

THE HEALTH OF A WOMAN.*

Few people are better qualified to write of "The Health of a Woman" than Dr. R. Murray Leslie, who has contributed a most useful volume on this subject to the "Health Series" published by Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd.

"Never before," says the author, "has the health of women mattered so much to the nation, whether we regard them as workers or as the mothers of the next generation."

The psychology of woman is, he says, a matter of the first importance.

"In the case of women, even more than men, there is an extremely close connection between the mind and health. When a woman is happy she feels well. Similarly, when a woman is unhappy her health suffers. The good old maxim, 'It is not work but worry that kills,' was probably written about a woman."

The author emphasises the unwisdom of "excessive intellect work, which exerts an exhausting influence on the nervous system by making undue demands upon a girl's reserve store of nervous energy, which is in her case, set aside for the development of racial functions. . . . The acquisition of intellectual knowledge at the expense of certain feminine passive qualities, such as sympathy, tenderness, and common sense, is a doubtful gain. It was their sympathy rather than their powers of intellect which inspired the deeds of Florence Nightingale and Edith Cavell." We must differ from the author in his estimation of the qualities of Florence Nightingale, the dominant note of whose character was unquestionably her commanding intellect. Sympathy she certainly had, but it was her intellect, not her sympathy, which enabled her to successfully produce order out of chaos in the Crimean hospitals and to evolve the principles which will ever form the fundamental laws of the nursing profession, however varied their application may be.

We endorse Dr. Murray Leslie's opinion that "it is good news to hear that Mr. Fisher—the President of the Education Board—proposes to make physical training an integral part of the educational curriculum of the national schools throughout the country." It is a reform which is long overdue.

The author is a believer in recreation. "Happiness is a woman's best tonic. A happy woman is generally a healthy one, and high spirits and joy of life are symptoms of health and happiness. Recreation often implies social intercourse with members of the opposite sex. This is not only the most natural and delightful, but the most necessary of all forms of recreation. Every girl has a right to such opportunities, and no sane, healthy young girl can be really happy without them. The more opportunities young men and

young women of the same social standing have of meeting each other, the better for the health and morals of both."

The author considers that "an atmosphere of love and sympathy is essential to a woman's happiness, and consequently to her health. . . . Notwithstanding the countless interests of a modern woman's life, her essential nature has in no way changed, and the general principle still holds true that a desire for affection—to love and be loved—will always remain one of her deepest and most dominant instincts, while her maximum happiness is attained when her love is won and returned by the man she desires as her future mate.

"Ellen Key—the celebrated Danish apostle of love—believes that for some women sex love is the highest of all things; that others are more profoundly affected by maternal love; while others feel most deeply of all that universal human sympathy which signifies motherliness in the widest sense of the term." Dr. Murray Leslie expresses his belief that "the great driving power at the back of the large and ever growing army of hospital and district nurses, of health visitors, and of social welfare workers—those great foster-mothers of modern life—is in reality a motherliness transferred from the private, domestic sphere to the larger and more varied realm of social and communal life."

In regard to marriage he is of opinion that "the time will come when Eugenic knowledge will so permeate all classes with a love of health and fitness that it will be almost impossible for young men and young women to fall in love and mate with the weak, the diseased, and the degenerate, both for their own sakes and for that of their unborn children."

The author deals with the hygiene of the expectant mother, and insists that "a woman should avoid all worries, be bright and cheerful herself, and only have cheerful and sympathetic friends around her, as a congenial atmosphere is all-important. As an instance of the evil effects of worry and shock, one might refer to the large number of miscarriages that have followed war anxieties and air-raids during the present war."

"A knowledge of mothercraft is," we read, "necessary from the point of view of the child's health; but, as a matter of fact, it is nearly as important from the standpoint of the mother's own health. . . . Love may be an instinct; motherhood is a fact; but mothercraft is an accomplishment, and one, too, that ought to be learned by every girl and woman in the country."

In regard to the expansion of women's employment, it has, we read, "led to a new appreciation of the close relations which exist between the quality and quantity of industrial output and the health and welfare of the workers, and accordingly there has been introduced a well-organized system of hygienic safeguards. . . . In many factories women doctors and nurses form part of the regular welfare staff, and their services are most valuable."

* Methuen & Co., Ltd., 36, Essex Street, W.C. 1s. 6d. net.

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