

PREVENTIVE MEDICINE

By Dr. OLIVE STAPLETON

In India, as in other countries, nurses are consulted about a variety of health subjects and are expected to be a mine of information about many things which only come on the fringe of their curriculum. Also nowadays in this country, nurses are beginning to have the opportunity of specialising in definite branches of their profession which up to now have been very neglected, *e.g.*, anti-tuberculosis and anti-V.D. work. Hence this article on a subject for which very little has been done in India up to now, as action cannot be put in advance of public opinion and cannot begin until there is a demand for it. We have heard a great deal lately about the danger of tuberculosis and the rapid spread that is occurring and the numbers of deaths that take place every year, but we hear very little of another group of diseases which cause just as great ravages to the population of India and are even more prevalent than tuberculosis and bring misery to countless households year by year, and which could be checked if only people cared enough and knew enough of the problem.

Here in India it is no new problem, and venereal diseases have been present so long that people are largely indifferent to them, and refuse to face the facts and take the blame when the happiness of a home is utterly spoiled because the wife is sterile owing to gonorrhoea, the disease having been acquired by her husband when he was a thoughtless youth, or because all the pregnancies have come to an untimely end or the children have died early because of untreated syphilis, acquired from the same source. Even when treatment is consented to, it is usually taken very half-heartedly and left off long before cure is effected, as nurses can see for themselves as they attend the Out-door Department of any hospital. Hence the need of education of the lay public on this subject, and in this nurses have a large part to play. It is a question of preventive medicine largely and one that concerns moral and social hygiene, so that a great deal of the work to be done is in the form of propaganda, helping the people of India to see that if they want to build up a strong healthy nation, they cannot afford to neglect so important a group of diseases, which destroy the health of so many families in such insidious ways.

It is very little good only providing special clinics for venereal disease, through these are badly enough wanted and exist in infinitesimally small numbers in India. What is needed is the creation of a strong public among the young people, that the customs which lead to prostitution are utterly wrong, and that not only will they themselves do nothing to encourage prostitution but they will do all in their power to spread knowledge and so replace darkness by light.

But before they can start to do this, they must have the knowledge themselves and up to now it has not been always easy to get it, as parents and teachers have often been unwilling or

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incapable of discussing such subjects with their families and pupils.

In this country, however, a society has been working in a quiet way for the last twenty years on this subject and is always willing to give help and advice in many ways. It has rather a cumbersome name—The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene—but that need not prevent people from seeing what help it can give. Its Secretary is a mine of information about many aspects of the subject, and among other things she can provide the names of books for teaching the simple facts of life to little children in such ways that they can easily assimilate it, as it is known that this is the best age for the child to learn the main facts of sex and so be enabled to grow up with a healthy outlook on the subject, and not pick up an incomplete knowledge of the subject from various undesirable sources and so keep an attitude of unhealthy curiosity towards it. She can also give the names of books suitable for older people, nurses, teachers and parents, to help them to prepare talks for children in the 'teens, to encourage them in the ways of health in a very broad sense, and to forewarn them against the time when they go off to work away from home or to college and come up against social problems and temptations which they may little understand and so easily fall victims to.

If trained nurses and health workers would take the trouble to study such literature, they could do a great deal to help in a real national campaign and be of the greatest service to India. At first there are sure to be certain difficulties, but if those who know the importance of the subject and have the welfare of this great country truly at heart, will not let themselves be discouraged but take every opportunity to spread the knowledge they themselves have, lead or join in discussions at women's meetings and be prepared to give help to young people, teachers and parents whenever possible, then the light will gradually spread and the misery, which at present exists so widely, will be steadily lessened.

The following books will be found useful:—

Published by the Association Press (Y.M.C.A.), Calcutta.

The Child in the Midst, by Mrs. Bryce, M.A. Re.1.

Comrades of the Road, by Mrs. Bryce, M.A. Re.1-4-0.

Published by the Christian Literature Society, Madras.

Anand's Question, by Miss B. C. Oliver, M.D. As.5.

A Clean Heart, or Lessons on Motherhood, by Mrs. West, B.A. As.6.