

## MEDICAL MATTERS.

### VENEREAL DISEASE: ITS PRESENT AND FUTURE.

Dr. Douglas White, and Dr. C. H. Melville, D.P.H., Lieutenant-Colonel, Army Medical Corps, presented an interesting paper on the above subject at the recent Annual Congress of the Royal Institute of Public Health in Dublin, a first instalment of which is published in *The Lancet* of December 9th. The writers state that:—

“The problem of venereal disease, and that of feeble-mindedness, are the two most important medico-social problems of our time, and inasmuch as venereal disease augments the ranks of the feeble-minded, the two questions are closely allied. Of the ravages of venereal disease the public know nothing and consequently care nothing, while those who do know seldom care to break the professional silence, which accords with popular prejudice and apathy. In attempting to deal with this subject, while each of us is, strictly speaking, responsible for his own section, we are, nevertheless, at entire unity as regards the principles and methods by which this problem has to be grappled.

“What is venereal disease? What is the present state of affairs? How are we to deal with it? These are the questions to which we invite your attention.

“Soft chancre, syphilis, and gonorrhœa—these are the chief forms of disease. The chief importance of soft chancre is its possible confusion with syphilis. Though soft chancre is not a slight or negligible malady, yet both in respect of the gravity of their effects and of the numbers of persons affected, gonorrhœa and syphilis are by far the most important. Their importance is not only individual, but national, since the former affects the procreative powers of both women and men, whilst the latter may and, if neglected, always does result in the introduction into the world of children who are diseased from the very start.

“Gonorrhœa is popularly regarded as a mild and not very shameful disease. Medical opinion, however, is doubtful whether, to the individual affected, it is not worse than syphilis. It may be fatal to the victim—more frequently to women than men; its complications and consequences are serious and very common; having no specific remedy of approved efficiency, it is apt, unless treated very early and very thoroughly, to become a chronic disease of indeterminate duration and perpetual inconveni-

ence. Its infectiveness is equally indeterminate. In adults it is only acquired by sexual intercourse. A young man contracting it, and believing himself cured, may then give it to his young wife. Apart from the danger to her person, about 50 per cent. of such infected women are sterile. The majority of all young men get this disease before the age of thirty, and very many marry while still infectious. In addition to the sterility which they may inflict on their wives they may be themselves sterile by reason of their own disease. The result is disastrous both to wives, husbands, and birth-rate.

“Syphilis is only like gonorrhœa in that it is at first, as a rule, locally situate in the genitals of either sex. In the primary condition the local sore alone is infectious. But after a few weeks the blood stream becomes involved, and the secondary stage begins. The skin and mucous membranes develop pocks and patches; mouth and throat are invaded, and the infectivity becomes general. Cups which the patient uses, pipes he smokes, cab-whistles, anything which he puts to his lips, may convey the infection to others; for this disease, unlike gonorrhœa, can be inoculated on any part of the body. If untreated he or she may remain a source of infection for about three years. After this the disease becomes latent, ceasing to be infectious to others; but for himself in this tertiary stage no part or organ of his body is free from the chance of invasion or destruction; and at the last he is liable to those diseases which are called para-syphilitic, tabes and general paralysis. Mercury has, indeed, a specific therapeutic effect on the disease, but complete cure by mercury, except under very early and prolonged treatment, is rare. For years after infection it is transmissible to wife and unborn children, who in their turn are liable to the same ills and may even transmit them to the third generation.

“The early manifestations of syphilis fill the out-patient departments of general hospitals; the later stages fill the infirmaries and asylums with senseless wrecks of humanity. It is the great-pox. Small-pox we fight tooth and nail, but the great-pox, which is far more disastrous to the nation's life, is left unheeded and unchecked. As for the children of syphilitic parents, it may be said that the first child always dies, either before birth or in the first year (95 per cent.); of all children more than 50 per cent. die before their second year, while most of the remainder are marked with the disease. So we may say gonorrhœa kills the tree before it sprouts, syphilis blights and stunts its growth.

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