

# Royal British Nurses' Association.

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## LECTURE.

### COLOUR IN ITS PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS.

In introducing the lecturer on Saturday last, Baron Rosencrantz touched on points of contact between the artist and the nurse and spoke of the very deep study which Mr. Norton had made of colour from many different aspects. He had taken up the subject not as an artist who played with colour in order to produce certain effects on canvas, but from a point of view that was much wider than this.

In commencing his lecture, Mr. Norton said that the subject was one which had excited the interest of investigators from the earliest times. Empedocles, Aristotle, Plato and Diogenes were among the early writers and philosophers who sought to explain the nature of colour and vision. Among modern investigators were Newton, Brewster, Young, Helmholtz and Ogden Rood, whose investigations were conducted chiefly on the physical side; we have the Hering theory, which contradicts the physical theory in one very important point. Then there is Goethe's colour teaching, which is at variance with both physical and physiological theories which are current at the present time, and which deals with the psychical aspect of colour in an infinitely more comprehensive way than is to be found in scientific works on colour. Indeed, of the psychic quality of colour there is little feeling or understanding at present in scientific or artistic circles. Familiarity with the physical and physiological theories of colour, such as the Young-Helmholtz and the Hering theories, leave the seeker for truth in a very bewildered state, inasmuch as scientists are divided in opinion as regards the hypothetical ether on which the former theory is based, while the latter theory is based on three substances or sets of nerves of which there is no anatomical evidence.

What is one to do in such circumstances? One can only rely on one's own innate sense of truth and the facts of experience. Goethe constantly draws one's attention to *facts*, and if one pays attention to those no other conclusion than Goethe's is possible.

Colour is manifested to us as a consequence of sunlight, and our appreciation of it is gained through the organ of sight—the eye. The eye is maintained as an organ of sight by the sunlight;

without light there would be no vision. (Here Mr. Norton gave instances, such as the case of pit ponies, where blindness occurred as the result of living in the dark.) It is from the study of solar phenomena that we shall get a solution of the problem of colour, not from analysing a beam in a dark room, but by going to the source of colour, the sun. We observe sunlight through a semi-transparent medium, the atmosphere. The first mitigation of sunlight through the deepening of the atmosphere produces the sensation yellow. On the other hand, the darkening of infinite space appears blue to us because we see it through the same semi-transparent medium—the atmosphere. A further densification of atmosphere gives us the red of the setting sun. These are our primordial colour sensations—the two fundamental, yellow and blue, with the third red, and from these the rest of the colour sensations can be produced.

In connection with the physiological effects, if we gaze at the sun or a beam of light admitted into a dark room and then turn our gaze to the dark wall our after vision is accompanied by the appearance of colour; we see first a circular, colourless image; this circle will become tinged with yellow at the centre and at the same time the edge will become red; this will gradually cover the whole circle and at the same time the edge will appear blue. When the whole becomes blue the edge will darken and then the whole will disappear.

A colour is said to be complementary to another when the sensation evoked by their union is equivalent to their disappearance and approximates to light grey. We are so constituted that we no sooner behold a certain colour than we are induced to produce its complementary—if we see red on a white surface we evoke a green colour on the white and so on with all the colours; the eye ever seeks unity—the primal white light the source of its origin. *In any use of colour for curative purposes it is the complementary sensation evoked which is the determining factor, not that which is seen objectively.*

To turn to the psychological aspect of the subject, yellow radiates out and sets us back to the primal beginnings of things; then blue denotes movement; it seems to draw us ever upward and onward; and then comes red, the culminating point, self-contained movement. There are strong will impulses in these colours. They are the acting colours. In connection

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