

The Black Plague.

Within the last few years the subject of morality in relation to health (health of the nation no less than health of the individual), has occupied some of the most far-seeing and thoughtful men and women of our time. There is gradually growing a strong determination to crush out the so-called social evil which, like a secret and terrible blight, is sapping the life of the nation at its very source.

Brave men, and perhaps braver women, have stood forth and warned us of the evil in our midst. It means more for a woman to deliberately break through the barrier of silence which convention has built round the whole question of venereal diseases, yet we have no lack of leaders of our own sex in this crusade of light against the darkness of ignorance and vice. As nurses, or as midwives, surely it is our duty to be in the front rank in a fight to cure, and to prevent, one of the most awful diseases to which suffering humanity is a victim. But with some few exceptions our training schools have not taught us all there is to know on this subject. To those who can obtain it I would recommend Miss Lavinia Dock's book, "Hygiene and Morality"; to those who are unable to read it perhaps these notes may be of use.

People commonly speak of syphilis, if they mention it at all, as comprising all the venereal diseases, whereas it is only one of a group of intensely infectious complaints. The others are gonorrhœa and soft chancre, or venereal sore.

Soft chancre is a local disease occurring on the genital organs. It is the simplest and the least dangerous of the three diseases under consideration, and if treated promptly and effectively it is curable, but if neglected serious complications may occur.

The incubation period varies from several hours to several days after the date of infection. The first symptom is a small nodule which rapidly proceeds to suppuration, forming a painful ulcer with an intensely infectious discharge. The ulcer is deep and its tendency is to spread and become multiple. If neglected the discharge may infect all the surrounding parts and last for years—or infection may involve the lymphatic glands in the groin, causing inflammation and a tumour known as "bubo." If properly treated from the outset soft chancre lasts from four to six weeks.

Gonorrhœa is one of the genito-urinary diseases attacking the mucous-membranes, especially that of the urethra, in the adult, and in the infant that of the eye. In 1879 Professor Neisser, of Breslau, discovered the

existence of a definite micro-organism known as the gonococcus, which occurs in this disease only. The period of incubation is from twelve hours to two days, or more, and generally speaking infection is only by sexual intercourse. The urethra is usually first attacked, also the cervix uteri in women, and the vulva and vagina in little girls. All these parts have delicate linings, which offer but a weakly resistance to the entrance of the germ. The disease has three distinct stages, the symptoms of the primary stage are those of an acute local infection, the parts burn, itch, and swell. Urination causes intense and increasing pain; in some cases there is hæmorrhage. The discharge is at first mucous, later it is greenish or yellow. In the second stage the inflammation spreads, involving the organs of generation and the urinary tract, ascending the ureters, and sometimes affecting the kidneys. In women a large proportion of cases of cystitis, ovaritis, salpingitis, and many cases of septic infection during the puerperium, are due to the action of the gonococcus. Sometimes the complete removal of all the female organs of reproduction is necessary. Gonorrhœa is answerable for sterility in both men and women to a large extent. It is usually the direct cause of ophthalmia neonatorum, and cases have occurred where nurses have lost one or both eyes through being ignorant of the proper precautions to take.

The third stage of gonorrhœa may end in gonorrhœal arthritis, kidney disease, affections of the heart, brain, and nervous system. Still less than a man can a woman ever be cured, and a man has been known to infect his wife ten years or more after the disease had apparently disappeared!

Besides the method of infection already referred to, gonorrhœa may be spread by sleeping in infected sheets, sharing infected towels, and last, but not least, by sitting on the seats of public lavatories. Syphilis, the best known of the three diseases, is also caused by a separate micro-organism called the spirochæte pallida.

The primary stage begins at the end of the incubation period, which may be anything between ten days and seven weeks from the date of exposure to infection. At the end of the incubation period a small red papule appears at the seat of inoculation; a little later it breaks down into an ulcer, small or large as the case may be. This is known as the "primary lesion," or "initial sore," of syphilis. In this stage of the disease there may be no further manifestation of the disease, and if the ulcer is small it may readily be overlooked. The primary stage continues from one to three months; at its close an active set of con-

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