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STUDY OF TROPICAL DISEASES.

A BISHOP'S PROPOSALS.

The Bishop of North Queensland (Right Rev. Dr. Frodsham) has issued a circular containing details of a scheme which he has formulated with the object of "furthering the scientific study of the diseases of tropical Australia." The Bishop, who is personally acquainted with the conditions of life in Northern Australia, has been impressed with the need for providing Australian medical students with greater facilities than at present exist for the study of tropical diseases, and the scheme he now advocates "first took practical shape" during his recent visit to Adelaide. He points out that "healthy as the Australian tropics undoubtedly are, they are not free from diseases peculiar to tropical countries," and that in view of the rapid and frequent communication between the Commonwealth and the Far East "it is not unreasonable to suppose that other diseases may be introduced, against which knowledge will be the best safeguard." Leading medical men in the States have told him that patients suffering from obscure maladies are frequently brought into local hospitals, and that they are handicapped in the treatment of such cases through lack of knowledge and the absence of an adequate laboratory where specimens could be examined and the diseases recognised. He also states that although many of the medical students now studying in Australian universities will probably take up work in the tropics they "are at present receiving inadequate practical instruction in the characteristics of a large class of diseases with which they may quickly be brought into contact." Australian medical men are thus, at the outset of their careers, placed at a disadvantage relative to English students, because the latter can, if they so desire, receive a course of instruction at the Schools of Tropical Medicine in London and Liverpool. The Commonwealth Government has already recognised in a practical manner the importance of the work which the London school is doing by contributing to its funds a subsidy of £200 per annum; but that institution is not likely to be able to extend its investigations to Australia for many years to come. For some time past, Dr. Frodsham states, the medical faculties of the Australian universities have recognised the defect in local medical education, but in trying to remedy it they have been confronted by the initial and apparently insuperable difficulty that none of the Australian medical schools is rich enough to bear the cost of elaborate laboratory and other equipment of a Tropical Institute. Another obstacle is that the three Australian medical schools are all situated in the temperate zone, where very few cases of tropical maladies are available for observation. "The position would be considerably altered, however," Dr. Frodsham writes, "if the professors of pathology at the various Australian schools of medicine could receive a plentiful supply of reliable specimens of tropical diseases. This could only be satisfactorily accomplished by stationing a scientifically-trained medical man somewhere in tropical Australia, where he could conveniently study from clinical cases the diseases peculiar to the tropics. The result of such observation, if duly communicated, and accompanied by specimens of the disease, would enable the professors of pathology to extend their own investigations in the university laboratories, and to place the results of their observation before their respective students."

—Not an Expensive Scheme.—

Dr. Frodsham proposes that the University of Sydney should have a general supervision and oversight of the clinical observations in the tropics, and that the appointment of a medical man to undertake the actual work should be placed in the hands of the Deans of the Faculties of the three Australian medical schools. He suggests that the Townsville Hospital committee should provide, free of charge, accommodation for patients under special clinical observation, as that town is "well situated as a centre from which the medical officer in charge of the institute could carry on his research operations." He believes that if his proposals could be adopted the scheme he advocates could be carried

out at a total cost of about £700 a year, which would include a salary of £400 for the medical officer in charge. His idea is that the Universities of Melbourne and Adelaide should participate equally with that of Sydney in the results of the research, and that the medical faculties of the former universities should be invited to collaborate in their respective laboratories in the work of investigation. "Consequently the Australian School of Tropical Medicine as contemplated in this memorandum will have a thoroughly Australian character. It will benefit the whole Commonwealth, both as regards the teaching of medicine in the southern universities and the alleviation of the suffering in the hospitals of the north." The Bishop thinks it would not be unreasonable to expect the Federal and Queensland Governments to subsidize an institution which would do so much for Australia.

—Proposals Favourably Received.—

Among those whom Dr. Frodsham has consulted, and who are "deeply impressed with the necessity for providing greater facilities for the scientific study of diseases of tropical Australia," are the Governors of South Australia and Queensland, Sir Samuel Way, Professor Stirling, Professor Anderson Stuart, of Sydney; Professor Allen, of Melbourne; Dr. Ham (Government Officer of Health in Brisbane), and Dr. Ramsay Smith. Professor Stirling made certain suggestions, which have been embodied in the scheme; and Professor Stuart has "no great misgivings that, when the project shall have progressed so far as to be placed before the senate of his university as a definite proposal, that body will approve of the suggestion that Sydney should be the centre for supervision of the institute." "As the matter presents itself to my mind now," he wrote, "if the funds as above noted (£700 per annum) can be provided we might reasonably look upon the thing as done."

TROPICAL DISEASES.

With fine disinterestedness the Bishop of North Queensland (Dr. Frodsham) has initiated a movement of the greatest importance to the Commonwealth at this juncture, a movement which has for its objects the scientific study of the diseases of tropical Australia, and the practical treatment of these maladies. As a correspondent, signing himself "Australian," has vividly demonstrated in The Register, effective occupation of tropical Australia is a vital condition of our future freedom from invasion. Leave idle and empty the higher zones, and Sir Edmund Barton's famous phrase of "a continent for a nation and a nation for a continent" will recall a tragedy of lost opportunity. The Commonwealth's right and title to the whole of this island continent must in the eyes of the world be one of use and settlement. Effective occupation will be the first, and may be the only, safeguard against the spilling over of Oriental peoples into our midst. Development of tropical Australia as a weapon of national defence assumes the magnitude of a national obligation, and, however costly the undertaking, dare not be neglected. For the present the Commonwealth is dominated by the sentiment of the temperate latitudes; the people have resolved, for better or for worse, that such development shall be restricted within the limitations of a white Australia policy. One almost insuperable obstacle to colonization by pale faces of the black man's land is the presence of those diseases to which

coloured skins have become more or less immune, and obviously the first step to be taken is in the direction of removing that obstacle if possible. It must not be overlooked that tropical Australia offers a congenial atmosphere for the introduction of microbes which cannot be rejected by any Immigration Restriction Act. Eastern Australia is bound to become a vast emporium for far eastern trade, and with its commerce will appear for distribution throughout the continent the scourges of the Oriental peoples. This menace will be increased when in due course the Panama Canal shall be opened for ocean traffic.

Already we have in our midst the *Stegomyia fasciata*, a splendid traveller by sea, and a communicator of yellow fever. We are not free from tick fever, malaria, leprosy, plague, beri-beri, and other afflictions, while we may not too confidently hope to escape from a visitation of sleeping sickness. In these circumstances the proposal to equip Australian medical science with means to combat tropical diseases, to adopt precautionary measures and supply effective remedies, becomes a matter of great public concern and rational urgency. The scheme suggested by Bishop Frodsham has the advantage of bearing the endorsement of the universities of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide. Dr. Frodsham desires that Queensland's contribution to the Federal movement, since that State has not yet a university, shall take the form of a clinical observatory to be established in the Townsville Hospital. The Chancellor of our own University warmly commends the step which has been taken by the Bishop, and Professor Stirling has identified himself with Dr. Frodsham's cause. Indeed, before the matter was broached, the University Council had sanctioned a course of post-graduate lectures by Dr. Angas Johnson upon tropical diseases. The need for an Australian school for the study of this all-important branch of medicine to the Commonwealth has only to be stated to be recognised, and the happy omen that the leading authorities are prepared to co-operate in its establishment is largely due to the untiring devotion and the diplomatic skill of the Bishop of North Queensland. Two things remain to be done. One is to secure the practical assistance of the Federal Government, which cannot be reasonably refused. The other will be to select a suitable medical scientist with leisure and enthusiasm and capacity to inaugurate the work of the new school, which would labour in harmony with all the ordinary medical schools in Australia, and furnish a post-graduate course for specialists. This matter can be safely left to the direction of the Sydney University, which will be asked to undertake the management. In various places the malarial mosquito has been mastered, and there is no reason why success in this and other directions should not attend an Australian school for the study of tropical disease.