

## Medical Matters.

### MALARIA IN ITALY: A LESSON IN PRACTICAL HYGIENE.

Professor Osler, in a most interesting letter in the *Times*, written from Rome, warmly commends "the splendid work of the Italian Society for the Study of Malaria." He writes:

In Professor Celli's lecture-room hangs the mortality chart of Italy for the past 20 years. In 1887 malaria ranked with tuberculosis, pneumonia, and the intestinal disorders of children as one of the great infections, killing in that year 21,033 persons. The chart shows a gradual reduction in the death-rate, and in 1906 only 4,871 persons died of the disease, and in 1907 4,160. This remarkable result has been very largely due to the sanitary measures introduced by the Society. It has long been known that malaria disappears "spontaneously." The Fen country is now healthy; parts of Canada, about Lakes Ontario and Erie, which were formerly hotbeds of the disease, are now free. This cannot be attributed altogether to cultivation and drainage. I know places on the shores of the lakes just mentioned in which the conditions to-day are identical with those which I remember as a boy. The Desjardin Canal Marsh, at the extreme western end of Lake Ontario, was a well-known focus of the disease. The marsh remains, the mosquitoes are there; but a case of malaria is almost as rare as in England. The disappearance is largely due to the free use of quinine. The settlers early recognised the important fact that malaria was a disease liable to recur, and it became a common practice to take Peruvian bark every spring and autumn for a year or two after an attack. This is a point in prophylaxis which the work of the Italian Society has brought into prominence. From the summary of the decennial report just issued the following paragraphs are of interest:—

"The Society has improved the prophylaxis of malaria, and has introduced into practice the new mechanical measures based on the defence of the habitation and the individual from the bites of mosquitoes. This being a relatively expensive procedure, the Society has occupied itself chiefly with the improvement of the anti-plasmodic prophylaxis—the administration of quinine.

"For this purpose it has promoted and defended legislation for the gratuitous distribution of quinine to the poor and to all workers in malarial localities.

"In order to render possible the prophylaxis and to prolong the treatment, it has prepared

the quinine in its most agreeable forms—namely, that of comfits and chocolates, the latter containing tannate of quinine, which has little taste, and is better tolerated by children.

"The results have been that since 1902, when the law on State quinine was promulgated, while the consumption of quinine has been yearly increasing, the mortality from malaria has diminished from about 16,000 to about 4,000 yearly; and in the army, Custom House offices, and in some communes where the new laws have been better applied, the morbidity has greatly diminished."

By these measures, and "by means of the agricultural and agrarian transformation of the land and colonisation, rather than by the destruction of mosquitoes (a thing impossible to be done by us on a large scale)," Italy may be freed from the scourge.

Malaria illustrates stages through which so many of the great discoveries in medicine have had to pass. At first a period of doubt—that the actual germ had been discovered seemed too good news to be true, and for ten years or more there was much, and perhaps justifiable, scepticism. Except for the great help in diagnosis, we did not get much further until 1898, when the experiments of Ross demonstrated the truth of the old suggestion of Lancisi (revived by King and by Manson), that the disease was transmitted by the mosquito. And now we are in the stage of prevention—the practical application of the knowledge of the cause and the method of its action. The anti-malarial crusades initiated by Ross have had an extraordinary success, and nowhere more than in Italy, in the hands of the National Society, to whose good work it is a pleasure to call attention. It would be hard to name any single event of the nineteenth century of greater practical importance to the race than the discovery of Laveran. In the words of Colonel Gorgas, it has made the tropics habitable by white men. The Panama Canal zone is an astounding witness to the success of modern sanitary measures against malaria. The monthly reports of Colonel Gorgas give a death-rate (among nearly 50,000 workpeople) lower than that of any large city—it has been as low as 12 per 1,000! And let us not forget that humanity owes this triumph to the men who introduced experiment into medicine, to the Harveys, the Hunters, the Majendies, and the Claude Bernards.

Professor Simpson, of King's College, London, is satisfied that malaria can be eradicated in West Africa, and the country be made healthy for both Europeans and natives.

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