

THE CONFERENCE OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF TRAINED NURSES.

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HEREDITY AND THE WAR.

¶ We this week report the concluding session of the Conference of the N.U.T.N., held at five o'clock on Saturday, November 17th, at 3, Vere Street, W., when Mrs. Bedford Fenwick was in the chair, and Major Marett Tims, R.A.M.C., gave a most interesting lecture, illustrated by lantern slides, on "Heredity and the War."

The lecturer clearly explained the laws of heredity, taking as illustrations experiments made with sweet peas, the continuity of pure strains and the results of crossing the giant and the dwarf varieties, which he called tall and short. From that he led upwards to heredity in man with whom, however, it was impossible to get absolutely pure strains; nevertheless, the law of heredity was very plainly marked in the mating of two persons—one with brown and the other with blue eyes; the diagrams also showed a recurrence of mental tendencies, or tendencies to certain diseases in families. Malformation of nails persisted, as did brachydactyls.

Inheritance played a large part in the breeding of mental defectives. As the law now stands, the lecturer stated, mental defectives can be looked after by the State up to the age of sixteen, and when they are of an age to have families its protection is withdrawn. He advocated segregation for mental defectives, both in the interest of the individual and of the community.

What conclusions, he asked, were we to draw in regard to the war in the case of those surgically afflicted? Were acquired characteristics inherited?

To take a well-known illustration, the tails of fox terriers had been docked for many generations, but that had no influence on the shape of the tail at birth and, biologically, there is not the smallest particle of evidence that, if a man loses a limb, his offspring will be defective in this respect.

A couple of years ago rash people wrote to the papers and advanced the view that the deformity would persist. At the time, Dr. Marett Tims said, he was in a hospital where there were a large number of amputation cases, and the effect upon them was depressing. He had them all up in the central dining room, and gave them a lecture on the subject, explaining that there was no scientific basis for the supposition.

In regard to the medical aspect, there was nothing which should affect future generations. Enteric fever acquired in Gallipoli or Salonika did not differ from the British brand which was not transmitted; heart diseases were acquired; trench fever, like malaria, was a protozoal infection. Those who had forbears who had lived in India, and had been saturated with malaria, did not inherit it. Nor was there any reason why trench nephritis should be transmitted.

In regard to shell-shock, cases of shell-shock were the most interesting of all those that the war had produced. The lecturer said the habit of regarding shell-shock as funk was much too common. It was nothing of the kind, and it was a cruel thing to say; neither was it a common or garden neurasthenia, but a traumatism affecting the nervous system. Possibly the children of shell-shock patients might have a tendency to neurosis, but the lecturer was insistent that, as a traumatism, it was an acquired characteristic and not transmitted. He had an intimate knowledge of many shell-shock patients, and he knew that many married men were worrying as to what was going to happen to their children and whether their own trouble would be transmitted. "If you meet with such men," he said, "do tell them it won't be so, so far as diseases and injuries are concerned."

What was more serious was that the pick of the manhood of the Empire was being killed off and the more weakly, the more delicate, the mentally defectives and epileptics were becoming heads of families in relatively increased proportions.

In reply to a question, the lecturer said that traumatic epilepsy was not hereditary. Sometimes shell-shock cases became obsessed with this idea—that they would become epileptics. One man who, while in France, had unfortunately been given a magazine to read referring to the subject, became haunted with the idea that he would become an epileptic.

In regard to night blindness, on which a question was asked, the lecturer thought that the reason why so many cases had been discovered during the war was that as residents in large well-lighted towns they were unconscious of the defect.

A hearty vote of thanks to the chair and lecturer moved by Miss Hurlston, was carried by acclamation. In closing the Session, the Chairman Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, conveyed to Miss Eden and Miss Rimmer the thanks of the conference for their successful work in its organization.

THE EXHIBITS.

In addition to the exhibits already mentioned a set of the excellent posters supplied by the N.U.T.N. were displayed, also a patient's holdall, specially intended for use in sanatoria, designed by Miss Violetta Thurstan. The pretty cover in blue linen, which fits like a pillow-case over a piece of mill-board, is furnished with pockets for every conceivable need. The pockets for flask, the mometer and handkerchief, have protective linings but the whole case can be readily washed.

In the Hospital Social Service Section were noticeable a striking photograph of Mr Leo Marsden, the sergeant commanding the Police Juvenile Bureau at Los Angeles, and an interesting chart, &c., showing the organization of social service from the Massachusetts General Hospital, collected by Miss Kent.

The wonderfully realistic models of rashes shewn by the N.U.T.N. also attracted much attention.

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