

Many deaths ascribed to other causes are the direct consequence of syphilis. It cuts off life at its source, being a frequent cause of abortion and early death of infants. It slays those who otherwise would be strong and vigorous, sometimes striking down with palsy men in their prime, or extinguishing the light of reason. It is an important factor in the production of blindness, deafness, throat affections, heart-disease and degeneration of the arteries, stomach and bowel disease, kidney-disease, and affections of the bones. Congenital syphilis often leads to epilepsy or to idiocy, and most of the victims who survive are a charge on the State. This indictment against syphilis is by no means complete. The economic loss resulting from this disease is enormous as regards young, old, middle-aged. It respects not sex, social rank, or years.

Gonorrhœa is characterized in its commonest form by a discharge of pus from the urethra, and causes acute pain at its onset in the male, but in the female it commonly causes little or no discomfort. Unless carefully treated, and treated early, it gives rise to many complications, such as inflammation of the bladder, gleet, stricture, inflammation of joints, abscesses, and rheumatism. It is a common cause of sterility and of miscarriages, and, in the female, of many internal inflammations and disablement, and in its later effects requires often surgical operations on women. It is a very common disease, and the public know little of the evil consequences which may follow what they have persisted in regarding as a simple complaint. From its prevalence and its complications it is one of the most serious diseases that affect mankind.

As regards treatment of venereal disease of all kinds, it should be clearly understood that the causative germs are well known and can readily be destroyed immediately after exposure to infection by thorough cleansing with antiseptic lotion or ointment. The use of soap and water only would lessen the incidence of infection. On the first suspicious sign of venereal disease the patient should apply at once for medical advice. There are methods of diagnosis, such as microscopic examination and the Wassermann test, the result of recent discovery, which make diagnosis simple and certain; and if treatment is begun early according to modern methods, which are much more effective than the remedies formerly applied, the germs of infection are easily vanquished. When sufficient time, however, is lost to enable these germs to become entrenched in parts of the body not readily accessible to treatment, cure is difficult, prolonged, and perhaps in some cases uncertain.

For their own sakes, as well as for the sake of others, patients suffering from any form of venereal disease should continue treatment, which may be prolonged in the case of syphilis for two years, until their medical adviser is satisfied that further treatment is unnecessary.

Women suffer less pain than men in these diseases, and consequently are more apt to neglect securing medical advice and treatment, and more ready to discontinue treatment before a cure is effected.

SECTION 3.—ACCIDENTAL INFECTION.

Occasionally cases are met with in which syphilis is acquired innocently by direct or indirect contact with syphilitic material, and then the primary sore is often located on some other part of the body than the genitals. Thus the lip may be infected by kissing, or by drinking out of the same glass, or smoking the same pipe as a syphilitic patient. A medical witness reported a case to the Committee in which syphilis was conveyed to two girls "through a young fellow handing them a cigarette which he was smoking." Metchnikoff has proved that the spirochæta of syphilis is a delicate organism and quickly loses its virulence outside the human body, and it cannot enter the system through unbroken skin or mucous membrane. It is extremely doubtful if any form of venereal infection can be conveyed in food. Frequently venereal disease is deceitfully attributed by patients to innocent infection, and no doubt some genuine cases do occur, but how seldom is illustrated by the statement of the Officer in Charge of the V.D. Clinic at Christchurch, who said, "I cannot remember a case where I was absolutely certain that infection was acquired innocently or extragenitally."

Gonorrhœa may be conveyed innocently from infective discharge on a closet-seat, or from an infected towel, &c., and undoubtedly gonorrhœal discharge if brought into contact with the eye sets up a violent suppuration.

The Committee are of opinion that the extent of accidental infection is greatly exaggerated in the public mind, but a few cases occasionally occur, and the Committee recommend that there should be better provision of public conveniences, especially for women, and the U-shaped closet-seat should be adopted. The use of common towels and drinking-cups in railway-trains, schools, factories, and elsewhere is condemned not only for the reasons stated above, but on general sanitary grounds.

SECTION 4.—PREVIOUS INQUIRIES AND CONFERENCES.

After the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in England in 1886, various Committees and Royal Commissions, such as the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904, the Royal Commission on the Poor-laws in 1909, and the Royal Commission on Divorce in 1912, drew attention to the frightful havoc wrought by venereal disease, and urged that further action should be taken to deal with the evil. In 1913 the British Government appointed a Royal Commission to inquire into the prevalence of venereal diseases in the United Kingdom, their effects upon the health of the community, and the means by which these effects could be alleviated or prevented, it being understood that no return to the policy or provisions of the Contagious Diseases Acts was to be regarded as falling within the scope of the inquiry.

The Commission took a great deal of most valuable evidence, and did not present their final report until 1916. They recommended improved facilities for diagnosis and treatment, including free clinics. They came to the conclusion that at that time any system of compulsory personal notification would fail to secure the advantages claimed. The Commission added, however, "it is possible that the situation may be modified when these facilities for diagnosis and treatment [recommended by the