

OBITUARY.

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MEMBERS of the Epidemiological Society have heard with sincere regret of the death of Dr. Corfield, their President, during his period of office. Dr. Corfield was not in very good health at the time of his election to the Presidentship, in 1902; but at that time his malady was probably not looked upon as of a serious nature; and he no doubt himself felt that, given fairly good health, he would have more leisure to devote to the interests of the Society than hitherto had been the case: as his retirement from the post of Medical Officer of Health of St. George's, Hanover Square, on the creation of the City of Westminster, had freed him from the trammels of municipal work.

Dr. Corfield, in his youth, underwent an almost ideal preparation for what was to prove the most important subsequent work of his lifetime. His Oxford training in mathematics and natural science, and the opportunities later afforded by his Radcliffe Travelling Fellowship for study on the Continent in the classical schools of learning, no doubt formed the preparation and supplied the stimulus for that devotion to the study of hygiene which was the abiding interest of his manhood. The examination of the Roman aqueducts in the neighbourhood of Lyons, and of prehistoric lake-dwellings in Switzerland, show the kind of study which specially interested Corfield as a student, and which is reflected in much of the work of his later life.

Success came to Corfield early in life. His Oxford career had been a distinguished one, and, shortly after taking his M.B. degree, he was elected to the newly-created Chair of Hygiene and Public Health at University College, London. This appointment he held until his death; and many generations of Public Health students have listened to his lectures, and worked in the hygiene laboratory at University College, which was established under Corfield in 1875.

Much of Corfield's earlier work was in connection with the treatment and utilisation of sewage. In the 'seventies

and 'eighties, and even earlier, the treatment of town sewage had become a very pressing question. An enormous development had taken place in the sewerage of towns, as a result of the labours of Chadwick and the early sanitary reformers. The discharge of crude sewage into the rivers of the country was doing a vast amount of injury, and the best methods of treating and utilising sewage had yet to be ascertained. In 1869 Corfield became a member of the committee appointed by the British Association to inquire into this subject, and for six years worked with characteristic energy as reporter to the committee. His views are fully set forth in his book on *The Treatment and Utilisation of Sewage*, which was first published in 1870, and has subsequently gone through two editions. Corfield was one of those who rendered a great service to sanitarians and the public by pointing out the fallacies underlying the assertions of those who, at the time, were vaunting chemical processes of precipitating sewage and the production of sewage manures from the sludge, as the best and most remunerative methods of utilising sewage. A great many of these processes had been patented, and the public had been invited to assist in the flotation of companies for working these patents, on the assurance that large profits were to be made out of sewage manures.

Corfield's work with the British Association Committee led him to become an ardent advocate of land filtration and of sewage farms. His views on the more modern methods of biological treatment—septic tanks, contact beds, and aerating filter beds—have never, so far as known, been made public. All this recent work has been done since his more active participation in sewage problems ceased; and it seems probable that he was unwilling to express opinions on matters to which his attention had not been actively directed.

Early in his career, Corfield took up the subject of domestic sanitation. In 1879 he delivered the Cantor Lectures before the Society of Arts, on "Dwelling-Houses, their Sanitary Construction and Arrangements," which were subsequently published as a small volume. There was no more able exponent of the true principles of house sanitation than Dr. Corfield, and it is no exaggeration to say that this branch of sanitary science and practice owes a great deal to him. Combined with a strictly logical mind, Corfield had a great capacity for detail and attention to minutiae, of which he recognised from the earliest time the great necessity in the preparation of efficient schemes of

drainage. With Rogers Field, Corfield shares the honour of being a pioneer in this branch of science, and of being the first to enunciate the true principles underlying house sanitation, and the right methods of their practical application. Corfield's reputation in this respect became great, and he built up an extensive sanitary practice all over the country. Sir William Jenner, at one of the early meetings in connection with the foundation of the Parkes Museum, said that the palaces of the rich were often found by him to be as insanitary as the hovels of the poor. It was largely reserved for Corfield and his fellow-workers to take away this reproach from the rich man's dwelling. His own work as a Medical Officer of Health and that of his colleagues, have done much also to ameliorate the housing of the poor.

Twenty years or so ago, in Corfield's earlier days, the dangers of drain air and sewage gas entering houses were perhaps rather over-emphasised. There was much at that time to warrant the belief that some infective diseases, like enteric fever and diphtheria, and many conditions of ill-health resembling septic poisoning, were the direct results of inhaling sewer or drain air. The more exact knowledge now rendered possible by the science of bacteriology has tended to place a limitation on the injurious effects of defective house sanitation. If Corfield erred at all in attaching too much importance to defective drainage, he erred in good company; he had also constantly before him the astounding results in the improvement of the public health following upon the adoption of better systems of house sanitation—results which could be only attributable to the advances made in the practical application of the laws of hygiene. Even now, we are far from knowing with any certainty the true relations subsisting between insanitary conditions of dwellings and disease outbreaks; and there has been, and probably still exists in some minds, a reactionary disposition to attach too much importance to the bacillus and too little to the conditioning of the soil, to the receptivity of the tissues, and their adaptation as favourable cultural media for bacilli. The predisposing causes of disease were perhaps mistaken for the true causes by the hygienists of the past; but at any rate they were often right in the measures they recommended for counter-acting such supposed causes, and on general principles their work is still approved and imitated.

Dr. Corfield's work and his leading position as an English sanitarian were recognised abroad, and he cultivated social relations with many of the most prominent hygienists of

the Continent. His European reputation was of the greatest value when he was acting as Honorary Foreign Secretary to the International Congress of Hygiene, held in London in 1891, and did much to promote the success of that meeting. If the state of his health had permitted, it was the intention of Dr. Corfield, as President of the Epidemiological Society, to have obtained contributions on subjects of special interest to the Society during his term of office from foreign epidemiologists of note; and these contributions would have been very gladly welcomed as tending to widen the basis of the Society's work, and to make it partake more of that International character which is one of its aims and proper functions.

Dr. Corfield acted conjointly with Dr. Netten Radcliffe as Secretary of the Epidemiological Society in the Sessions 1870-1872; and, in 1874, he contributed a paper "On the Alleged Spontaneous Production of the Poison of Enteric Fever," in which he expressed his belief that enteric fever does not arise *de novo*.

In his private life, no less than in his public work, Dr. Corfield was highly esteemed and respected by all. He was ever genial and accessible, and his many interests outside his professional work rendered him a most agreeable companion, free from any touch of that narrowness of view or of judgment, which is sometimes the result of a successful professional life passed in too exclusive a devotion to the daily rounds of duty.

L. C. P.
