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EDITORIAL.

A VENEREAL PREVENTION COMMITTEE— A NEW MOVEMENT.

Ever since, as Matron of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, upwards of thirty years ago, when it was our duty to visit daily the venereal wards in that institution, we have wondered at the criminal ignorance of the people on the horrors of this group of diseases, largely the result of a miserable and vulgar prudery, which we hope a few strong and great-hearted people will now combine to sweep away.

There are hopeful signs. The lay press no longer boycotts truth on this question of absolutely vital importance to the well-being of the people, and men and women are no longer afraid to acquaint themselves with details, and in realising tragedy, to brace themselves to help to prevent in the future the misery resulting from moral cowardice in the past.

We have always been sane on the venereal question, and call for punishment where the law dealing with cruelty has been violated. And for one human being to infect another, born or unborn, with venereal virus, calls for a punishment commensurate with the crime. But what is to be done where ignorance is so colossal, that thousands of human beings run horrible risks to health, happiness and life, without means of protection? They must be instructed and protected, and that brings us to the discussion on the principle of self-disinfection which is now dividing experts and others honestly desirous of stamping out this devastating disease.

A White Paper recently presented to the Ministry of Health contained the decision that the official recognition of self-disinfection in civilian venereal disease is "neither desirable nor practicable," and this decision has inspired a number of medical men to ask their fellow-citizens for the action which they consider urgently necessary, in the interests of the national and racial health, but which the official forces of the nation find themselves unable or unwilling to take.

These men, all trusted leaders in medical science and practice, have formed themselves into a Venereal Prevention Committee, and state in the Press:—

"There are evidently only three possible courses:—

(1) To take no action against venereal infection, apart from moral teaching.

(2) Delayed disinfection (early treatment centres).

(3) To teach and provide immediate self-disinfection.

We all agree in rejecting (1).

The White Paper recommends (2), but the provision of centres for delayed disinfection is not, and never can be, adequate. The London County Council, the greatest urban authority in the country, has rejected the scheme. No method is even suggested that could be worked in rural districts. The practical difficulties in town and country alike are insuperable. Time, the vital factor, is necessarily lost in every case.

There remains only (3), immediate self-disinfection. We maintain that venereal disease is thus preventible; that authoritative teaching on the subject is urgently required; and that the means, together with approved instructions for their use, should be readily accessible to the public.

We fail to recognise any moral distinction between the provision of delayed disinfection at centres and the provision of immediate self-disinfection, and we decline the grave moral responsibility of attempting to conceal the knowledge which is capable of saving myriads of the innocent, living and unborn, from the most hideous disease of body and mind."

The work of this Committee has our warmest sympathy, and we earnestly hope that the reasoned and authoritative statement which it has issued will so deeply impress both the Government and the public that adequate legislation may be speedily proposed and carried into full effect. Only by such means, enforced by an enlightened public opinion, can this terrible scourge be stamped out.

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