

a direct effect on the nervous mechanism that regulates the distribution of the white blood corpuscles in the body.

Consequently, in war time we see ordinary infections intensified, so that such diseases as scarlet fever, diphtheria, and measles, which are always with us, become more prevalent in the community and more harmful to the individual attacked, and we also have a revival of more or less forgotten or rare epidemics like typhus and "spotted fever." An important factor in the production of both these latter, incidentally, is overcrowding. It may be, for all I know, a military necessity to pack our soldiers over here into huts or tiny billets, almost as closely as sardines in a tin. I have no military knowledge, and I cannot say, but it is none the less a physiological crime, and it is certainly asking for trouble in the shape of spotted fever, for instance. You cannot go against the laws of health and expect to be let off the logical consequences. Were it not that the resistance of the soldier is raised very considerably by the exercise and good food he gets, the trouble would be much greater, and we must not forget that, given overcrowding, too little food, and worry to boot, in the *civilian* population, the havoc must be expected to be great. In other words, war may bring home to us our national sins—like insanitary housing, for instance—in the shape of appalling visitations of known or obsolete disease. Typhus, smallpox, spotted fever, and even cholera or plague are now something more than possibilities.

But, you will say, how does this exactly concern women? Simply, I think, because women—health visitors, nurses, and indeed all women who go about and see things—are such a potent factor in the dissemination of *knowledge*, and this is mainly a problem of education. We doctors have excellent opportunities of shutting the stable door, but the horse has generally been stolen by the time we are called in, and, of course the poverty of war means that people generally try to do without the doctor as much as possible.

The knowledge to be spread—as broadcast as possible—resolves itself into the necessity for feeding the hungry, calming the frightened, comforting the troubled, and detecting—or even suspecting, for that is half the battle—infectious disease when it has arisen, so that the sufferer may be isolated. Such signs as feverishness, sore throat, persistent headache, and so on, are too often labelled "influenza" for the public safety.

I think, too, that the public requires some educating in the matter of the use of certain

so-called preventives of infection. It is no uncommon thing to find people who ought to know better dropping eucalyptus oil on to their pocket-handkerchiefs in order to keep off infection, or, as I mentioned, sprinkling disinfectants about very dirty rooms for the same purpose! None of these things have the smallest effect on the average microbe, and it would be of much more use if they were to scrub their floors, open their windows, and eat well. Many of the poor do not get enough nourishment because they eat very expensive foods which they do not know how to cook, and in this respect alone the influence of the woman who sees and knows is invaluable.

Then there is the perennial drink problem. Without for one moment preaching total abstinence, it is beyond all question obvious that constant drinking to slight excess diminishes the resistance of the person to infectious disease, so that he not only is more likely to be attacked, but suffers more severely when he does succumb. Someone said that in the South African War the drinkers were "labelled" by dropping out on the march, and the same thing is most evident in the wards of a fever hospital. One can tell a man's habits in regard to alcohol by the way he behaves under infection. And one must remember that alcohol is a cheap anæsthetic—and personally I believe this to be the main reason why many people, especially women, take more than is good for them—and that all anæsthesia is seductive in time of stress and distress. Moreover, it is not so long ago—I remember the time well—since alcohol was supposed even by the "faculty" to keep off infection, and that is why you always find a very large and thriving public-house just outside a fever hospital for the benefit of those who have to visit their relatives who are "dangerously ill"! The old belief dies hard.

To sum up:—All cannot fight or make shells, but all can protect, and one of the national foes against which protection is even now necessary is the ravage of preventible infectious disease. Later on, the difficulty may be very serious.

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#### NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TRAINED NURSES.

For the convenience of several speakers who hope to take part in the Conference on "The Place of the Imperial Mother in Peace and War," the date has been altered from the 10th to 17th of June. Tickets (free) may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, N.C.T.N., 431, Oxford Street, London, W.

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