EPIDEMIC INFLUENCES.

"The old order changeth, giving place to new."

WE had thought that in the field of contagious diseases the truth of our Laureate's line had within recent years been made abundantly plain; but in the Milroy Lectures by Inspector-General Robert Lawson, delivered recently before the Royal College of Physicians, London, we have an evidence of the persistency of type. In a course of four lectures this old army surgeon gave the results of his observations, gathered throughout a long period, during which he had been stationed with the army in various parts of the British possessions, from Jamaica to the Cape of Good Hope. The following is found in his introductory lecture:—"From the examination of a large body of evidence in the manifestation of fever in many countries, and extending over many years, it became obvious," the lecturer stated, "that epidemics of that form of disease, which developed at various points from time to time, passed uniformly to the northward until they finally disappeared. The length of the course of individual epidemics varied much, but from the combination of several details the period occupied in passing from the Cape of Good Hope to this country was found to be about six years, and the factor which determined this movement was evidently one of very general operation, and most likely connected with some of the natural forces. It was of great importance to define the position of this influence from time to time, and after a good deal of consideration it was found that this might be effected, approximately at least, by lines of equal magnetic dip."

In the second lecture, and so on to the end, from certain army statistics, which doubtless give facts as regards mortality during the past fifty years, the Inspector-General endeavored to establish some general laws with regard to epidemic cycles, and in lieu of some better explanation, his lines of magnetic dip and fever zones may be a satisfactory explanation of what has occurred; but they have only a little less bearing on the practical question of how epidemic diseases extend, than has the supposed sun-spot influences on the varying amounts of rain in every decade. To-day every executive health officer is too well aware that with magnetic dips, in whatever direction, isolation of first cases is the *sine qua non* to the limitation of outbreaks of contagious diseases. Rauch, of Illinois, in the remarkable exposition several years ago of the introduction of cholera into America, clearly pointed out that only after several cases had been imported did a single case at length, in several epidemics, gain a foothold in American soil, sometimes by New York, sometimes by the St. Lawrence, and again by the Mississippi. Once introduced, it spread rapidly, until strict isolation proved more potent than all supposed magnetic dips in limiting the disease. Three years ago Montreal had some three thousand deaths from smallpox in six months, while Ontario, with 2,000,000 of a population, had a total of nineteen deaths during the same year of twelve months. The disease has been stamped out, but are we to look for the difference in results in some occult planetary influence? Doubtless we must respect the views of an old army officer, but we cannot compliment the College of Physicians in its selection in this year, near the close of the nineteenth century, of a lecturer who, most innocently, would fill the eyes of a credulous medical public with the stuff that passed as current coin thirty years ago. To day we do not, like Boabdil, consult the astrologers as to the fate of our Grenada, but look to the measures which have been taken by Dominion and United States Governments for inspecting, and isolating when introduced cases of contagious diseases, all ships from suspected ports, and fix our belief in the immunity of the country from contagious diseases by means of Troy laundries and the bi-chloride douche. We trust the prominent place which Inspector-General Lawson's lectures have been given will not disturb the equanimity of officers of health who have for years persistently and, more successfully than Sisera, been fighting the stars in their courses, and stamping out first cases of disease by the prosaic methods of disinfection.