

GENIUS AND TUBERCULOSIS.

LECTURE BY DR. VARRIER-JONES TO THE NATIONAL UNION OF TRAINED NURSES (CAMBRIDGE BRANCH).

Dr. Varrier-Jones, Acting Tuberculosis Officer for the County, delivered an interesting lecture on "Genius and Tuberculosis" to the local branch of the National Union of Trained Nurses at the New Medical Schools on Wednesday evening, April 17th. The lecturer began by saying that when we investigated the lives of those whom we considered the most brilliant, and who had left behind them a memory which would never fade, the imprint of a personality which, although strange and sometimes unintelligible to the mass of mankind, yet had the power of charming generation after generation of those who came after, and filled with wonderment all those who had occasion to come into contact with the magic spell which had been thrown around them as a halo, it was surprising to find how many of these persons, whose influence in literature and art had been so widespread and powerful, had bodies which were frail and fragile, and were the site of that insidious disease, tuberculosis. It was very truly said that "mind rules matter," and it was indeed true when we considered the many great minds which had, through years of suffering, through years of pain, and through years of disappointment, risen above the pettiness of earthly sorrows, and had shone with a brilliance which constituted that psychological problem. It would seem as if, deprived of the powers of bodily work, the brain had been excited to pour forth its greatest efforts, and live in a world which was peopled by imaginary objects, either good or bad. It seemed as if a body attacked by tuberculosis enabled the brain to have a freer rein, and to fly into those realms of thought and imagination which it was impossible for the mind tied down to earth by an earthly body, and its earthly pursuits, to attain.

The lecturer went on to speak of the symptoms displayed by, and the physical characteristics of, the consumptive, and said that mind and body reacted and inter-reacted one upon the other, and while a person was debarred from exercise which was natural to a healthy life, we must expect differences in temperament, and, corresponding with these, deficiencies. When we made allowances for these we found, nevertheless, a very typical psychological state, which could only be accounted for by some common causative agent. In so many consumptive patients the spirit was struggling to be free; the weak and

impotent body alone stood in the way. We had around us examples which we could study every day, and their wills could be controlled and brought into line with our own by a simple method. We must not be guilty of harshness when we laid down the simple rules for their guidance.

Dr. Varrier-Jones gave a number of interesting details of the lives of some well-known men, showing how they corresponded to the details regarding consumptives which he had enumerated. He first dealt with Robert Louis Stevenson and his long and pathetic struggle against his illness, and said that in his early years, when he spent many agonising nights of terror, the force of imagination was strong, the mind often flew through space, and drew pictures as vivid as any seen with the natural senses, and left a store of impressions which nothing could efface. The lecturer spoke of the extraordinary physical feats of writing performed by Stevenson, and said that one wondered if such energy could have been forthcoming without the aid of the tubercle bacillus. He next went on to speak of Francis Thompson and his privations, and said that in his life we had an example which typified the tuberculous genius of the highest order. Regarding Schiller, Nevinson wrote that "it is possible that the disease served in some way to increase his eager activity, and fan his intellect into keener flame." Certain phrases of Keats would seem to show that he apprehended the same influence, and Lanier gave himself up quite understandingly to the intoxication. The world ought never to give up the Thompsons for all their incapacities, the lecturer said in conclusion. Out of their very failures had come successful careers, and over physical degradation had they won victories and towered in intellectual glory. This was something which ought to be remembered by those who were so dogmatic in classifying our so-called defectives. They would not recognise a potential Thompson or a Verlaine, much less distinguish the types.

FRENCH FLAG NURSING CORPS.

Owing to stress of work in France, Sisters have been requisitioned. Candidates must be of pure British descent, hold a certificate of three years' training from a general hospital or infirmary, age 26 to 36, have good health, and speak French fairly.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick will interview candidates on May 6th and 7th at 431, Oxford Street, London, 2.30 to 4.30 p.m. Original certificates will be required.

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