



The Meek Inherit

➤ WHENEVER anyone quotes the Third Beatitude, wherein the meek are promised the heritage of the earth, some flip-cynic is almost certain to comment: "Oh, sure! They'll inherit it when everybody else is through with it and doesn't want it any longer."

That may be good for a short laugh, yet it is a serious and solid fact that the meek are constantly inheriting the wasted and worn-out parts of the earth—and are patiently redeeming them.

The meek, in this case, are the whole community of small and inconspicuous plants which the common phrase loosely lumps together as "mosses."

Life habits of the many hundreds of different plant species that make up this rather miscellaneous conglomeration are as diverse as are their botanical kinships; but one thing they have in common: they can stand conditions too difficult for the endurance of those vegetable aristocrats that are generally termed the higher plants. So when a flood or a landslide, a forest fire or a disastrous cycle of soil erosion, makes any part of the earth uninhabitable by loftier green folk, these unregarded meek creep in on the denuded soil, or even on the bare-scraped rock, take possession, and start life over again.

On naked rock, sun-scoured in summer and storm-blasted in winter, generations of lichens manage to cling. Often a careless eye might mistake some of them for splotches of spilled paint or natural mineral outcrops, but they are plants and they are alive. They may grow so slowly that you cannot see any change in a lichen-patch in a decade or a century, but they do hang on and thus hold a frontier of life against encroaching Emptiness.

On the opposite frontier, where the discouragement is not drought but

drowning, we are apt to find a larger assortment, and certainly more rapid growth. We find the true mosses in great abundance, often spongy with moisture; we find also their second cousins, the liverworts.

Most of all, in wet places, we find the lowliest of our botanical meek, the algae. These living green scums and slimes fill stagnant ponds, wave in tufts

in slow streams. But they also come ashore, forming green mats on the naked soil, even penetrating its upper layer and giving it the "greasiness" that makes such tricky footing.

In the end, all these lowly plants die, leaving the soil enriched and ready for the next generation. The meek have inherited—and relinquished.

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MEDICINE

Peritonitis Checked

Still another victory for penicillin has been achieved. Expected to save lives of appendicitis patients who cannot have immediate operations.

➤ NEWEST triumph for penicillin is over peritonitis, cause of 92% of the deaths of patients admitted to hospitals with acute appendicitis. Discovery that penicillin can save these patients comes from studies by three Navy medical officers, Lieut. Comdr. G. B. Fauley, Lieut. T. L. Duggan and Lieut. (j. g.) R. T. Stormont. The studies were reported at the meeting of the American Medical Association in Chicago.

Dogs as well as humans can get peritonitis and in a series of 27 not given penicillin, the death rate was 92.6% with an average survival time of 57 hours. No deaths occurred in 20 dogs that got penicillin promptly. Even among 19 with an 11 hour delay in giving the mold-chemical, the death rate was reduced to 21%.

Penicillin is not a substitute for operation for appendicitis by a capable surgeon, the Navy surgeons warned. Patients who are operated on promptly for appendicitis almost never develop peritonitis.

For treating peritonitis following battle wounds of the abdomen, however, and appendicitis and its complications aboard small ships, submarines and in isolated shore units where adequate facilities for immediate operation are not available, the Navy doctors believe penicillin should prove an effective aid.

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Vitamins May Aid Shock

➤ SOME OF the B vitamins, notably thiamin, niacin and riboflavin, may prove helpful in treating shock such as follows battle wounds, in addition to plasma and other methods of treatment. Studies

showing how the vitamins may help were reported by Dr. William M. Govier, of Winston-Salem, N. C.

These vitamins can work in the body only in combined forms called coenzymes, he pointed out. Lack of oxygen due to failure of blood circulation or loss of blood apparently causes breakdown of these coenzymes, he and his associates have found. As a result, severe and sudden vitamin deficiency is added to blood loss and oxygen starvation.

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"Intestinal Flu" Germ

➤ AN UNKNOWN germ, possibly a virus with an affinity for the intestines, is suspected of being the cause of the condition usually called intestinal flu, Dr. Hobart A. Reimann, of Philadelphia, reported.

There may be a whole group of such viruses prone to attack the intestinal tract, he said, pointing to the discovery of such a virus in cats in 1940 and in calves in 1943. Previously no viruses known to attack the stomach and intestines primarily had been known.

The discovery of such a group of viruses, he said, would no doubt open a field of investigation of as much importance as that pertaining to the newly recognized virus infections of the nose, mouth and lungs.

The intestinal flu germ is probably spread through the air. The disease it causes is widespread, and may appear in isolated cases or in epidemics. It may be mistaken for food poisoning, influenza, bacillary dysentery and, in single acute cases, for appendicitis.

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