FADS IN MEDICINE

One of the most useful accomplishments of the late Sir William Osler while in America was the impetus he gave to the study of medical history. We wish that this influence could have lasted permanently and have been extended to the laity. A general knowledge of past events would have a chilling effect on many of the new so-called schools of medicine, cults, fads, and so forth, though it would not take the place of the divine gift of common sense.

Many minds revel in the occult and the miraculous, and many are attracted by new and untried fields, roaming readily from one to another, regardless of essential qualities. For those who espouse the new things because of the money that can be made out of their popularity, there is no hope. Common honesty is their need. It must be conceded that the laity who seek relief from real or fancied ailments are honest, and a certain number of practitioners are also sincere through their lack of training in fundamentals. Endorsements given by popular writers, clergymen and others, who lack the fundamental training required to make them competent to form opinions, cannot be condemned too strongly.

For all of these—at least those who are honest—the perusal of some of the charming and brilliant "Medical Essays" of Oliver Wendell Holmes is recommended. They are recommended also to all those interested in the progress of medical science and who wish material with which to combat the vicious propaganda so common to-day.

The story of Bishop Berkeley and his panacea, Tar Water, should be better known. A man of fine mind, liberal training and exalted character, he held the esteem of his countrymen to an unusual degree. "To Berkeley every virtue under heaven," was said of him. Yet he "offered a remarkable illustration of a truth which has long been known to the members of one of the learned professions, namely, that no amount of talent, or of acquirements in other departments, can rescue from lamentable folly those who, without something of the requisite preparation, undertake to experiment with nostrums upon themselves and their neighbors." He ascribed miraculous powers to tar water, made by mixing a quart of tar with a gallon of water, and decanting the supernatant water after forty-eight hours. It was useful in many ailments of man and animals, it would relieve the "tender nerves and low spirits" of hypersensitive persons, improve children, and relieve the British people of a tendency to "grow stupid or doat sooner than other people." "He was an illustrious man, but he held two very odd opinions: that tar water was everything, and that the whole material universe was nothing."

In 1796, Dr. Elisha Perkins put forward his "Metallic Tractors," two pieces of metal about three inches long, blunt at one end and sloping to a point at the other, and sold at five guineas a pair. A patent was granted to him, and an amazing popularity followed, not only in this country but in Europe. They were used in the Royal Hospital at Copenhagen, and in 1804 a Perkinean Institution was founded in London. Within a few years his son, who had introduced the tractors into England, had saved more than ten thousand pounds collected from the faithful in Great Britain. The Royal College of Physicians and reputable members of the medical profession, who stood out against the preposterous claims made for the wonderful tractors, were criticized and denounced unsparingly.

The Royal Society accepted them and a book written in favor of them. Many persons of distinction, social as well as professional, endorsed the wonderful discovery, among whom are mentioned eight professors from four universities, twenty-one physicians, nineteen surgeons, and thirty clergymen, including twelve Doctors of Divinity. Both in America and England the proportion of clergymen

who wrote glowing endorsements was large, and in England the chaplain of the Prince of Wales was among the number. A New England clergyman and professor wrote as follows: "I have used the Tractors with success in several other cases in my own family, and although, like Naaman, the Syrian, I cannot tell why the waters of Jordan should be better than Abana and Parphar, rivers of Damascus; yet since experience has proved them so, no reasoning can change the opinion. * * * it is very probable, fifty or a hundred years hence, we shall know why the Metallic Tractors should in a few minutes remove violent pains * * *." In the short time of forty years "he would have seen the descendants of the 'Perkinistic' philosophers swallowing infinitesimal globules, and knowing and caring as much about the Tractors as the people of Saratoga Springs do about the waters of Abana and Parphar."

The world moves slowly along certain lines. In spite of the well-proven facts of bacteriology, new cults are constantly arising, proclaiming doctrines entirely untrammeled by science or common sense. The mental descendants of the "Perkinean philosophers" are now following the teachings of osteopathy, chiropractic, naprapathy, Christian Science, Hickson, Abrams or Coué. Clergymen are still giving aid and comfort to irregular methods of alleged healing, and expressing opinions on subjects in which they have had no training. Hickson was recognized by the Church of England, and the Episcopal Church in this country, which at its General Convention in Portland, 1922, appointed a committee to go into the matter further. The learned Bishops of the Lambeth Conference passed resolutions condemning venereal prophylaxis, apparently forgetting the many innocent victims of venereal disease.

These things are discouraging, and Public Health is retarded by them. Education seems to be the only real remedy. It behooves all trained sanitarians, biologists and medical men to read medical history, and to teach the public at every available opportunity. M. P. R.

CONTROL OF BUBONIC PLAGUE

In 1916, Dr. John Guitéras said in the course of an unusually interesting address given in Washington, that previous to that time by only a few years, if anyone had attempted to enumerate the diseases which were the chief dangers of the tropics, and had not put yellow fever first, he would have been considered crazy, but he now ranked it fourth or fifth, and placed bubonic plague first. His statement surprised some of his hearers—perhaps all who had not followed closely the course of events in the tropics and countries adjacent to the tropics. His estimate has been verified and confirmed during the intervening years.

In the recently issued Annual Report of the Surgeon General of the Public Health Service it is stated: "Bubonic plague is perhaps the most widespread of all diseases of a pestilential character in the world, except smallpox. In the early part of the present fiscal year this disease threatened to become epidemic in the southern part of the United States, particularly in the cities of the gulf coast, but prompt and radical measures applied to local conditions in Galveston, Beaumont, and Pensacola, where the disease had gained a foothold, and the continuation of the measures already in force in New Orleans, served to avert its spread."

The plague stations at Pensacola, Fla., and Beaumont, Texas, were discontinued in 1921; that at Galveston was continued with a reduced force after January 1, 1922, while the New Orleans station was reduced to the same status as before the outbreak in 1919, so as to provide a nucleus of specially trained men in the event of other outbreaks.