

SOCIAL HYGIENE.

(The following paper was read at a conference of various bodies on the Social Hygiene question.)

At a meeting on May 27th, 1918, a motion was carried unanimously in favour of legislation for the eradication of venereal diseases on the lines laid down in the following ten paragraphs. We give the pars. and comments upon them:—

1. "Notification of Venereal Diseases to be compulsory on the part of the medical attendant, but only if the patient does not satisfy the following conditions, Nos. 2 and 3."

Notification is not a punishment to certain people, who don't care if it were shouted from the house-tops, but to the vast majority, since the diseases carry a moral stigma, notification, however confidential, is a punishment. Then let it be used as such, and kept for those who, by carelessness of their own bodies, or those of others, deserve it. Segregation is not essential for the control of venereal diseases, as it is for the control of other infectious diseases, so long as the sufferer observes certain rules. The use of notification would be that he or she would be compelled to observe these rules, not necessarily that they must be isolated, being only notified if they fail to observe them.

2. "He or she must be efficiently treated."

Venereal disease is only easily or fairly easily amenable to treatment in the early stages, but that treatment must be efficient. One of the principal values of this proposed legislation would be that sufferers would seek treatment early.

The kind of treatment that would be looked on as 'efficient' treatment would have to be, and **can easily be**, laid down in the Act. **As a matter of fact the enacting of standard lines of efficient treatment would be of the utmost value as a guide to what is expected of the practitioner, and what will cure most effectively.** It would have to be laid down how often the sufferer must report to his medical adviser.

3. "They must not expose any person to the danger of infection."

4. "It is compulsory on the part of the medical attendant to inform the sufferer in writing of the facts contained in 1, 2, and 3, namely that he or she has the disease, must be ef-

ficiently treated, and must not infect others, and that notification is unnecessary so long as these rules are observed."

This would involve no more than the ordinary procedure carried out for ordinary notification of disease, in which the guardians or sufferer have to be helped.

5. "It is a criminal act to expose to infection or to infect any other person knowingly, and such intimation on the part of the medical attendant as outlined above, to constitute knowledge of a state of infectivity."

6. Failure on the part of the sufferer to respect these conditions renders immediate notification necessary to a duly constituted authority."

It will be said that perhaps a doctor might out of mistaken kindness, fail to notify a patient who ought to be notified.

No doubt it will be wise to make the authority some other person than the medical officer of health—perhaps a magistrate—so that the charge may be investigated before action is taken, but this can be settled easily. Otherwise, the ordinary rules that attach to the notification of ordinary infectious diseases will apply. Under these penalties are provided for failing to notify disease, which include suspension from practice for a period of months, if the charge is proved. The medical man would be just as open to such a charge as in the case of diphtheria; he would be just as easily found out, perhaps more easily, and the law will be upheld, if it is made, just as precisely in venereal diseases as in other diseases. **It will be found that medical men will do their duty, and it is a fact that the great majority of medical men are in favour of some form of notification.**

7. "The authority after due investigation of the charge, and after finding it proved, will either place the patient in a special clinique for treatment, or have him or her prosecuted for infecting others, or both, if necessary."

8. "It must be an offence under the Act for any person except a registered medical practitioner to treat venereal diseases, or to dispense drugs for venereal diseases, except on a registered practitioners' prescription, or to advertise drugs or treatment for venereal diseases."

The object of this is manifold. There is great danger that unqualified persons, such as druggists, may

tell the sufferer that he has the disease when he has not, or vice versa, that he has not got the disease when he has—or fail to recognise the disease at all, thus denying to the patient the extreme advantage of early treatment, and losing valuable time. In addition, the essential drugs **can only be administered by a qualified medical man as the methods of administration are highly technical.**

9. "Bacteriological and other diagnostic tests must be provided free by the State."

10. Free drugs and free treatment, and free specially-qualified doctors must be provided."

They are an integral part of the scheme; these last two sections go together. It is obvious that if the State requires a sufferer to be treated, it must provide the means free. These should not be in clinics, which are specifically labelled as venereal, as this is a more or less public advertisement of what a person goes there for.

It might be, however, that a person of either sex might be too poor to afford the proper skilled treatment, and yet too proud to go to a public institution. This is where the provision of free examination of clinical material, free blood tests, and free drugs comes in. In an ordinary case, when giving advice, the doctor is not out of pocket, except for time. In venereal cases it is not so. The clinical and bacteriological tests are very expensive, so also are the drugs. If he has to provide these, he may suffer severe money loss. But if he were able to obtain these free, the treatment of the patient would then resolve itself into such as would (as in ordinary practice) involve only the risk of loss of time.

Further, the provision of free tests, drugs, and free doctor would do away with any allegation that the doctors were playing into their own hands for profit.

It is useless to allege that some would rather go untreated than apply to doctors. If they did so, they must be few. In any case, their sufferings would speedily overcome their reluctance.

It is also useless to argue that one is powerless if the disease is concealed, or that if, for instance, an infected person does not complain of being infected, one is stultified. You might just as well say don't try to