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EDITORIAL.

HEALTH IN THE TROPICS

A very important lecture on Health in the Tropics, with special reference to the responsibility of employers, together with a cinema demonstration, was given recently at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, by the Director, Sir Andrew Balfour. The moment seems an opportune one to emphasise also the responsibility of nurses in this connection. This may be considered from several points.

First, there is the preparation of the nurse for this special work, for it must be realised that one with only three years' general training is but ill-equipped for the task. Nurses should make a point of taking one of the excellent courses in tropical nursing now obtainable before they offer themselves for this special work, for they will be brought into contact, often in responsible charge with no doctor near at hand, with many diseases which they will not have seen in the course of a general training, and their knowledge, or ignorance, of symptoms and treatment may turn the balance of life and death with valuable lives. A nurse should, therefore, conscientiously qualify herself for this branch of work.

Next it behoves her in a tropical country to be careful as to her own health. First, because example is better than precept, and many people are apt to think such care unnecessary and tiresome, until they learn its importance by bitter experience; it is, therefore, a duty she owes to the community no less than to herself, for the maintenance of the public health at as high a level as possible is of the utmost moment in the tropics. A knowledge of tropical hygiene, of the danger of "a touch of the sun," and of the methods by which diseases peculiar to the tropics are to be avoided should be part of the equipment of the nurse no less than of the medical practitioner.

Sir Andrew Balfour, in the course of his lecture at the London School of Hygiene, said: "It is amazing the difference which good health makes to the tropical resident even if the climate be vile, the food unattractive, and the conditions of life calculated to worry and annoy him."

After referring to the important and life-saving discoveries of the last three decades in connection with malaria, blackwater fever, and yellow fever, the lecturer gave an interesting example of the effect of knowledge on industry in connection with diseases which specially attack the native races. Hookworm infection, Sir Andrew declared, need no longer be the curse of the agriculturist, and quoted in support of this a letter sent by an employer to the Director of the Medical and Health Department in Kenya Colony.

This employer wrote:—

"I think that the following facts *re* my labourers (Wadigo) will interest you:

"Last year, and during the first six months of this year, the highest weeding and clearing task that I was able to get done by my labourers was 450 square yards per day, and this after infinite trouble. The task was done unwillingly and the men were sulky and appeared to me to be unfit to do a fair day's work.

"On May 13th, 1928, as you no doubt remember, I took every man to your camp, where you gave them anti-hookworm treatment.

"At the present time these same labourers are doing a task of 1,000 square yards in heavier grass and bush and are doing it cheerfully."

It will therefore be seen that not only on the score of humanity, but from the point of view of Empire building, a knowledge of tropical diseases, of their cause and cure is an important asset. How much ignorance of the laws of health has affected the output of workers can only dimly be guessed, but chronic infection by the germs of malaria, hookworm, and other diseases is undoubtedly a cause of inertia and lethargy in native races.

To the nurse with a knowledge of tropical hygiene and the consciousness of what may be done in the prevention and cure of disease, life in the tropics is one of constant interest. The aim of the nurse is not to keep the beds of a hospital full of interesting cases, but as nearly empty as possible, because owing to the instruction given to both Europeans and natives in the management of their health and the hygiene of their surroundings, they do not succumb to preventable diseases. It is impossible to estimate how many lives have been saved by knowledge, for the quiet, everyday routine of sowing the seed, which in due time bears fruit, does not lend itself to spectacular statistics. And it is impossible to estimate how many lives are lost through ignorance, for nowhere is the danger of ignorance more deadly than in the tropics.

We commend to nurses when deciding to what branch of their profession they shall devote themselves, when they have become registered, to consider work in the tropics, where in many places nurses are urgently needed. As a rule conditions are pleasant, the members of the small European community amongst whom they find themselves located friendly, there is the joy of travel, and the thrill of seeing new countries. We do not desire to imply that the life is all *couleur de rose*, there is often deep tragedy, and the more one gets beneath the surface the more one realises its pathos. But we do say that tropical nursing offers to the nurse with a competent knowledge of hygiene, and inspired with the desire to eliminate preventable disease, a useful and satisfying life's work.

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