

## THE RACE IN DANGER.

### VENEREAL DISEASE REGULATION AND DEBATE IN THE COMMONS.

All the publicity possible should be given to the necessity for prevention of venereal disease, and the courageous debate in the House of Commons on December 16th last will ventilate the very serious extent to which the danger to national health has extended during the war.

Defence Regulation 33b, under which persons who spread venereal infection can, in certain circumstances, be subject to compulsory treatment, was implicitly approved by the House of Commons.

Dr. Edith Summerskill, who moved the address praying annulment of the Regulation, told the House that she did so because the Regulation proposed did no more than toy with an important problem, and gave very good reasons for advocating more drastic legislation.

Sir Ernest Graham Little, a specialist on the treatment of venereal disease, gave examples of the many causes of innocent infection. "Though modern methods of treatment may not always cure," he said, "they can render a victim non-infective. He counselled acceptance of the regulation as an instalment."

But Mrs. Tate opposed the regulation on grounds that it was inadequate, lacking in vision, and calculated to make people believe something was being done when it was not. If suffering from smallpox a woman would not be allowed to leave until her treatment had been completed. We must consider venereal disease of infinitely greater social importance than smallpox."

Sir Joseph Lamb said that venereal disease was no longer confined to towns. Since factories, hospitals and public institutions had moved to rural districts it was rampant all over the country. He urged the Minister of Health to act boldly.

Mr. Driberg complained at delay in launching the propaganda campaign. Many Members of Parliament took part in the debate. All to the good. The more publicity the better, and away with all false modesty. Let them make a point of discussing this national danger, worse than bombs, in their constituencies.

#### Reply of the Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health, in his reply to the debate, agreed that the spread of venereal disease was hindering war effort, adding that Regulation 33B was a war effort; he advocated a higher ethical standard and a fuller appreciation of spiritual value as the only complete and final solution of this problem, that personal purity was the only complete prophylactic. The Medical Research Council had refused the task of recommending what should be used by way of prophylactic. But it was agreed that the spread of accurate knowledge and voluntary and continued attendance for treatment must be encouraged in every way; but there was disagreement as to what further measures should be taken.

New infections with syphilis, which had fallen by 45 per cent. between 1931 and 1939, had risen by 47 per cent. between 1939 and 1941. Including Service

infections contracted in this country, the rise since 1939 had been 70 per cent., giving an incidence rate the same as that of 1932. The clock had been put back 10 years.

The three essentials of an attack on venereal disease were public education, adequate free treatment, and indirect action to discourage promiscuity. Education was the first essential and a sphere in which everyone could help. Finally, he challenged those members who had prophesied that the regulations would be ineffective. "I already have evidence that the mere appearance of the regulation has caused some who did not offer themselves for treatment in the years before the war to come forward. If the regulation should not succeed in its purpose I shall not hesitate to ask for further powers."

That sounds fair enough; but we have been interested in this question for a number of years, and whilst realising the difficulties we have arrived at the conclusion that the solution is more simple than it appears. We hang for murder, we imprison for manslaughter, we punish crime.

To infect a fellow human being with venereal disease is a crime, which may result in disease and death. Let it be so recognised and punished.

But the Law must be just. We must have all the publicity possible, the young must be instructed as to the danger of this poison, without hesitation or false modesty, and it is the duty of Parliament to provide every remedial agency in its prevention and cure.

#### Campaign against the Plague.

The Medical Profession is, of course, the first and most effective power in attacking the evil, and systematic action should be enforced. Let it be practical. First an explanatory leaflet should be drafted in very plain and simple language, explaining what venereal disease is, how contracted, and its terrible results to health. This leaflet should be widely distributed in the home, to parents, to teachers in schools and brought by doctors and nurses to the knowledge of the community. It should be made compulsory for all persons infected to declare their condition and submit to treatment until they are pronounced cured and free from infecting others.

This insidious evil, now rampant throughout the country, is a matter of national importance, threatening, as it does, the standard of national health from generation to generation. The demand of the "vile body" to eliminate the control of the spirit, must be resisted from the cradle to the grave. The moral law must control man's life in association with his fellow man, and failing obedience he must be punished. Let the campaign against this plague be practical, vigilant and fearless.

#### THE BEVERIDGE REPORT.

We learn from several of our correspondents that they really have not time to study the stupendous Beveridge Report and would be grateful for a summary. By kind permission we propose to republish in our next issue an admirable and explanatory criticism, by Mr. Herbert Tracey, which appears in the current issue of the *Mental Health Services Journal*.

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