MATTEISM: AN EXPOSURE.

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It may be known to many readers of the British Medical Journal that in response to certain representations made by Lady Paget in a monthly periodical, and by Mr. W. T. Stead in the *Review of Reviews*, a committee of investigation was formed in the early part of last year, to inquire into the claims of Count Mattei and his followers to be curers of cancer "without the knife." The committee consisted of the late Sir Morell Mackenzie, who was appointed its first chairman, Mr. Lawson Tait, and myself. It was open to question whether or not such an investigation as was proposed to the committee was expedient in the public interests. Speaking only for myself, I may be permitted to say that Matteism seemed to me to be an unusually dangerous form of quackery, that it was assuming large proportions, that in deference to popular clamour it was beginning to be practised even by regular medical practitioners; and it appeared that to bring to light its true character would be an important public service. There is no reason to doubt that the other members of the committee held similar views. Mr. Lawson Tait expressed his scepticism freely; and Sir Morell Mackenzie never doubted that the result of the committee's investigations would be the exposure of pretensions that were false and mischievous. Notwithstanding this, we were all steadfastly resolved, if we should find ourselves mistaken, and if Mattei's potions really should cure cancer in some inconceivable way, that we would admit our error and make known the true state of the case.

For my part, however, I strove to introduce a stipulation that the Matteists should at least tell us what their remedy consisted of before we proceeded to further investigation; but this stipulation was not accepted. As some of our medical brethren have a little misunderstood the position and intentions of the committee, it may be desirable to state that we entered upon our duties merely as a committee of observation, not of supervision or direction. We were asked, not to treat cases, but to see and admit cures in the making, exactly as we might have been asked to see and admit the reality of the miracles at Lourdes, or of the wonders said to be wrought at Bethshan. To this there could be no ethical objection; nor, so far as I can see, was it in any way inexpedient. On the contrary it was, under the peculiar circumstances, highly expedient, as the result has convincingly shown.

At the outset the Matteists expressed themselves willing to accept as subjects of treatment cases of *boná-fide* cancer, by whomsoever introduced, provided they were still in the "first or second stage." To this limitation the committee made no objection. But when it began to be necessary to put these protestations into practice, a spirit of caution, not to say of extreme timidity, laid hold of the Matteists. Patient after patient was sent in, but declined by the cancer curers on one pretext or another. So much was this the case, that Mr. Lawson Tait was several times on the point of making a premature exposure of what he considered discreditable tactics. Even Mr. Stead himself began to think that he might have been deceived. This unlooked-for hesitancy was an early indication that in Matteism all is not gold that glitters, and that the Matteists themselves are very well aware of the fact.

The most cautious calculator may sooner or later find himself in a dilemma; and that was exactly the position in which the Matteists found themselves. Mr. Stead, without at all intending it, had proved to be their most dangerous enemy. They were between Scylla and Charybdis If they persisted in refusing every case sent in, Mr. Stead must expose them in the *Review of Reviews;* if they accepted cases which they could not cure, the believers in open and honourable methods of medicine, whose criticism the Matteists themselves had demanded with such well-simulated earnestness, would equally expose their failure to the light of day. Thus hemmed in on all sides, they were obliged to accept some cases for experiment; and ultimately they agreed to treat five patients out of a large number submitted to them—all women, all, with one doubtful exception, suffering from cancer of the breast, and all certified by competent surgeons, not members of the committee and not Matteists.

The committee appointed a graduate in arts and medicine of the University of Cambridge to act as their paid registrar. His duties were to watch the cases in detail, from week to week, and to make periodical reports. The members of the committee themselves also, in turn, regularly inspected the cases and noted their progress. It may be desirable here to state that the registrar, whose name I am not at liberty to mention, proved to be a most discreet, conscientious, and intelligent officer, and I much regret that he does not permit me to claim for him that honourable recognition of his important service to truth and good morals which every right-thinking medical man will be anxious to accord. To him it is largely due that the committee has been enabled to expose what they believe to be a worthless and impudent system of quackery.

Some of the patients accepted by the Matteists for treatment were at first located for a time in St. Saviour's Hospital, Osnaburgh Street; but this arrangement proving impracticable, they were dealt with as out-patients at one of the Matteist depôts. The committee, recognising that they were observing an experiment in the utility of which they had no *a priori* faith, and which was being tried on five human beings, felt that they were bound to explain to the patients at the outset exactly how matters stood. The five women were therefore separately and solemnly informed that not one of the members of the committee or their registrar had any faith whatever in the value of the treatment which the Matteists were employing, and that the wisest thing for every one of them to do would be to seek aid at a hospital or privately at the hands of a competent surgeon. This advice notwithstanding, all the patients elected to undergo the Mattei treatment.

The five cases were under observation for exactly a year. That period was quite long enough for definite changes of a favourable or unfavourable character to manifest themselves in all or most of the cases. At first the Matteists professed great confidence of favourable results. A few months after the commencement of the experiment Sir Morell Mackenzie unhappily became very ill, and the meetings of the committee were interrupted and not recommenced until after his death. The registrar, however, saw the patients every week, and I, being resident in London, was kept thoroughly conversant with the course of events. On the death of Sir Morell Mackenzie it seemed necessary either to strengthen the committee by the addition of other medical men resident in London or to dissolve it, as Mr. Lawson Tait lived at too great a distance from town to take any personal part in the work. Mr. H. A. Reeves, F.R.C.S.E., and Mr. John Hopkins, F.R.C.S., both consented to join the committee and to see the investigation carried to a conclusion.

Thus strengthened by competent practitioners resident in London, we felt that a thorough and conclusive inquiry could be conducted to completion. A visiting rota was agreed upon, and each member of the committee promised to attend weekly in turn, along with the registrar, at the depôt to inspect the cases. All this was faithfully carried out. When the Matteists discovered that they were dealing with men who intended to give them as much latitude as they pleased, but who were also minded to see what use they would make of it, they took fresh and more obvious alarm. They wrote to the committee, through Mr. Stead, representing that the treatment of the five cases was likely to be very prolonged and to cause much inconvenience to the members of the committee, as well as to delay indefinitely the publication of the report which was so anxiously looked for. They therefore proposed that, as they had several old cases on hand which they professed to have cured previously, the committee should see those ancient cases and publish their report upon them.

Mr. Stead expressed himself as thoroughly ashamed of his champions. He, unfortunately for himself, had been fully convinced that Matteism was an inspiration, and that Mattei and all his followers, but especially his medical followers, were loyal lovers of truth. Though the members of the committee sympathised deeply with the editor of the *Review of Reviews*, it is hardly necessary to state that they did not see their way to accept and report upon ancient cases exclusively vouched for by the testimony of the interested "cancer curers," and of which they had no opportunity of verifying the diagnosis at the outset or watching the progress. This was the second attempt made by the hardly pressed Matteists

to escape from the plight into which they had brought themselves.

It now became obvious to all the parties concerned that the Matteists must either cure their cases or ignominiously give up the contest. But the cases could not be cured by any such means as were employed. On the contrary, the cancerous growths all continued to progress exactly as if no treatment whatever had been used. Some developed slowly, others more rapidly: but one, which had presented an unbroken surface at the outset, very soon became deeply ulcerated and excavated, and even the Matteists themselves were obliged to admit that "it seemed to be getting worse." Then happened an apparently irrelevant circumstance which the cancer curers seized upon, as a drowning man catches at a straw. One of the smaller medical papers not knowing the real facts of the case, called in question the expediency of the inquiry. The members of the committee then publicly explained the *status quo*. Whereupon the Matteists wrote to Mr. Stead, pretending that one of the conditions of the inquiry had been violated; and that, therefore, they declined to continue the treatment of the cases under the observation of the committee. Mr. Stead explained to them that they were under an absolute misapprehension; that no condition had been violated: that what had happened was that the committee had made a rule for its own guidance to the effect that nothing was to be published relating to the cases, without the authority of the committee; that the Matteists were not members of the committee and therefore had nothing to do with its rules; that, moreover, even the rule made by the committee for its own regulation had not been violated, inasmuch as nothing had been published relating to the facts of the inquiry, but only an explanation of the sceptical attitude of mind in which the committee had entered upon its work had been given to the medical profession; and that, moreover, the Matteists had known of that atttitude of mind from the very first, and had professed that it was the one mental attitude of all others which they themselves had wished the committee to hold.

But Mr. Stead's protests were all in vain. In vain he told the Matteists that they had invited inquiry; in vain he urged that to convince believers was a superfluous task; what was necessary was to convince unbelievers; and that the unbelievers were ready and waiting to be convinced. In vain he urged upon them that if the five cases were to be ultimately really cured, even unbelievers could not deny the actual and material facts; and that, moreover, if they did, he (Mr. Stead) was there to convict them of falsehood, and to denounce them before the whole professional and non-professional worlds. In spite of these almost pathetic protests and adjurations, the Matteists positively and repeatedly declined to continue the treatment of the cases under the observation of the committee, in any way whatever. This was the third attempt on the part of the Matteists to escape from the investigation they had directly courted. This final attempt at escape was successful. The Matteists took to flight, and ran, figuratively speaking, as fast and as far as their legs could carry them. Is any comment demanded upon facts like these?

What are the medical aspects of the Mattei treatment? There are no medical aspects of any kind. Matteism, in the deliberate judgment of the committee, consists exclusively of vulgar, unadulterated, unredeemed quackery. Mr. Stokes analysed the "electricities," the potions of the Matteists, and found them to yield no other reaction than that of plain distilled water. The results of administering these substances to patients entirely coincided with the results of chemical analysis. Water is the potent magician which, when taken in unquestioning faith, makes some of the deluded victims of Matteism feel that they are relieved of their pains. Even the poor creature whose cancerous growth is ulcerated and excavated, and whom the Matteists themselves admit to be "worse," persists in declaring herself improved, and pathetically anticipates the day of her perfect cure.

There is nothing more to be said. The story is as old as the world. The savage trusts to his amulet; the civilised man, both in the upper and lower circles, submits himself with childish, if not childlike, simplicity to the pretences of the quack. It is a strange world; but, such as it is, open and honourable medicine has to live and work in it, and must make the best it can of so wonderfully varied an environment.

CHOLERA.

THE epidemic of Asiatic cholera in Russia, which is abating in the south-eastern towns first attacked, has extended to the west. It is now admitted officially that it has broken out in Moscow, where 9 cases and 4 deaths occurred on August 5th. On that day there were in the whole of Russia 6,076 cases and 2,901 deaths, while on August 7th the numbers as given officially had declined to 4,261 cases and 2,177 deaths. Estimates based on official statistics are to the effect that 25,000 persons had succumbed to cholera in the Russian Empire down to the end of June. It seems to be certain that no case of Asiatic cholera has yet occurred in Austria or Germany.

Our Paris correspondent writes: The epidemic of choleriform diarrhœa continues to diminish in Paris. M. Lozé, Police Prefect, has addressed to the police commissaries of Paris directions to be observed in bringing the bodies of persons dead from a contagious disease. The death is to be immediately notified, and the house visited by the medical inspector. The mayors of commune towns, etc., are directed to enforce burial sooner than usual, and to require that the body be enveloped in a winding sheet, steeped in a solution of perchloride of mercury. The coffin must be hermetically closed, and contain a bed of wood dust 5 or 6 centimetres deep. These burials are to take place in the commune where the death has taken place; if the corpse is conveyed elsewhere to be buried it must be placed in a metallic coffin. The epidemic of choleriform diarrhœa in the environs of Paris, caused an interesting discussion at the Société Médical des Hôpitaux. M. Netter always discovered in the stools of patients suffering from choleriform diarrhœa the coma bacillus isolated by Koch, in Calcutta cholera, but presenting characteristics which differentiate it from Koch's cholera bacillus of laboratories; it is shorter, more curved, and thicker. In Paris, the cholera cases had no relation with the comma bacillus. Medical men of the environs maintain that the Seine water is the sole cause of the epidemic, and the fact that in a part of Argentine supplied with Seine water cholera nostras broke out, whilst in another part of the village furnished with Oise water there were no cases, supports their view. In both parts the population is principally of the working classes, and the sanitary conditions equally bad.

Our Berlin correspondent writes: The police authorities in Berlin have issued a notice as to the prevention of cholera. It consists of two paragraphs—a prohibition and a warning. The prohibition forbids the importation into or passage through Berlin and Charlottenburg of all old clothes, bed or other linen, rags, etc., fruit, fresh vegetables, butter, and soft cheese from Russia until further notice, under punishment of par. 327 of the common law—that is, imprisonment up to two years. The warning is with reference to the clothes and luggage of travellers from Russia, to the straw, hay, and such like packing material in which wares from Russia—especially eggs—are packed, and gives minute instructions as to burning, disinfecting, washing the clothes, disinfecting the hands that have touched the articles mentioned, etc. Similar instructions have been issued in Potsdam, Lubeck, and several other towns. The German medical papers and reviews are busy with the cholera question. The *Deutsche medicinische Zeitschrift* publishes a paper by Brieger and Wasserman, both belonging to the Koch Institute, on Preventive Inoculation against Asiatic Cholera. The writers have succeeded in rendering guinea-pigs immune to cholera by injections with cholera bacilli cultivated on extract of the thymus gland and not heated. The Government Department for Medical Matters has addressed a circular to the Provincial Government representatives (*Regierungs-präsidenten*), asking them to obtain and send in the names of medical men—especially those in posts at hospitals and universities—able and ready to carry out bacteriological examinations in connection with cases of supposed cholera, and who are willing to assist the Government medical officers (*Kreis-physici*) if cholera should break out.