

## Medical Matters.

### THE CHOLERA OUTBREAK AT CALCUTTA.

An official statement has now been published in regard to the outbreak of cholera at the Presidency General Hospital, Calcutta, with Professor Haffkine's report on the outbreak. It will be remembered that the outbreak occurred on July 30th and 31st, and that 6 nurses, 3 patients (children), in the Alexandra ward, and a sweeper, succumbed to the disease. So virulent was the infection that though treatment was at once begun, in the fatal cases death for the most part occurred within 24 hours of the onset of the disease.

The conclusion arrived at is that the infection was conveyed by some article of food at the nurses' dinner on July 28th, as every nurse affected had this meal, and broken food from the nurses' table is the sweeper's perquisite. In regard to the infection of the children, it is supposed that the nurses, as occasionally happens, carried some food from their own table to some of the children.

#### PROFESSOR HAFFKINE'S REPORT.

Professor Haffkine's report states "the outbreak comprised 10 cases among nurses, 3 inpatients in the Children's Ward, and 1 sweeper, all occurring practically within 24 hours.

"The suddenness and the abrupt termination of the occurrences suggest ptomaine poisoning; that it is cholera was proved by the demonstration of *comma bacilli* in three fatal cases in nurses, and in a fatal case in a child. The other fatal cases did not come under examination."

Professor Haffkine examined the water supply both filtered and unfiltered, but failed to detect *comma bacilli* in either.

He, however, found *comma bacilli* in the water in the ice chest belonging to the nurses' dining hall, in an earthenware *chatti* in the cook room, used for storing filtered water, in a zinc bucket from which the *chatti* is filled, and in a large *lota* in the cook room, in which potatoes peeled by hand had been put into water to be washed after the peeling.

Contaminated articles were also found in the nurses' quarters.

It appears from the report that the drinking water used on the nurses' dining table is cooled by ice put into the jug. The ice supply is in charge of one of the *massalchis*, who receives it on arrival, puts it into the ice chest, and deals it out when required. The peeling of potatoes and other vegetables is done by the *massalchis*, as also the washing of the dishes for the tiffin carriers. The hands of these *massalchis* and of other servants were examined for *comma bacilli*, and two yielded positive results.

The first of these was the cleanest of all, who

came up for examination having just finished bathing. Professor Haffkine states further:—

"When on the day following it became apparent that the hands of this man had yielded *comma bacilli*, an enquiry was made, and the following written statement was received from the Hospital authorities:—

"K. *massalchi*, yesterday morning, after peeling potatoes and cleaning vegetables, visited the latrine for defecation and subsequently bathed at the usual place set apart in front of the servants' quarters, which is a filtered water supply from the municipality. The servants invariably bathe there while the flow of water is on; and it is the place where this man always bathes."

"Thus the dry hands of the man, who had done his best to keep clean, and was apparently in the best of health, were contaminated with *comma bacilli*, and these came off easily when brought in contact with the fluid into which they were received by me.

"I have had no time to ascertain yet whether the two men in question actually harboured *comma bacilli* in their bowels. But contamination conveyed from their hands to the ice and to the dishes, bottles, muffineers, etc., would be carried to every nurse who dined in the hospital at the time; it would be capable of being conveyed, not directly to a sick ward, but to the nurses' dining room in the ward; and could reach the ward's sweeper who, it appears, usually gets whatever remains in the muffineers from the nurses' dinner."

The fact that this man had visited the latrine and washed in the servants' bathing place just before his hands were examined led Professor Haffkine to suspect that he and the second man mentioned were actually harbouring *comma bacilli* in their bowels, but when making his first report he had not had time to make the necessary investigations.

The men were then placed in separate quarters, and arrangements made for gathering and examining their discharges. After four days the men left the hospital grounds in spite of all inducements offered them to stay. In each of the stools passed by the men on these four days *comma bacilli* were seen under the microscope, as well as an enormous number of other microbes. At first Professor Haffkine was unable to get isolated cultures, but later succeeded in doing so in the case of one of the men. He proposed to compare the bacilli isolated from the *massalchi*'s bowels with those obtained from the patients in the outbreak, but stated that this would take some little time.

There is, however, a new element of danger in Indian life, if apparently healthy servants can be cholera-carriers and infect the food they handle with this dread disease.

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