

## THE MEDICAL UPLIFT OF BURMA.<sup>1</sup>

By E. S. CORSON, M.A., M.D., Bridgeton, N. J.<sup>2</sup>

The term medical missionary is a *nom de plume* of the last half of the century of modern missions. Previous to that time, the missionary was primarily evangelistic and secondarily, as a conservator of his own health, acquired medical knowledge, which was extended to aid those with whom he was working.

The superiority and accuracy of foreign methods as compared with native soon led the native to desire a more extensive knowledge of scientific medicine.

Fortunately, so far as her dependencies are concerned, the British government has an efficient medical service in all centers of population. But what are these among so many.

They are mostly engaged in hospital, sanitary and other government work.

The vast agrarian population is practically without medical aid. The family doctor as we know him is unknown.

The early missionaries, not having the time nor knowledge to dispense medicine on a large scale, depended on reliable patent medicines, so that an enormous amount of this form of medication is used by the natives.

A vast amount of practical medical knowledge has been disseminated through pamphlets translated by missionaries and educated natives. Physiology is taught in many of the schools. Every large mission maintains a large central boarding school. A required number of older pupils and teachers are delegated to care for the sick. These assistants on returning to their respective villages impart their knowledge and apply their skill in alleviating the sick. The village pastor or teacher is then the representative of modern medical science in these places. He there occupies the position of the old family doctor of times gone by. He fills the double role as adviser of spiritual as well as physical needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Formerly of Toungoo, Burma.

Difficult and chronic cases are taken to the missionary who treats them himself or refers them to the government hospital.

Many of the civil surgeons are firm friends of the missionaries and take a personal interest in the health of the mission station.

The village doctor is handicapped in his work through lack of equipment. In many cases his only cash income is from the missionary, with an additional supply of such medicine as he has been taught to use. The poverty of the people prohibits their buying medicine at such profit as to enable the teacher or doctor to earn a livelihood from their sale. His skill and advice are not considered as of monetary value. In many instances his gratuitous treatment of so many patients depletes his stock and leaves him without capital to replenish it. The opinion is sometimes held that as Christ went about doing good and made no charge for his services so also should the missionary and native pastor or doctor do likewise.

The government medical schools in Calcutta and elsewhere offer good facilities for obtaining a medical education on a scholarship basis, with a stipulation that a certain number of years be spent in government service.

The remuneration in this branch of civil service is such that but few capable men will leave it for private practice, and these only in the populous centres. The mission school hospital in which those desiring may add a knowledge of medicine during their regular schooling seems at present to be the main means for solving this vast problem.

Socially this knowledge of practical medicine which has been imparted and received in a desultory manner has conferred incalculable benefits. Some of the people are fatalists. With them sickness and disease are but a part of that which man in his sojourn on earth must endure. Intervention and attempt to cure disease are useless. Others of them believe that sickness and disease are entities introduced into the body by evil spirits. Hence the disease is not to be combatted but the evil spirit inflicting the disease. Others believe in the efficacy of native herbs and various concoctions of things supposed to be the

constituents of the body. Definite remedies for definite diseases has imparted confidence in foreign methods and faith in their ability to cure disease.

Quinin is sought after as a remedy for malaria and its sequelae. Vaccination for smallpox is everywhere favorably received among the Christians and their followers.

The educated understand the germ theory of disease and avoid unhygienic conditions in their home and village life.