

really are. Suffice it to say, that the arms of such germs as the bacillus *foetidus* and bacterium *termo* are of such malodorous character that the stink-pots of mediæval warfare were delicate perfumery in comparison.

There are, it is true, important side issues in the practice of medicine with which, so far as we know at present, germs have no connection whatever; but, in these days, the germ theory of disease so colors the whole field of view as to practically obscure every other question. Now, this cause of disease has, doubtless, existed since the beginning of time. We know, for example, that all the firstborn of Egypt died in a single night, and we may fairly assume, without questioning for a moment the miraculous character of the epidemic, that the cause was some virulent germ, which, in this instance, was compelled to manifest a peculiar selective action. The children of Israel, very early in their career as a nation, passed stringent laws for the segregation of their lepers, though the bacillus *lepræ* was discovered so recently as A.D. 1874 by Hansen, of Bergen. We read also that Satan "smote Job with sore boils, from the sole of his foot unto his crown," though it is certain that the patient patriarch was blissfully ignorant of the fact that the immediate cause of his sad affliction was the staphylococcus *pyogenes aureus*.

In view of these facts, then, it is doubtful if any of us fully realize the importance of the stupendous discovery that has burst upon us during the last five and twenty years.

#### ANTISEPSIS AND ASEPSIS.

The discovery having been made, however, the leaders in our profession—among whom our own English Lister, the French Pasteur, and the German Koch tower head and shoulders above the rest of their generation—were not slow to act upon it, with the result that, for a few spasmodic years, it was even thought that, by the aid of carbolic acid, corrosive sublimate, iodoform, and other chemical ammunition, the strongholds of our at-last-revealed adversaries were to be speedily laid low. This was the brief and not too brilliant dynasty of antiseptics.

Soon recognizing, however, that to destroy germs in a test-tube is a very different thing from dislodging them from their entrenchments in the human body, and that substances which are poison to the microbe are not always innocuous to its host, it early became clear that to avoid a conflict with such a subtle enemy is even better than victory. Thus, again, was the truth of the old aphorism exemplified, that "discretion is the better part of valor," and thus, also, was established the era of "asepsis" and "preventive medicine." Accordingly, the wary physician of to-day, upon the first signal of danger, proceeds at once to place himself in an attitude of defence, and endeavors to keep the foe at bay by attention to the hygienic environment of his patient, by strengthening the resist-