

THE TUBERCULOSIS CONFERENCE

Following the lead and example of Canada, a Conference has been sitting in London, England, to consider the causes and treatment of tuberculosis, or what is popularly known as consumption; the scientific name being indicative of the origin of this disease, and the common name its effect. Consumption of the lungs or any other bodily organ is caused by the destruction of vital tissues by living organisms, called "bacilli," that are impossible to be seen, except under a microscope of high power. The most eminent medical and chemical authorities now living took part in the Conference. They were in perfect harmony on all points, save one, which was raised by the distinguished German, Dr. Koch, whose life is devoted to the investigation of the problems arising from the known connection between disease and living germs, each disorder of the body being held to be caused by a specific bacillus, which is alone capable of causing its own disease and no other, just as certain drugs have their exclusive symptoms. The Conference was a unit in regarding living in close, ill-ventilated rooms as highly conducive to the development of consumption. Fresh air was spoken of by all the speakers as the most effective curative or palliative treatment of this scourge. Drugs do not seem to be in much favour in the highest medical circles as cures of consumption, though they have their uses as medicines beneficial to the general health. Fresh air, cheerful society, nutritious food, moderate daily exercise, thorough cleanliness, were declared to be the best preventatives of and the most effective restraints upon tuberculosis. Consumption is not inherited nor heritable, was the judgment of the Conference, though it was very apt to be given by a consumptive parent to a child by exhalations of the specific germ of the disease being inhaled. Hence, the isolation of sufferers is desirable under such conditions as repress those favourable to infection, for it is now recognized that consumption is highly contagious. The removal of patients far from home is deprecated, as the sufferer's native climate or the climate in which he has lived for some years, is often the best for curative purposes, and it is extremely desirable for patients to be in touch with home so as to avoid the depression of spirits which is highly injurious. The Conference strongly condemned the habit of expectorating in public vehicles and other places of public resort, as the matter so ejected by a diseased person is laden with germs which when dried are dispersed and are liable to implant the disease in those who inhale such poison. In public cars, therefore, spitting ought to be stopped by a few stern examples being made of offenders. At present the local street cars contain a notice for-

bidding this filthy practice, but conductors see with complacency the rule violated every hour of the day, and so safe from any punishment do the offenders feel that they tell any person who protests to mind his own business, at which insolence conductors only smile. In view of the greatest medical authorities at the Conference on tuberculosis having pronounced spitting in public cars to be a nuisance liable to endanger the public health, the managers of street railway companies should require conductors to put a stop to the practice.

A sensation was created at the Conference by Dr. Koch throwing grave doubts on the theory that tuberculosis is communicable to man from animals. His contentions are thus summarized:

"If bovine bacilli are capable of causing disease in man, there are abundant opportunities for the transferring of bacilli from one species to another, and cases of primary intestinal tuberculosis from the consumption of tuberculous milk ought to be of common occurrence, but the post-mortem examination of human beings proves that cases of primary intestinal tuberculosis are extremely rare in man. It, therefore, must be concluded that human subjects are immune against infection with bovine bacilli, or so slightly susceptible that it is not necessary to take any steps to counteract the risk of infection in this way."

The Koch theory is contrary to the conviction of the medical faculty generally. In a leading review for last month one of the ablest living physicians declares that the larger proportion of consumptive cases were caused by infection from cattle. It would be rash indeed to throw doubt on the conclusions of Dr. Koch, who is the chief of living bacteriologists. The question is to be investigated under such circumstances and by such scientific experts as will result in a conclusive judgment; meanwhile, there should be no relaxation in the means now adopted so prevent milk and meat disseminating the seeds of consumption, as it is held that they do by the medical faculty.

One of the curiosities of the conference was the fact coming out that the embargo laid on Canadian cattle entering England "on the hoof" was not so much to protect British herds from infection, but to protect British cattle raisers from competition. With almost cynical frankness this was revealed by one of the speakers who, on this subject, spoke with authority. All rules have exceptions. The English Free Trade rule evidently has this exception, that protection is a sound principle when applied in favour of English agriculturists who breed cattle. It was also stated that tuberculosis is quite common in English cattle, but that no serious consequence had appeared to those in contact with them. The immunity from consumption of English farmers and their families