

A WORD TO CARETAKERS OF CHILDREN.

THE "ENGLISH DISEASE": ITS CAUSE AND CURE.

Sir Henry Gauvain, M.D., M.Ch., &c., the Medical Superintendent of Sir William Treloar's Cripples' Hospital and College at Alton and Hayling Island, lecturing on "Light and Life," at the eleventh annual conference of the British Commercial Gas Association, held in Bristol on October 16th, said it was peculiarly gratifying to medical men to notice an increasing tendency of late years on the part of the public, and particularly the educated and intelligent public, to become acquainted with matters appertaining to public health. That feature had been accentuated by, though it ante-dated, the Great War, when we learned, as nothing else could have taught us, the sacredness and preciousness of human life. Many organisations and societies had been formed with the object of dealing with public health questions and enlightening the community on those means by which their health could be best preserved and disease prevented. "It is somewhat strange," the lecturer said, "that all the different features in connection with preventive medicine, one which has perhaps attracted less attention than many, is the question of light as regards health." Although they had been practising light therapy for many years at Alton, yet it was not until last summer that anything like considerable public interest was taken in that side of their work. But the glorious summer of 1921, which did so much good for the country, which bathed us in sunlight, brought home to the public the value of the sun, while the conspicuous absence of the sun last summer made us feel the need of it.

"The sun is the great source of all energy. It makes our rivers and our health-giving winds; it is the source of nearly every form of energy on this earth, and it is also an indispensable factor in our life. By its action on the green colouring matter of plants, the mysterious pigment, which exists in the lives of plants, has its physical energy converted into chemical energy, and the result of that conversion is the growth of plants, our green fields, our woods, our pastures, and from these the animal life of the world derives its strength."

A great deal of research had lately been done on the action of light with regard to the prevention of disease. Until quite recently rickets was thought to be a disease. It had been described by Dr. Saleeby as "one of the diseases of darkness," but it had been thought to be a disease due to deficiency in certain essential properties in the diet. It was known that if an animal were fed on a diet deficient in certain properties—vitamines and the like—that animal would acquire rickets—a disease so common in this country that it was called on the continent the "English disease." It had recently been shown that if an animal—for example, a rat—were given a diet deficient in those essential food substances,

and yet a diet that would enable life to be prolonged, that rat would acquire rickets; but if that rat were exposed for as short a period as fifteen minutes a day to sunlight, or even for three minutes a day to ultra-violet light, it would not acquire rickets.

With regard to tuberculous disease, the tubercle bacilli, which were the cause of more suffering and more loss of life than any other bacilli, were slain on exposure to light. These same bacilli would live in dark rooms, in our slums, and in our byres, for a long time—always having the potentiality of carrying disease and death—but the light would kill them. "Light has a great antiseptic power. Sunlight is the world's great antiseptic. Without the sun many disease germs would continue to exist which are now destroyed." One of the best descriptions of the value of sunlight that he had come across was to be found in the writings of Norman Davey. "The sun," he wrote, "is the great dispeller of ill-humours. He is the healer, the life-bringer. He is the only true doctor to the troubled mind. He is the best apothecary in the world. There is no tonic sold for gold over any chemist's counter so remedial as that celestial pick-me-up, which is poured for nothing at daybreak over the wide counter, which is the rim of the earth."

NURSING IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. THE FAILURE OF THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE G.N.C. ELECTION.

In reply to questions addressed to the Minister of Labour, as representing the Ministry of Health, by Major R. W. Barnett, M.P., which we published in full last week, relating (1) to the failure of the arrangements for the Election of representatives of nurses to the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, and (2) to the violation of the secrecy of the ballot by the provision of space on the back of the ballot paper for an identification number, Major Boyd Carpenter gave the following written answer:—

"The returning officer has reported that owing to a failure in the arrangements for despatching the voting papers, for which the Council's staff are in no way responsible, nearly 1,000 voting papers have gone astray, and he has been obliged to declare that the election must be held afresh where contests are involved. Three candidates have been returned unopposed, and for the remaining seats, therefore, ballot papers will be issued at the earliest possible date. The opportunity will be taken at the same time to correct the printer's error to which my hon. and gallant friend refers, by which the space for the number was incorrectly printed on the back of the ballot paper."

In the House of Commons on Monday, December 11th, the following question by Mr. F. Roberts received a written reply:—

QUESTION.

MR. F. ROBERTS asked the Minister of Labour, as

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