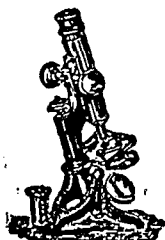


Medical Matters.

CRIME AND RESPONSIBILITY.



"Crime and Responsibility" was the subject of an interesting address, delivered by Dr. Bernard Hollander, President of the Ethological Society, at the inaugural meeting and conversazione of the winter session, at the Gallery of the Royal Society of British Artists last week. Dr. Hollander said he had chosen this subject because of the interest shown in the two cases of moral insanity whom he had cured recently by surgical operation. Human nature, he explained, depends on heredity, physiological, and social circumstances. The most important of these is heredity. Just as intellectual capacity is determined by it, so is moral capacity. Both may be developed by education and training if there is the predisposition, not otherwise. Character, as well as intellect, depends on brain organisation, hence physiological accidents may change a man's inner nature; as, for instance, prolonged illness, the habitual use of drugs and alcohol, a slight injury to the brain, or a small patch of inflammation or softening. Man is prompted by such motives only as appeal to his individual organisation, hence punishment will act as a deterrent on offenders only whose nature is such that they do not like being put in gaol. To many imprisonment has no terror and brings no disgrace. The legal test of responsibility is wrong, and should be modified, considering the advance made in our knowledge of mental disease. A man may be fully conscious, have no delusion, know the nature of his act and that it is a wrong act, and yet be incapable to control the mad impulse of his deranged mind; just as even the strongest man in convulsions, though conscious of them, is unable to stop them. The law assumes that the driving impulse to action is reason, not feeling, whereas just the contrary is true. A man may reason soundly and be capable of work necessitating the healthy function of the highest intellectual powers, yet his conduct may be wrong on account of the state of his disorganised feelings. True, reason should control and guide the conduct, but there are moments, even in sane persons who know right from wrong, when a mad desire will have its convulsive way in defiance of reason. There are criminals who could, if they liked, check their evil impulses, and there are others who cannot bridle them, though they have

the desire to do so. The offspring of neurotics, epileptics, and drunkards, who have lived amid the contagion of evil, have not the same choice of an honest life as the children of normal persons have. Dr. Hollander claimed that crime calls for intelligent and scientific treatment, which lies with the future learning of the medical profession. It is to the physician that the public will look for the differential diagnosis between the curable and incurable criminal, and it is he who will be largely instrumental in the treatment of moral disease.

OPHTHALMIA NEONATORUM.

Much is heard at the present day of ophthalmia neonatorum. It is now known to be for the most part a preventable disease, and that blindness from this cause need not occur if proper precautions are taken at the birth of the child, or, if when the disease shows signs of developing, it is taken in hand immediately.

Dr. Robert Jardine in his *Practical Text Book of Midwifery for Nurses*, describes it as "frightfully contagious," and says, "The inflammation is caused by vaginal discharge getting into the eyes during the birth of the child. If this is not thoroughly washed out immediately after birth, the conjunctiva of the lids and eyeballs becomes red and inflamed, and in a few hours begins to secrete pus in large quantities. The eyelids are swollen and the edges of them get glued together so that the pus is retained. When the lids are separated it gushes out. In a short time the superficial structure of the eyeball becomes ulcerated. If this is not checked destruction of the eye will quickly follow, and blindness result."

"In the severe cases the irritation is caused by the micro-organism which causes gonorrhoea (the gonococcus). In the milder form, which is commonly supposed to be due to cold, these organisms are not present."

If pus is secreted, Dr. Jardine recommends that an antiseptic lotion should be applied every few hours with pledgets of cotton wool, which should then be burnt. Protargol 10 to 20 grains to the ounce should be applied all over the conjunctiva after the pus has been washed away. The surplus solution should be washed off with sterilised water. Perchloride of mercury must not be used with a silver solution, as an insoluble salt will be deposited on the eye. Any towels used for the child must be kept for it alone. They should be steeped in an antiseptic and boiled before being used again. The treatment must be continued until the eyes are perfectly right.

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