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AUSTRALIAN TROPICAL DISEASES.

One of the most important proposals now before the Australian public is the scheme for the establishment of an institute at Townsville, in Queensland, for the scientific study of tropical diseases. The suggestion came from Dr. Frodsham, Bishop of North Queensland, who in an elaborate and a carefully-prepared memorandum set forth the nature and advantages of such an institution, and the means by which it could be created with comparative ease at the designated locality. The advances effected in the scientific knowledge of tropical diseases during the last few years are remarkable, and they have been made subservient on a colossal scale to the well-being of mankind. Many tropical regions formerly dreaded by Europeans as places of residence have lost their terrors through the more perfect means of treatment possessed by the medical profession and the sanitary authorities. Ismailia, on the Suez Canal, from which in former days malaria was never absent, is now reported to be perfectly immune. The old Spanish city of Panama has been dealt with by the American authorities, and for the first time in its history has attained the distinction of being a clean and healthy town. Similar testimony coming from many quarters has led all the great European Governments interested in tropical countries to recognise the value and importance of scientific research in regard to the special diseases peculiar to such places, and has induced them to extend their patronage to the establishment of institutions designed for the prosecution of enquiry. Schools of Tropical Medicine have been founded in connection with the Universities of London and Liverpool, and the American Government has established a fully-equipped institution of the same kind at Manila.

In no other country could more substantial reason be shown for such a school than in Australia. A large part of this continent is tropical, and all the seaports have intercourse with neighboring tropical countries. The commercial communication with the East and with the Netherlands-Indies, which almost touch our northern coast, is sure to expand within a few years to great proportions. Tropical diseases have been already introduced, and some have become almost endemic. Healthy as undoubtedly the tropical and sub-tropical parts of Australia are, we are unhappily more or less familiar with malaria, leprosy, the plague, tropical dysentery, and other diseases the nature of which is less understood. If by means of scientific knowledge these maladies can be prevented or made amenable to control, it would be impossible to exaggerate the boon it will bring to suffering humanity. But in addition to this consideration the proposal can be strongly supported on patriotic grounds. If the tropical regions of Australia are to be adequately occupied by the white man everything must be done by the best hygienic and sanitary measures to encourage European settlement. Dr. Frodsham quotes the apposite words of the French Minister for the Colonies contained

in his instructions to the colonial Governors. "In order to colonise we must render the colonies healthy." The success attained in tropical countries under far more intractable conditions should render us optimistic about our own, and lead us to welcome every means science places in our hands for the conquest of disease.

At the present time there is no institution existing in Australia with the necessary appliances by which a medical student can obtain a scientific knowledge of tropical diseases. Courses of lectures and demonstrations on the subject like those now being delivered at the University of Adelaide by Dr. Angas Johnson have, however, stimulated interest and prepared the way for larger and more systematic measures. It is proposed to establish a properly-equipped institution on the lines of the advanced schools of other countries. The scheme provides for stationing a scientifically trained medical man in some suitable centre of tropical Australia where there are opportunities for clinical study. The results of his observations, together with "specimens" of the diseases, are to be transmitted to the professors of medicine in the selected university provided with a laboratory, where the investigations would be perfected. The proposed centre for the original observations is the Townsville Hospital. The university to supervise the scheme is that of Sydney, as being nearer Townsville than either the Adelaide or the Melbourne University, but both the latter institutions are to have a recognised place in the management, and all the results will be equally available for them. The cost of the

scheme under these conditions will be exceedingly moderate. The estimate is £700 per annum. The whole plan has received the endorsement of the medical authorities of the three Universities, and approval has also been expressed by their Excellencies the Governors of Queensland and South Australia; Sir Samuel Way, the Chancellor of the Adelaide University; and Dr. Ham and Dr. Ramsay Smith, the chief Government officers of health in Brisbane and Adelaide respectively. The scheme is now under consideration as a practical measure by the committee of the Townsville Hospital.

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TROPICAL DISEASES.

THE CASE FOR AN AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE.

In connection with the proposed establishment of an institute in Townsville devoted solely to the study of tropical diseases, which formed the subject of a leading article in "The Advertiser" yesterday, Dr. Angas Johnson, on Friday, supplied some further particulars as to the proposal. He referred to the present annual contribution of £200 by the Federal Government to the London School of Tropical Medicine, and asked why this money should be expended in the English metropolis when it could be more usefully employed in furthering the study of tropical diseases on the spot. The Northern Territory wanted settlers, and the populating of that extensive area could not be successfully undertaken unless we had endeavored to grapple with the diseases peculiar to that region. It was no use to talk of a white population there until efforts had been put forth to enable the white residents to combat tropical diseases.

Colored races were practically immune to the attacks of tropical parasites, so much dreaded by Europeans. It was just the same as if a colored man went to a cold climate; he speedily fell a victim to tuberculosis. The importance of special scientific research in regard to tropical diseases could not be over estimated by Australians, and an institute established to experiment with tropical bacilli and parasites would be a great boon to the Commonwealth at large. In Australia were to be found all the diseases peculiar to the tropics, with the exception of yellow fever and sleeping sickness. There was no doubt that such diseases could be successfully fought and ultimately conquered. From Havana, for instance, Americans by assiduous and experimental study had almost banished yellow fever and malaria. They had fought plague by burning, disinfecting, isolation, and the destruction of mosquitoes. What had been done there it was only reasonable to suppose could be as effectively done here. In Cuba, when that disease infested island was under the Spanish flag, and 100,000 troops from Spain were stationed there, about 25,000 died every year. That was an awful mortality, 25 per cent. But after the Americans assumed control they introduced new, up-to-date, and hygienic methods, and in an incredibly short space of time had rendered the island practically free from the pestilence which raged there formerly, and practically exterminated yellow fever and malaria, once so rampant. There was no doubt, said Dr. Johnson, that the needs and requirements of Australia imperatively demanded an institute on the lines of the one proposed. The doctors out here could spare neither the time nor the money to go to London. Besides which what was the earthly use of going to study diseases in a country absolutely free from them? If Townsville were selected as the site for the new building a doctor could easily spare a month, and the time spent would be extremely beneficial to him. The moment the Panama Canal was completed the danger of the introduction of yellow fever and other diseases now unknown in Australia would be greatly increased. But if doctors here were educated sufficiently to recognise immediately the symptoms of such plagues they would be in a much better position to deal with any outbreak. The alien diseases already in Australia included leprosy, to which Chinamen fell victims yearly, and had to be dispatched to the various leper stations; dengue fever, so prevalent in Queensland at present; bubonic plague, now a source of anxiety in eastern States, and others too numerous to mention. Malaria was responsible for many deaths annually. Only by studying the origin of these dreadful pestilences, and how to cope effectually with them, could Australia hope to be rid of them. The institute at Townsville would also fulfil another duty. It could be used as a distributing centre for laboratories in other States. When a lecturer wished to procure, say, some dead films of malarial blood for microscopic purposes the institute would supply his wants without any delay. They never knew what new germs were to be introduced in Australia. When the soldiers came back from the Boer war a lot of them were found to be suffering from tropical dysentery, a disease hitherto almost unknown here. Their horses had been left in Africa, but the men were permitted to bring back saddles, saddlecloths, and bridles, and as there was a lot of horse sickness in Africa at that time horses here could easily have been infected with the disease by the use of those accoutrements. The zoological authorities were always reporting new animals into the country, yet the animals were never submitted to a close scrutiny to discover whether they were bringing any new and unknown parasitic pest into the State, or what disease they might introduce, because, coming from tropical countries, men here were unable adequately to inspect them owing to their lack of knowledge on the subject. In the dissemination of disease the flea was the great agent to carry bubonic plague from one rat to another, and the rat was eventually the means of its spread among human beings. Bugs were known to convey leprosy, and mosquitoes were invariably associated with malaria, as well as other diseases, such as filaria and yellow fever. Tick fever in Queensland had followed on the importation of Texan cattle from America, and was assuming formidable proportions. The tick in fowls kills the fowls with spirochaete fever, and not, as was commonly held formerly, with chicken cholera. But had adequate means been furnished previously to investigate these matters thoroughly the discovery would not have been so belated. Until the proposed institute was constructed investigation and research into those diseases which periodically plagued Australia with their visitations, as well as those which had obtained a good footing here, would be seriously retarded.