TROPICAL DISEASES.

Dr. F. A. Lyon, Assistant Secretary to the Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich, contributes to *The World's Health* an interesting article on Tropical Diseases, in which he says that amongst the characteristics peculiar to the course of civilization during the first quarter of the twentieth century is an unprecedented advance in medical science and a marked increase in popular interest in matters of health and hygiene. The year 1929 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the initiation of the organised study and treatment of tropical diseases by the late Sir Patrick Manson, "the Father of Tropical Medicine."

He traces and gives due credit to Sir Patrick Manson for his achievements in the scientific sphere and his discoveries in China, culminating in the enunciation of the mosquito-malaria theory (subsequently proven as correct by Sir Ronald Ross).

Tropical Nursing.

Two years ago courses of lectures in tropical nursing and hygiene were initiated at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London. It is not, says Dr. Lyon, realised that the nurse in the tropics may often have to carry out treatment herself because there is no doctor close at hand, and that a life may be sacrificed if she lack the specialised knowledge demanded to look after a case of tropical illness. Two courses in tropical nursing are given each year by members of the medical staff of the hospital in conjunction with practical work in the wards. At the conclusion of the course an examination is held and the Certificate of the Seamen's Hospital Society for Tropical Nursing, signed by the teachers, is awarded to successful candidates.

Some Recent Advances.

In spite of the unprecedented destruction of human life during the World War, it is probable that future generations will recognise that the struggle did more for the development of the science of tropical medicine than any other event in the world's history. More lives have been saved as a result of the conditions then experienced than were sacrificed during that disastrous period. The War came at a moment when the knowledge which had already been gained by the labours of Manson, Ross, and their many distinguished followers in India and Africa could best be applied in the illimitable fields then laid open.

Sleeping Sickness.

As a result of the brilliant conceptions of Ehrlich and his school, one of the greatest advances following experience gained in the War was the production of "Bayer 205," a synthetic aniline compound which possesses a remarkable action on the deadly trypanosome of sleeping sickness. Although the action of this drug on artificially infected animals had already been accurately assessed, since 1921 the dosage appropriate to the human organism has been discovered as the result of the treatment of patients at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London. The drug has been found to be well tolerated in doses, given intravenously, from one to two grammes per week, and a total of ten grammes to be sufficient to ensure a cure. It may now be said that trypanosomiasis has been robbed of its horrors and the efficacy of the drug is now so widely recognised that infected Europeans are no longer obliged to come to a temperate climate, a curative course of treatment being available in Africa. In certain cases resistant to "Bayer 205," "Tryparsamide," an arsenical compound perfected by the Rockefeller Institute in New York, has been found to succeed.

Dysentery.

Dysentery may be caused by a variety of parasites: the most familiar are the bacillary and the amoebic forms. Many intractable and distressing cases of the former type remained as an aftermath of the War, in many of them the problem of effective treatment being apparently insoluble, since the destruction of the large bowel was almost complete. In years previous to 1920, surgical treatment of the large intestine was often followed by disastrous results. The means were found, however, of alleviating, and in some cases of entirely curing, this condition by making an artificial opening of the cæcum and by subsequently washing out the bowel with a diluted hypochlorite solution. The general condition of greatly emaciated patients was thereby rapidly improved, in some cases to an extent for which it had not been dared to hope, and by placing the large intestine at rest in this manner which permitted the fæces to escape without soiling the mucous surface, complete restoration of function was achieved. Amœbic dysentery is also a condition of ulceration of the large bowel. The parasite, the *Entamoeba Histolytica*, and its life-cycle became better known during the War, but the results of treatment by emetine were by no means satisfactory or permanent. A compound of emetine known as Emetine-Bismuth-Iodide was produced in 1916, but a certain proportion of cases proved resistant to this drug, the administration of which is often followed by severe reactions. Yatren, a combination of oxyquinoline sulphonic acid with iodine, which had been utilised in Germany as a wound antiseptic, was found, when injected into the bowel, to be remarkably efficacious in exterminating the amœbæ without having a detrimental effect upon the patient's general condition. The reports received about the action of this drug were analysed at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London and the good results fully confirmed. It was found that in certain cases it, too, failed to effect a permanent cure, but by a judicious combination with E.B.I. permanent results are now obtainable in every case. The duration of treatment of a case of amœbic dysentery, which formerly was a matter of six weeks, has now been reduced to one of ten to twelve days.

Malaria.

Dysentery and malaria are perhaps the most important of the tropical diseases both from an economic as well as a social point of view. So protean are their manifestations that it may be said that in the complete mastery of them lies the emancipation of the tropics for development by European nations. With regard to malaria, the treatment of this disease by quinine, though undoubtedly one of the greatest therapeutic triumphs ever achieved, has certain disadvantages. To some individuals quinine is a more poisonous drug than to others, for it may adversely affect the heart or the digestive organs. Moreover, there are certains forms of malaria, such as the benign tertian, which tend to

previous page next page