

PRACTICAL WORK IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

ELSEWHERE will be found admirably defined the true meaning of hygiene, a word which has only within recent years begun to have a definite meaning and to contain the expression of certain fundamental ideas with regard to health. A modern writer of fine discrimination says, "The tree of hygiene, plunging with its roots into the fertile soil of our physiological medicine and drawing its nourishment from the whole domain of practical medicine should raise its life giving branches throughout all parts of the vast human domain."

"Hygiene is not only allied to the mother-science (of medicine) which has given it life, but also to each of the special branches of practical medicine, since it owes to them an attention all the greater that it is forced to watch the first indications of the invasion of a disease and that it should seize this intermediate and hardly determined stage between the normal state and the pathological manifestation which is not the first, and still is not the second. It ought to hold the eyes constantly fixed on the two faces of human life and of human life in all its protean manifestations of modern times." "Embracing all medicine theoretical and practical, the auxiliary sciences comprised, on the one hand, and on the other the innumerable manifestations, normal and abnormal, of all ages and of all human occupations, there is truly enough to frighten the spirit the most intrepid, the most athirst for knowledge."

None, we think, viewing the proposition so well enunciated will fail to see that wide views regarding the extent and importance of this subject must prevail if we are to accomplish in any notable degree the objects which manifestly are associated with what are with but partial correctness, signified in the term preventive medicine, for as Arnould says, "while the special purpose of hygiene is the struggle against diseases and if possible their extinction," still, "to be but such is not sufficient. Rightly we seek not only to preserve health, but further, to augment it."

In Canada, but notably in Ontario, it may with much truth be said that in certain particulars the first portion of Arnould's statement has been, and is being in some degree exemplified; since the history of public health legislation from the indefinite and general powers laid upon municipal coun-

cils under the old statutes to those contained in the public health acts from 1882 to 1887 and whose execution falls upon a Provincial Board and on some six hundred Local Boards, shows that a notable advance has been made toward the attainment of ends, manifestly obtainable by some such system. The mere statement of the progress of health legislation must, however, set forth with still greater acuteness, some points as peculiar, as, to some, they may appear new or unexpected. To men engaged in varied avocations, with almost no conceivable relations to the special work of hygiene, except as they are personally affected by obedience to or contravention of her laws, have been by law delegated, as Health officers, the task of investigating the causes which promote or lead to disease, of determining what interpretations must be given to them under the law as regards the question of nuisances, and of dictating the measures to be adopted for the prevention or investigation of diseases. Not only, however, are they to do this without remuneration, as also may practically be said of their medical health officers where such exist, but without any technical or experimental knowledge even, and in the absence of any opportunities for having by competent persons, investigations carried on, they are required by law to express *ex cathedra* opinions on many matters, presenting phases, which to the most skilled are often of the greatest difficulty. To further demonstrate this anomalous condition of practical hygiene the statutes empower—from the jurors and magistrates upwards—a set of men in large measure wholly untrained in the methods of experimental science and incapable through a lack of scientific knowledge of appreciating the true bearing of many well-known scientific facts, to adjudicate upon matters of the highest interest and far-reaching importance as affecting individuals, families, whole communities and even whole Provinces.

But it may be stated, and we are not prepared to impugn its partial truthfulness, from what has been taught in the past from the diversity of opinion of medical men as regards matters of fact of a sanitary character that the aggrieved or injured person is very likely to occupy the position of the old man and his ass in the fable, should he expect at their hands a unanimous opinion as to the degree of a nuisance, or the necessity for its removal.

If this be a fair statement of the present position