people who have not got it. If you want to know how little it is worth, ask the people who have."

The book is full of quotable sayings.

"Have you ever noticed that there is no spectacle so depressing as the ruins of a house that has never been finished? The ruins of houses that have had their day and been lived in, are often restful and beautiful and picturesque; but the decay of a building that has been begun and not completed, is one of the most ghastly and hideous objects on the face of the earth. So many lives seem to me like that; and with such lives I have the profoundest sympathy."

\* By Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler. Hutchinson.

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