

WHAT CAN NURSES DO TO PREVENT BLINDNESS?

Dr. Elice M. Alger, of New York, has an arresting article in the *Modern Hospital* on the above question. He writes in part:—The last fifty years have seen such an enormous increase in medical knowledge that even physicians are not able to keep abreast of the whole field, and we have seen the consequent development of specialties and sub-specialties. But we have made comparatively little progress toward realising Pasteur's dream of abolishing all contagious diseases from the earth.

Public education is the only sure foundation for public health. The patent medicine man, sordid and mercenary as were his motives, was the first to appreciate popular interest, and he really started the public health movement by the frank talks in his advertising. In the days when a reputable physician would have been ostracised professionally for addressing a mothers' meeting, the patent medicine man was teaching his dupes that they had "organs" and "weaknesses," and while it has made them, perhaps, morbidly sensitive, it at last created a wide demand for honest and disinterested advice.

This has been true of diseases of the eye just as much as of tuberculosis and cancer.

A National Committee on Prevention of Blindness now exists in America, and Dr. Alger writes:—

"It includes physicians, of course, but it aims to include also all who are interested directly or indirectly in the conservation of vision, men and women, physicians and laymen, employers and employees. Among those who, by training and purpose in life, are prepared to understand and aid in this great popular campaign, none stands higher than the trained nurse, while perhaps the most important part of the whole work deals with the period of infancy and children.

"We are coming to recognise more and more

the right of the child to be well born. This is a truism as applied to epilepsy and idiocy, and yet few are aware perhaps what an important factor heredity is in diseases of the eye. In such conditions as congenital cataract, retinitis pigmentosa, night blindness, and albinism, the element of heredity is so well marked that there is a tremendous probability that the children of an affected parent will be blind or practically blind. The element of consanguinity of parents is also a very important one, because it offers a double chance of the child's inheriting any family peculiarity. One does not realise how frequent

these conditions are except in an institution for the blind, where are collected, as in an eddy, this hereditary flotsam, children lacking one or both eyes, or some part of an eye; children with microphthalmus, or macropthalmus, and all sorts of hideous congenital defects. To a less extent we are now beginning to trace the element of heredity in such conditions as colour blindness, glaucoma, ordinary senile cataract, and progressive myopia. Extreme deformities in the shape of hyperopia and astigmatism appear in many instances to be congenital. There seems to be no question that a man or woman with such diseases as retinitis pigmentosa or congenital cataract should not marry, or at least not have children, because the probability of transmission is so strong and the disability is so great.

"Then there are certain diseases which, through heredity, are very prone to involve and frequently ruin the

eye, notably, syphilis. Indeed, before the day of complement fixation, the interstitial inflammation of the cornea was one of the triad of diagnostic symptoms of hereditary syphilis.

"Many think the trained nurse is destined to take a far more prominent place in the obstetrics of the future—whether as the assistant or the competitor of the physician is in the lap of the gods. In any case, she must know about ophthalmia neonatorum. Credé showed that a drop of 2 per cent. nitrate of silver instilled into the



THIS TRAGIC LITTLE GIRL WAS BORN WITH NORMAL EYES. THE MIDWIFE DID NOT USE PROPHYLACTIC DROPS. SHE PAYS THE PRICE OF LIFE-LONG BLINDNESS FOR THIS NEGLECT.

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