

not be classed as a purely venereal disease. Infection might occur from any syphilitic discharges. It could be spread by kissing, by the use of infected vessels or towels, or by anything which had been in contact with an infected mouth, by licking an infected pencil; it could be contracted by a nurse or doctor in dressing, or operation, by a midwife during delivery; it could be transmitted through the placenta to the fetus, or acquired by the infant in suckling. The speaker described the three stages of development of this infectious disease, the primary, the secondary, and tertiary, the last of which, she said, might arise from one to three years after infection, or might even not occur for fifty years or more, so long drawn out was the possibility of the virus in this, the worst of the venereal group. The syphilitic gummata and hard nodules distinguishing this stage ultimately ulcerated, and in their ulcerative process caused loathsome disfigurement and often destroyed life. No part of the tissues of the body were immune from the disease.

Nor did the innocent escape. The disease contracted from prostitutes in the first instance might be communicated to the innocent wife and unborn child, the unfaithful and infected wife might infect her husband. *Syphilis insontium* crowned the mystery of pain. Shillitoe wrote:—"Very many women are absolutely innocent, and altogether ignorant, of the serious nature of the complaint. Not infrequently we are asked to treat a woman for the whole course of the disease without once mentioning the word syphilis, or giving her any inkling as to the true nature of the ailment from which she is suffering. . . . It is impossible to discuss the conditions in the same open way as with men."

The wife seldom escaped, the mother might be infected by her syphilitic offspring. As to children, Fournier followed the cases of 90 married women infected by their husbands and pregnant, in the first year. There were 50 abortions, or stillbirths, 38 died in infancy, 2 only survived. It was estimated that syphilis of the father gave a mortality of 28 per cent. in the offspring, of the mother a mortality of 60 per cent, of both parents of 68 per cent. If the fetus survived the syphilitic infant developed the secondary stage of the disease, the first being absent. It might be recognised by the wrinkled skin, the yellow old man's face, the excoriated buttocks, the syphilitic snuffle. Later, the child showed signs of degeneration, arrested development, malformation, epilepsy, mental weakness. Symptoms might not manifest themselves till later life. Even the second generation was not exempt.

Lunacy, mutilation, child murder, another and yet more goodly trio.

The speaker then gave some appalling statistics showing the widespread presence of venereal diseases, and their disastrous effects. Thus Noeggerath had stated that of every 1,000 men married in New York 800 had had gonorrhoea, and 90 per cent. were uncured at the time of their marriage.

Dealing with the prevention of venereal diseases the speaker repudiated the idea of regulation as

effective. First, it had been tried in every European country but England and Norway, and the condition of affairs spoke for itself. Secondly, regulation touched only the older and regular prostitutes, leaving the younger and recently infected women, who were the great danger to the community, aside. Thirdly, a committee reported to the Advisory Board of our own Army Medical Service: "The isolation of a particular section of infected persons, namely, of diseased prostitutes, cannot be considered an ideal method of arresting the disease, while large numbers of infected persons of both sexes remain free to spread the contagion."

The speaker advocated—

1. Education, as the first plank. Children should be taught from their infancy to avoid masturbation, to regard the genital organs as sacred. They should each learn the simple physiology of sexual life, which could easily be taught from animals and plants. Lies should not be told them in regard to the birth of the little brother or sister. Habits of modesty, decency, and regularity in the accomplishment of the natural acts should be inculcated.

2. Discipline the children. Self-control and self-discipline were more easily acquired in childhood than in later life.

3. Notification. Other preventable diseases were notifiable, why not this one, by far the most important of all? Take the seal of secrecy from the physician's lips and compel him to notify.

4. Open recognition. Bold acknowledgment of these diseases in our midst, and that they had to be met and treated.

5. Free and easily accessible treatment to which no moral stigma was attached.

6. The punishment of any infected person who knowingly exposed another to the risk of infection.

7. The diminution of alcoholism.

These diseases were eradicable from the human race, innocent and guilty alike desired to see them eradicated. Therein lay the chief strength of our cause.

The speaker concluded:—

"I take it that we are at one upon the main point. As nurses, as patriots, we desire to limit as far as lies in our power, the physical, mental, and moral ills of humanity. We desire not merely to cure but to prevent. These of which we have treated are preventable diseases, remembering that fornication is no more a necessity of the body than are drunkenness or gluttony. And shall we not prevent them? Are we going to sit still, as we have sat still so long, and see the race degenerate before our eyes? Are we going to watch the long drawn out sacrifice of life and health that is daily going on around us? Listen to Karl Marx: 'Society has hitherto failed to find a remedy, perhaps because only man has sought for one,' and 'All that is requisite for the attainment of this end is that those engaged in the study and practice of general hygiene, and those concerned in the safeguarding of public morality, should not weary in their efforts, and that scientific research should pursue its aims firmly and clearly, unin-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)