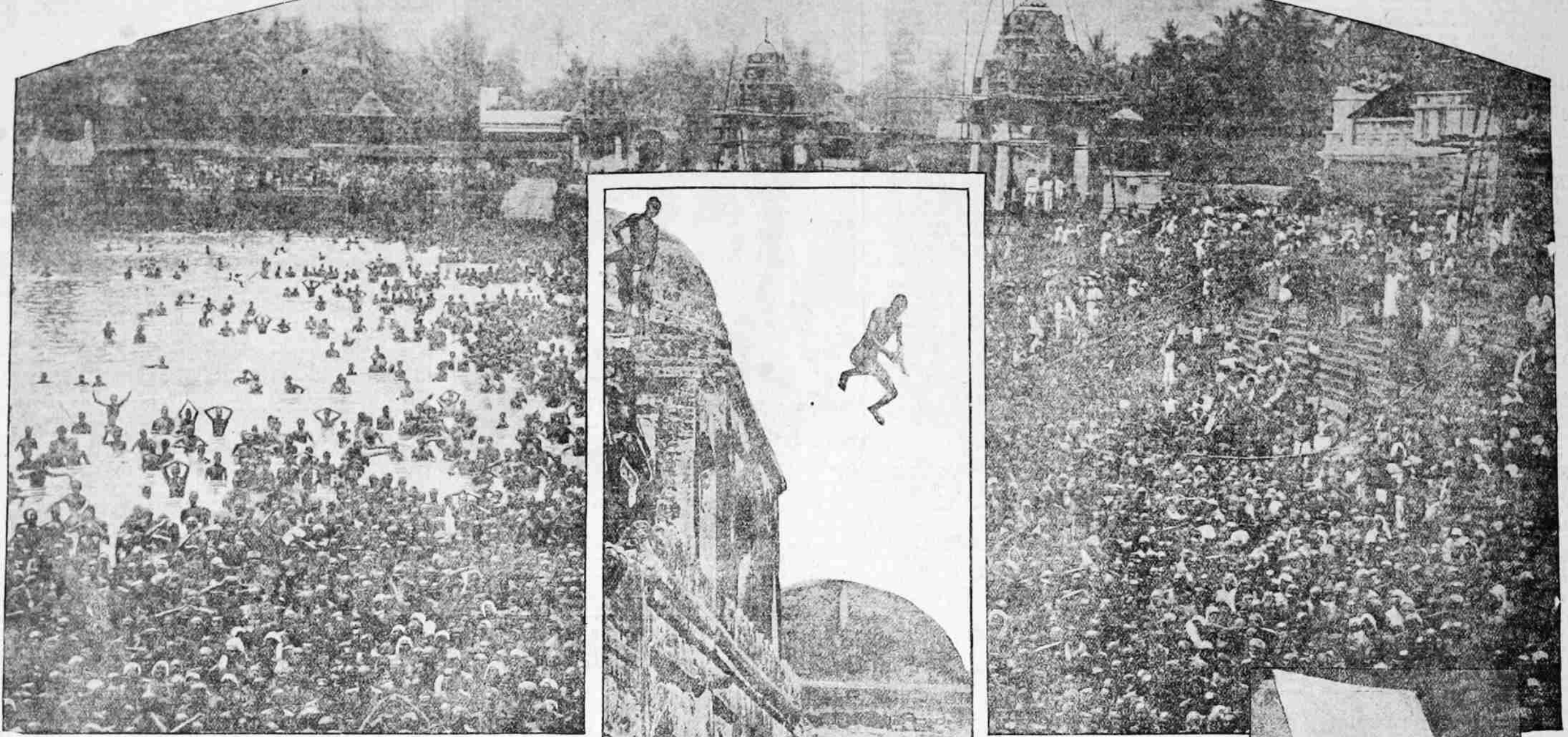


To Sterilize The Sacred Cesspools of India



Medical Science Finds a Delicate Task in Regulating the Hindu Fanatics Who Overcrowd the Sacred Bathing Pools of the River Ganges, and in Disinfecting the Pious Mohammedan Pilgrims from Mecca

OFFICIALS of the British Empire are uniting in a movement to clean up the plague spots of India and the Orient generally, hitherto protected by religious sentiment and associations.

This is one of the results of recent events which have brought many men of civilized nations in contact with the mysterious sacred plague spots of the East and impressed these men with the urgent necessity of cleaning them up.

Cholera, plague and "Spanish influenza," to mention only three out of many diseases, are constantly prevalent in certain localities of the Orient, and from these places they are from time to time spread over the whole world, causing immense mortality.

"The epidemic home of cholera," says the London Lancet in a recent issue, "is universally believed to lie in Lower Bengal—in the Sunderbans and the delta of the Ganges. The problem of the eradication of this disease, therefore, is not complicated by uncertainty as to its place of origin. The large size of the area in question, the engineering difficulties and the cost with no direct financial profit, of draining and 'sanitizing' this vast region all stand in the way of a radical solution of the cholera problem. But these are not insuperable difficulties. In a world awake to the blessings of health can any cost be deemed too great or any obstacle be thought insuperable where the saving of millions of human lives and the prevention of incalculable suffering will be the rewards of success?"

In attempting to clean up the plague spots along the Ganges River the British authorities will be interfering with the most sacred localities of the Hindu religion. The Ganges is the "Holy River" of that religion. Merely to spend one's life in contemplation—it is called "yoga"—of this stream is the highest possible act of devotion. Children and sick and old persons have been left to die on its banks because their relatives believed that was the surest way of making them happy. Sometimes the crocodiles come and swallow up the abandoned ones—they, too, are sacred.

At many places along the river there are great bathing places, sacred to various divinities of this complicated religion. In

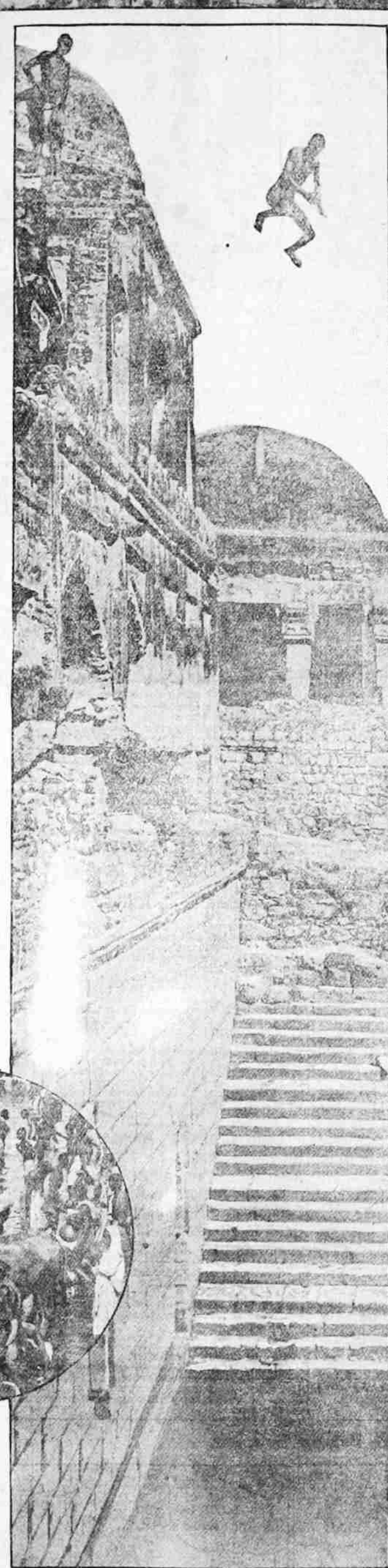
some instances there are steps in the bank down which the pilgrims can go to lave themselves in the sacred waters. At other places a pool is constructed near the river which supplies its water through a canal.

At certain festivals and great anniversaries of the religion as many as a hundred thousand persons pass through one of these bathing places a day. At Benares, the wonderfully beautiful chief holy city of India, situated on the Ganges, there are many of these bathing pools. Many of them are sacred to Vishnu, one of the major gods of the Hindu pantheon.

At Madras, in India, there is a structure known as the Mahamagan tank. Here over 200,000 pilgrims bathe at certain festivals, and the water is to say the least unhygienic, no matter how sanctified it may be.

Into these sacred bathing places the pious pilgrims plunge without the slightest regard for health or cleanliness. Often diseased, covered with sweat and insects, suffering from sore eyes and other afflictions, they rush in until the tank is nothing but a wriggling mass of black humanity. The religious fervor that inspires them makes them feel that the experience has benefited them enormously.

Many of these pilgrims are walking cases of Asiatic cholera or some other disease that is prevalent in Asia. The germs are distributed throughout the whole assembly, and they carry them home or die on the way, and in either case distribute the seeds of disease in various parts of the world. Many of them return to seaports and there they come in contact with sailors, who are likely to carry the dis-



A Hindu Fanatic Taking a High Jump Into the River Ganges, Which Would Be Fatal to Most Men, but Which He Believes Will Assure Him the Deepest Blessing of the Sacred Stream.

There are upward of 200,000,000 Hindus in India to whom the Ganges is a sacred stream. There are also more than 60,000,000 Mohammedans in the country who have their own sacred places of pilgrimage and aid in the work of spreading infection.

Hindu Devotees Swarming Into the Sacred River Ganges at Benares, Which They Believe Will Give Them Eternal Happiness, but Which Modern Science Has Shown to Be the World's Filthiest Breeding Place of Cholera.

In order to eliminate the dangers from these bathing centres, the British authorities will have to see that the pilgrims who use them are clean and free from disease and that no more than the proper number bathe at the same time. The overcrowding of a given body of water would be a danger even though the persons were fairly clean and healthy. To achieve their objects the reformers will have to deal with the tenderest susceptibilities of an ignorant and fanatical mass of people. Nevertheless, science has made some progress even among the Hindus, and there is now a feeling that sufficient efforts have not been made to educate them.

English "Territorial" soldiers of the intelligent middle classes, different from the old regulars, were stationed in India in large numbers during the war and, having suffered themselves while there, they have demanded that sanitation in England's great dependency shall be brought up to European standards.

The greatest centre of pilgrimage in the world and the greatest source of disease infection is the sacred city of Mecca, in Arabia. Every pious Mohammedan is required by his religion to pay at least one visit to Mecca and its companion city Medina before he dies. About 20,000,000 Mohammedans make the pilgrimage annually in normal times. They come from all parts of Asia and Africa, and even from Europe, as there are many Mohammedans in European Turkey and its former territories.

The prescribed time to make the pilgrimage is at the period called the "Hajra," which commemorates Mahomet's flight from Mecca to Medina. The period begins on July 6. At this time countless swarms of Mohammedans camp about the ancient, mysterious, sacred cities, which are entirely without modern sanitation and contain no conveniences for travellers.

The pilgrims form camps in the desert of as many as 20,000 at one time. They go through a long series of ceremonies, chief among which is making the circuit of the Kaaba and kissing the black stone which is believed to have dropped straight from heaven.

Another act of devotion is drinking a cup of water from the sacred well called Zem Zem. The pilgrims crowd around this in such numbers that they make it a dangerous centre of infection. Some of the most fanatical pilgrims, after performing all necessary acts of devotion, blind their eyes in order that they may never look upon unholy sights.

During the war Mecca and Medina became through the efforts of England part of an independent kingdom known as the Hejaz. The King of the Hejaz is said to be a very intelligent man and, although he is not so well disposed toward the British as at first, it is believed the Powers can induce him to establish sanitary conditions in connection with the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.

Nearly three-fourths of the Mohammedan pilgrims on their way to Mecca pass through Egypt, where they add to the vast mass of disease already existing there and also gather up new infection.

European Doctors Examining Mohammedan Pilgrims Returning from Mecca, So That They May Not Carry Cholera and Other Diseases Away With Them.



Dr. Andrew Balfour, late President of the Egyptian Public Health Commission, recently gave an English scientific meeting an appalling picture of the unsanitary conditions prevailing in Egypt, even in localities where Europeans live.

"The natives," he said, "inhabit villages which though often picturesque, transgress well-nigh every law of health; congeries of flat-roofed, ill-ventilated mud-dwellings, some of them partly underground, crowded like rabbit warrens, and where the houses are shared alike by man and his domestic animals—donkeys, cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, cats, dogs, rabbits, fowls and pigeons. The roofs are usually piled high with grass or garbage. The lanes or passages between the houses are narrow and not infrequently blocked by stacks of manure. No sanitary conveniences of any kind exist, but rats swarm and at certain periods there is a plague of flies."

"In Alexandria, which is largely a European city, we find slum quarters, or echeches, of the worst description, centres of typhus and relapsing fever, often cheek by jowl with better class dwellings, often close to areas inhabited by well-to-do Europeans. The conditions at the hammams, or Turkish baths, are scandalous, for at these places the town refuse, often ill-smelling and foul, is used as fuel, and being stored anyhow and everywhere, is most offensive and dangerous."

There is another disease which science demands should be attacked at its Asiatic place of origin. That is "Spanish influenza," which during the last four years is stated to have destroyed incomparably more human lives than the great war.

Dr. Simon Flexner, director of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, made this statement before the recent Congress of American Physicians and Surgeons: "Influenza took its origin in a region somewhere near the Russian border of Turkestan, spreading along the trade routes as rapidly as transportation moved. The endemic focus is somewhere on the eastern border of Russia."

"It is not too much for a reconstructive medical profession to conceive the clearing up of a region which by its inaccessibility and its neglect has every twenty-five or thirty years originated waves of disease spreading over the globe."