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ART. XLIX.—OBSERVATIONS ON THE CLIMATE OF BARBADOES, AND ITS INFLUENCE ON DISEASE: TOGETHER WITH REMARKS ON ANGIOLEUCITIS OR BARBADOES LEG.

By JAMES BOVELL, M.D.,

Member of the Royal College of Physicians, London,—late Junior Physician to the Barbadoes General Hospital,—Junior Physician to the Toronto General Dispensary and Lying-in Charity:

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Besides the awful scourge which the whole tribe of insects frequently become to man, cutting off every green thing that grows on the face of the earth, reducing, in one night, whole fields teeming with plenty, to mere desolate wastes; it is the opinion of some very intelligent minds, that one of the prime causes of the unhealthiness of a place is frequently associated with their presence, since the decomposition of their dead bodies, mingled with that of decaying vegetable matter, must tend to generate or heighten the poisonous malaria. We find, if history is to be believed, that the decay of the dead bodies of insects alone, have, from their putrid stench, so vitiated the atmosphere as to create frightful disease and death to the human race. St. Augustine, mentions a plague to have arisen in Africa from the destruction of innumerable swarms of insects, whose bodies being mingled with sea-water, on the shore of which they had been cast, generated a pestilence from which 800,000 men perished in the kingdom of Massinissa alone, and many more on the territories bordering on the sea. Italy, as mentioned by Mouffit, suffered both in man and beast from a similar cause. At different times, we know as matter of truth, that the West India islands have been terribly afflicted by the pestilential increase of insects, and which existed in such vast hordes, as to render the utmost precaution necessary for the preservation of the lives of infants, and even cattle were frequently very severely injured by these tormentors, their eyes being perfectly destroyed. Ligon, in his history of Barbadoes, in giving its natural history says: "The next of these moving little animals are ants or pismires; and these are but of small size, but great industry, and that which gives them means to attain this end is, they have all one soul. If I should say, they are here or there, I should do them wrong, for they are everywhere; under ground, where any hollow or loose earth is amongst the roots of trees; upon the bodies, branches, leaves, and fruit of all the trees; in all places without the houses and within; upon the sides of the walls, windows and roofs without, and on the floors, side-walls and ceilings within; tables, cup-boards, beds, stools—all are covered with them, so that they are a kind of ubiquitaries.

Messrs. Kirby and Spence, inform us, that about 70 years ago, the Formica Saccharivora completely put a stop to the cane cultivation by making its nest under the roots of the plant, which so injured it as to render it quite unproductive. Their number was incredible. They descended from the hills like torrents, and the plantations, as well as every path and road, for miles, were filled with them. Many domestic quadrupeds perished in consequence of the plague. Rats, mice, and reptiles, were an easy prey to them, and even the birds, which they attacked whenever they alighted on the ground in search of food, were so harassed as to be at length unable to resist them. Streams of water opposed only a temporary obstacle to their progress, the foremost rushing blindly on to sudden death, and fresh armies instantly following, till a bank was formed of the carcasses of those that were drowned sufficient to dam up the waters and allow the main body to pass over in safety. Even the all-devouring element of fire was tried in vain; when lighted to arrest their route, they rushed into the blaze in such myriads of millions as to extinguish it. Those that thus patriotically devoted themselves to death for the common good, were but as the pioneers of the advanced guard of a countless army, which by their self-sacrifice was enabled to pass unhurt. The entire crops of standing canes were burnt down, and the earth dug up in every part of the plantations; but vain was every attempt of man to effect their destruction, till in 1780 it pleased providence at length to annihilate them by the torrents of rain which accompanied a hurricane most fatal to the other West India islands," and among these Barbadoes suffered the most severely. The tempest was, however, much more terrible and severe than the authors seem to believe, for it was only but little inferior to the one that laid waste Barbadoes in 1831. This very hurricane that swept away such innumerable swarms of insects, so depopulated, at the same time, the island, as to render it for a period remarkably healthy. The effects, however, were not so lasting apparently, as those which followed our last visitation, which makes me attach great weight also to the improvement in our social condition. But the presence of insect life, even in a much more circumscribed scale, has given rise, not unfrequently, to severe maladies, the origin of which, at the time, was perfectly unaccountable; hence we cannot but believe that the continued unhealthiness of those wooded islands, depends as much upon the increase or decrease of insect life, at times, as on any other cause, and there can scarcely be a doubt but that many diseases are caused by them—of this we have some proof. In India, during the season in which the fruit called