Notes, Short Comments, and Answers to Correspondents.

SOME RACIAL PROBLEMS, SOCIAL EVILS, AND MODERN CRUSADES.¹

BY ROBERT B. WILD, M.D., M.Sc., F.R.C.P.,

DEAN OF THE MEDICAL FACULTY, UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER, ETC.

THE need for a clear appreciation of the factors involved in racial evolution is shown by many modern movements designed to improve the conditions of life, the welfare of the individual, and to produce a strong and virile race; on every hand there are crusades against predominant diseases, admitted or supposed social evils, and various forms of racial degeneration. One of my former teachers—a great master of medicine—Sir W. Roberts, used to impress upon us as the most important maxim in therapeutics never to order a dose of medicine without considering, “Can it possibly do harm?” This admirable caution is equally advisable before applying remedies to the body-politic as well as to the individual, for we must remember that the present conditions of life are the result of generations of growth and represent a balance of factors which has been slowly arrived at and which may more easily be disturbed than readjusted.

While I am far from wishing to make any attack upon these crusades, and least of all upon the sincere, well-meaning, and often altruistic persons who lead them, I do think it is important to consider their racial as well as their individual effects. The welfare of a particular individual may not always be coincident with the best interests of the nation or race to which he belongs.

The Regeneration of the Race.

The first racial problem which has to be faced is the need of every nation for a due supply of healthy children to replace the wastage of war and its aftermath of disease and starvation. Before the war the falling birth-rate of almost all the more highly civilised nations was a cause of anxiety to many. Possibly an increasing complexity of civilisation with greater demands for the development of the nervous system may have some influence upon the capacity for reproduction. Also the greater demands of social life and the expense and difficulty of maintaining and housing a family tend to raise the age of marriage until a sufficient income is assured with a consequent shortening of the child-bearing period. In many countries also these difficulties lead to the deliberate limitation of families or the procuring of abortion by illegitimate means. It is possible that in the future the community may be driven to protect itself by insisting upon a registration of pregnancy; even now in Scotland under certain circumstances the concealment of pregnancy is an indictable offence.

One of the handicaps which all nations have to carry is the burden of supporting unproductive members of the community or of maintaining during the period of growth and adolescence a number of children who die before they can repay to the nation, by their work, the cost of their rearing and education. Any widespread disease which removes individuals at a time when their working powers are on the wane and before they become a burden on the community is an advantage, and a disease which destroys the individual in early adolescence is a serious handicap.

Tuberculosis and Cancer Contrasted.

The crusade against tuberculosis can do nothing but good. I think, however, that too much is made of the bacillus and too little of the environment; it is pre-eminently a case where preventive medicine has an open field. The great increase of tuberculosis which appears to be so marked a feature in the countries of Central Europe which have suffered most from malnutrition, and its progressive increase as food became less and less plentiful, will, as its special incidence is carefully studied, undoubtedly lead to a better knowledge of its ætiology, and we may find that a deficiency of some vitamin factor in the food is responsible for a decrease in the resisting power of the tissues to the invasion of the tubercle bacillus. In this connexion it is interesting to note a paper by Dr. B. G. M. Baskett,² in which he shows how the death-rate from tuberculosis through a long series of years varies with the rise and fall of real wages, by which he means the relation between the wage paid and the price of food.

We may contrast with tuberculosis another disease of great importance—namely, cancer—against which we have also a crusade. Although cancer may attack patients at all ages, the great majority of cases occur in later middle life, when most of the sufferers have already done the greater and most productive part of their life's work. Their deaths at a time when they are likely soon to become a burden on the community lighten the load of unproductive consumers which the community has to carry, and cancer is therefore by no means an unmixed evil so far as the national welfare is concerned. If cancer was found to be curable or preventable to-morrow one of the results would be within a few years an enormous increase in the cost of old-age pensions. Similarly, conditions such as arterio-sclerosis are disastrous for the individual, but not to the race. An increase in the number of those who linger on to die by the slow process of senile decay is not a gain to the nation, and it has been said that “those who are noted as centenarians are rarely noted for anything else.” Mere length of days without corresponding length of service is not a desirable aim from the point of view of racial welfare.

Venereal Disease.

The crusade against venereal disease, though of great benefit to the individual sufferer, may do more harm than good. I do not want to enter to-day into the question of prophylactic packets and cleansing stations, but would merely quote the old tag, “The means at hand to do ill deeds oft makes the ill deeds done.” The true remedy for venereal disease, and also for that other social evil prostitution, is the encouragement of early marriage and the institution of such conditions of living as to facilitate the rearing of a family. Tennyson put his finger on a great evil when he wrote over 60 years ago—

“Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth
Cursed be the social lies that blind us to the living truth.”

Many years ago I was much struck by the curious fact that venereal disease was particularly widespread in the most highly civilised and advanced nations of the world, and was forced to the conclusion that at any rate racial progress is not incompatible with considerable syphilitic infection. The association of syphilisation with civilisation is probably due to the fact that extensive promiscuity of sexual relations can only take place in comparatively large communities, and it is only in such communities that we find the combination of individuals for mutual defence, mutual help, and specialisation of function, which is the first foundation of civilisation. In a community where the competition is keen the members of it infected by venereal disease—generally speaking those individuals whose passions are strongest and moral control weakest—are at a disadvantage, and in comparison with the non-infected they are likely to leave fewer offspring and these less likely to reach a healthy maturity. Venereal disease therefore, if not too widespread, is not an unmixed evil for the race.

Eugenics.

Another crusade designed to raise the quality of the population is the cultivation of eugenics. As yet, however, any general application of the principle of eugenics is wanting, and it is likely to remain wanting until there is some agreement as to what is the ideal for which it is desirable to breed. The principles of heredity are still largely speculative, but in practice all breeders know that the first requisite for success is to have a clear idea of the object to be attained; for example, we may breed horses or pigeons for speed, flowers for colour or scent. But the aims of the eugenic expert in the regulation of human breeding are not yet agreed on. Some would breed for physical development, some for “the will to power,” some for mental qualities. Among the latter, disagreement soon comes in, for to some the desirable type appears to be the quick alert mind ready to see immediate issues and turn them to practical use; to others the more highly developed intellectuality which works more slowly, takes longer views, and is the basis of scientific progress; while for a third group the progress of the world is bound up in a more highly developed emotional capacity with an advance of the spiritual life towards the religious ideal and of the altruistic as opposed to material interests. It may be possible to breed with more or less success for any one of these ideals, but not for all, and it is futile to expect any general agreement on the choice to be made. There is an old Lancashire saying that “It taks aw sorts o’ foke to mak a world,” and probably our present methods of sexual selection give, on the whole, as good results as would be obtained by a more conscious and deliberate method.

Drug Addictions.

I now pass on to another social evil of the widest importance and the subject of endless controversy—that of drug addiction. It is not always easy to say what is a drug addiction or that it is necessarily an evil. For example, the medicinal use of thyroid or the dietetic use of purins or alcohol may lead to habits of which the border is hard to

¹ Abridged from a Presidential Address delivered before the Manchester Medical Society, Feb. 4th, 1920.

² Brit. Med. Jour., Jan. 10th, 1920.

define. However, I wish to confine myself to a few of the more important drugs, producing either a narcotic or a stimulant action on some part of the central nervous system or the autonomic ganglia. Many hypotheses have been put forward as to how drug addictions arise, and every one of them may be right. I only wish to mention four. The late Dr. Norman Kerr looked upon the addiction to drugs as a definite disease closely allied to insanity, to which he gave the name "narcomania." The late Sir William Roberts classed the narcotics and stimulants in habitual use as "euphoric agents," and put down their employment simply to the pleasurable sensation of well-being which temporarily followed their use. Dr. Harrington Sainsbury says: "We fly to drugs and we initiate habit either to escape a distress of mind or of body, or to secure a pleasure; in some cases both objects are attained." This is often true, but I agree with Herbert Spencer's statement that in many people in a civilised state "the activities are cerebral in a degree beyond that to which the constitution of the race is adapted." To many people even the ordinary tasks of daily life produce a sense of exhaustion, which is temporarily relieved either by a narcotic which dulls the highest perceptive powers or by a stimulant which rouses the over-fatigued brain to additional effort; some find the one method, some the other, the more effective.

At first probably recourse to these drugs is only made to relieve an exceptional strain or a blighting monotony of occupation, but as the indulgence is repeated more and more frequently the habit is acquired and the regular action of morphine, cocaine, alcohol, caffeine, or nicotine becomes essential to that smooth working of the functions of the body which gives rise to the feeling of euphoria or well-being. A stopping of the habitual drug is like the stopping of the lubricant in a machine; there is in working friction instead of smoothness, and the result of the disturbed functional activities is that severe symptom-complex of deprivation which we know as a "craving," and which leads to a larger dose of the drug by which the symptoms are quickly relieved. Thus the victim is led deeper and deeper into the power of the drug until all interest in life beyond that of satisfying his craving is gone, and to do this successfully he counts the world well lost. When this stage is reached his or her value as a citizen is gone, and, though it may seem a hard saying, the community is best served by his early death.

Of the narcotic drugs by far the most important is alcohol. The high-water mark of alcoholic consumption in this country—one of the highest in the world—was reached in 1900, when the estimate per head of total population was 32 gallons of beer, 1.22 gallons of proof spirits, and 0.42 gallons of wine. In 1913, the last full year before the war, it had fallen to 27 of beer, 0.67 of spirits, and 0.24 of wine. Later statistics are of no value as they are vitiated by variations in the alcoholic strength and the absence from the country of so large a proportion of men. It is now proved that alcohol is not a stimulant but a selective narcotic, which paralyses certain centres earlier than others, notably the centres for the perception of pain and discomfort, whether bodily or mental, and also the centres of inhibition.

Of the evil effects of the abuse of alcohol there is no need to speak, but we may ask whether there are any compensating advantages to the moderate users? First, of course, there is some food value. Alcohol can replace a considerable proportion of the carbohydrates and fats of the food, and it may also aid appetite and digestion, and enable otherwise unpalatable food to be enjoyed. In many monotonous occupations, and in times of stress, alcohol can enable work to be carried on for a time which would otherwise be impossible. It will, when taken after work, afford relaxation to the mind and promote a feeling of euphoria. It makes many men contented with their work who would otherwise rebel. One result of its action on the brain is by relaxing inhibition to promote freer social intercourse and mutual coöperation. It is not for nothing that dinners play so large a part in raising funds for charitable objects.

The Effect of Alcohol on the Race.

As regards the effect of alcohol upon the race it was long ago said that "alcohol was nature's finest sieve for the sifting of the fit from the unfit," and we can easily see that the consumers of alcohol are handicapped in the race for the highest places. First, there is the economic handicap, for as a food alcohol is expensive, and those who buy it have the less to spend on other necessities which may be to their advantage. Secondly, though it may enable men to do work which they could not do without its aid, yet work done under its influence is less perfectly done, and they fail to reach the highest standard. Thirdly, those who from lack of self-control give way to excess in its use fall lower and lower in the social scale. As the pronounced alcoholic families tend also to die out in the course of a few generations, we can see that the indefinite continuance of the race is continued in the main by those members of the nation who are able to withstand the temptations of alcohol. Whether these and possibly other advantages outweigh the loss to the com-

munity, occasioned by the incapacity, sickness, and early death of those who take excess, must be a matter of individual opinion, but we shall all, before long, have to act upon our convictions as to whether the use of alcohol in this country shall be prohibited or allowed. Meanwhile, we shall all watch with the greatest interest the experiment now on trial in America. I doubt whether prohibition in this country would deprive the habitual alcoholic of his stimulant. We have had for some years a prohibition as close as possible of opium, morphia, and cocaine, and yet we find a considerable number of victims to these drugs. Where a law is opposed to the feelings of any large number of the community it is certain to be evaded, as in the old days when smuggling carried with it but little social stigma, and few people scrupled to take advantage of smuggled goods when they had the chance; a somewhat similar and recent example of the same kind is the law passed a few years ago to restrain juvenile smoking, and we all know the futility of the law designed to prevent unqualified dental practice. Any law which is evaded is worse than none, as its evasion produces a general lowering of that respect for law which is the basis of government.

I should like to quote you the conclusions arrived at by Dr. Harrington Sainsbury in his book on "Drugs and the Drug Habit"; he says:—

"For the principle of local option there is much to be adduced, but when all is said and done it is a tyranny—the tyranny of a majority, and when there is a bare preponderance it may be an unjustifiable tyranny. May it therefore be commended to the prohibitionist or abolitionist: 1. That temperance promises a higher moral yield than total abstinence. 2. That the aim of all education should be to develop character, to create a people strongwilled for good. 3. That it is possible to pay too high a price for sobriety and that this excessive price is paid when liberty of action is forfeited."

Of all narcotics ethyl alcohol is the least harmful, and we have already had evidence that its prohibition is likely to be followed by a resort to more harmful drugs.

Other Drugs.

Opium and morphia are the cause of even more serious results to the individual, but the number affected in this country is too small to have any appreciable effect on the race. Indian hemp, either as hashisch, gunja, or churrus, has never taken root in England, but it is widely used in our Asiatic dependencies and the neighbouring countries, and produces effects which are in some respects intermediate between those of alcohol and opium, with a marked tendency to cause insanity.

Of the other narcotics which give rise to habit I will only mention chloral hydrate, veronal, and sulphonal. It is less commonly known that acetanilide, in the form of headache powders, may give rise to a habit, and that aspirin is becoming increasingly popular as a pick-me-up. What the consequences of habitual aspirin taking may eventually be I do not know, as it is only of recent development, but I have seen cases of distinct craving for it. I want especially to call attention to this class of drugs, as the habit of taking them seems to be on the increase of late years, and the interesting point arises as to whether there is any connexion between this increase and the decrease in the consumption of alcohol since 1900.

Of nerve stimulants cocaine is probably the worst drug addiction we have to deal with. It is a direct stimulant to the brain, and the sense of euphoria produced is more intense than that produced by any other drug, hence its great seductive power. I have seen many cases, and three past students of my own either committed suicide or had to be sent to an asylum as a result of cocaine. The oxy-purin bases, caffeine, theobromine, and theocine, are so closely allied to the food constituents and so universally taken that many people do not recognise that they are taking drugs at all, and, moreover, they are drugs of comparatively recent introduction to our race. It is also worth noting that allied purin compounds, such as xanthin, hypoxanthin, and guanin, are present in considerable quantity in meat extracts, which are also coming more into use as popular stimulants and beverages. Physiologically the effects of a cup of beef tea or bovril is almost identical in kind with the effects of a cup of tea or coffee or cocoa.

It is an interesting subject of speculation how mankind in so many parts of the world has discovered and used the oxy-purin alkaloids, as the plants containing them have no characteristic smell or taste which might betray their presence to uncivilised people, and yet we find them in use all over the tropical parts of the world where perhaps the exhaustion produced by excessive heat is best relieved by a nerve stimulant. These bases are pure cerebral stimulants, especially to the intellectual faculties, they remove the sense of fatigue, and often enable work to be done under adverse conditions. Unlike alcohol, they do not impair the quality of the work.

Are there any bad effects to set off against these benefits? There is the possibility that by allowing work to be continued when the feeling of fatigue is an indication that rest is urgently required may lead to a nervous breakdown. Many

authorities also consider that the coincidence of a large increase of functional nervous diseases, especially neurasthenia, with the increased consumption of tea is more than a coincidence. Also a persistent high blood pressure often said to result in early arterio-sclerosis. Of the bad effects of excessive tea and coffee drinking we have all had experience, and I have seen several cases of acute poisoning with intense restlessness, garrulity, and absence of sleep, with a pulse of 160, followed by extreme exhaustion.

Another drug addiction is that of nicotine, next to caffeine the most universal of all, and which is also the subject of a crusade, which apparently makes little headway.

Conclusion.

Probably neither caffeine nor nicotine is a serious handicap to the nation at present, for our competitive nations are equally affected by these addictions. If the use of these drugs enables more and better work to be done and diminishes the dependence of old age by an earlier wearing out of the arterial tissues the nation will gain at the cost of the individual, and in peace as in war the welfare of the individual should be sacrificed for the good of the race.

In trying to bring before you some of the problems with which we are faced at the present time I suggest that it is necessary for us as medical men to take a broad and unsentimental view of the issues which will confront us in our work. If in the future the work of a medical man is to be more preventive than curative he will have to think more of the community and of the race than he has done in the past without thinking less of the individual.

ST. GEORGE'S HOSPITAL MEDICAL SCHOOL: THE PUPILS' REGISTER.

THOSE who are interested in the hospital and school will be glad to hear that their register is now ready for the press, and the Dean will be glad if anyone who wishes to subscribe for a copy will communicate with him. It is difficult at the present time to give any indication as to how much the book will cost, but it seems impossible to expect that it can be published at less than one guinea and it may very likely cost 30s. The book consists of a transcription of all the names (6500 in all) on the pupils' register from 1752 to 1918, with annotation notes on the men about whom it has been possible to find out anything. Among the famous names included in the work will be found those of John Hunter, Mathew Baillie, Thomas and Robert Keate, Sir Benjamin Brodie, Sir Prescott Hewett, Henry Gray, Frank Buckland, Edward Jenner, Sir Everard Home, and the two Gunnings; among those St. George's pupils whose names are not so likely to be known as alumni of the old school occur the names of Thomas Addison, Bence-Jones, John Gale Jones (the political agitator at the time of the French Revolution), Charles and George Hawkins, H. W. Bellew, and Aloyse Sprenger. It is hoped that it will be possible to reproduce photographic representations of the entry cards of old pupils, of which the school possesses a very complete collection of the various types of cards issued at different times, and also the house surgeon's certificate of 1769, presented to Thomas Keate by the board of governors. Dr. G. C. Peachey has written a foreword on medical education in the metropolis during the eighteenth century, in which he incorporates the names of those early pupils of the hospital whose names are to be found in the minutes of the weekly board, with annotation notes on many of them. The Dean would be glad to have the names of intending subscribers before the end of the year.

LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND SANITATION IN BIHAR AND ORISSA, 1918-19.

THE local administrative measures that are now delegated to the municipal and district authorities in the provinces of India are gradually becoming operative on the material and sanitary conditions of the people, who until recently were almost entirely without knowledge of, or interest in, such matters. In Bihar, at the elections of municipal commissioners in the towns, the number of votes recorded in nearly all cases exceeded 60 per cent. of the electorate, and the number of meetings held in most instances fulfilled the statutory requirement. Progress in action is, however, slow, and the Lieutenant-Governor regrets to note the apathy in many municipalities, of which 46 out of a total of 56 now possess autonomy. In Patna, however, the chief city of the province, which has a population of over 136,000, there was a marked change, the elections being hotly contested. The incidence of taxation in the province averages 1 rupee 12 annas per head (say, 2s. 4d.), which cannot be considered excessive; the expenditure on conservancy operations amounted to Rs. 875,015 (say, £58,334). It is unfortunate that there should be a dearth of men qualified to hold the appointment of health officer: out of 12 municipalities, for which the Government have undertaken to pay the full cost of the appointment, only 6 possess this necessary officer. It is hoped that shortly improved conditions may be offered to properly qualified men. In the rural areas of the province the growth of self-government is

naturally slower; it depends, first, on the extension of the elective system to local boards; and, secondly, on the formation of "union committees," which have power to enforce adequate measures for the preservation of the public health. The efficiency of these committees "depends largely on the existence of a public spirit, which is as yet less common than it ought to be." *Chi va piano va sano* is probably as true here as elsewhere.

THE DANGEROUS REVOLVER AGAIN.

MANY fatal accidents as well as crimes due to the carrying of revolvers have been chronicled in THE LANCET, and presumably many cases of injury remain unrecorded by the press. The following is a good example of the ownership of pistols by persons who, to put the case mildly, can give no good excuse for carrying or using such weapons. A carman charged with murdering his brother by shooting him was recently acquitted at the Central Criminal Court, and it is possible, if not probable, that his account of the affair was a true one. He said that he was standing drink to his brother, and that having called for five glasses of beer he put his hand in his coat pocket to find a Treasury note wherewith to pay. He "did not know that the revolver was in his pocket," and in pulling it out discharged it, with the fatal result stated. A carman with Treasury notes and a forgotten revolver loose together in the pocket of his coat, and in a public-house, sounds as if he might be dangerous to more than his personal friends. To prevent the carrying of weapons may not be easy; at present it is not unlawful. In the instance cited the man may have failed to have a gun-licence, but subject to that he has been acquitted of manslaughter as well as of murder, and has committed no offence.

LEBANON MENTAL HOSPITAL.

Dr. H. Watson Smith, O.B.E., director of the Lebanon Hospital for Mental Diseases, Syria, states in his annual report that 109 patients (68 men and 41 women) were admitted to the hospital during the year. Thirty-five were discharged cured, 14 improved, 16 did not improve, 8 patients were found to be not insane, and 12 deaths occurred. At the end of March there remained in hospital 85 patients, an increase of 24 over the figures for last year. Recently there has been an increase in the number of acute cases, many of which were soldiers sent by the French military authorities, and in these the results of treatment have been gratifying. The general health of the hospital, Dr. Smith reports, is good, and there is a fairly good supply of food and medicines, but after the war period much is needed for the general improvement and repair of the institution. The London offices of the Lebanon Hospital are at 35, Queen Victoria-street, E.C.

RATS IN HOUSES: SOUTHWICK v. STANTON.

IN an action in the county court a plaintiff claimed damages, alleging a breach by the defendant of an implied condition under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, and the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act, 1909, that a house let to him by the defendant was reasonably fit for human habitation. It was alleged that the house was overrun by rats from a neighbouring sewer, which destroyed clothing belonging to the plaintiff, as well as provisions kept by him in a small room, which he used as a shop. The county court judge found as a fact that the house was, owing to the continuous presence of rats, unfit for habitation, and following the old case of *Campbell v. Wenlock*, a case of a house infested by bugs, that the implied condition applied to the whole house, and that there had been a breach of it if any of the rooms were unfit for habitation. The divisional court held that the county court judge was wrong, and that an incursion by rats did not constitute a breach of the defendant's contract under the Housing, Town Planning, &c., Act. The appeal raised points as to the rats having invaded the house from adjoining premises, and not being continuously there, and also as to the use as a shop of the part which they entered. There was another question also as to the extent of the remedy if the house were to be held unfit for habitation. The case, therefore, does not appear to go so far as to say that the presence of rats cannot make a house unfit for human habitation. Apparently, however, their presence must be continuous, and must make itself felt in rooms used for human habitation and not merely as store-rooms or for trade. Rats are more likely to be found as visitors than as continuous inhabitants of any house, but that their presence is highly undesirable from a sanitary point of view there can be no question. Their habits and the various methods for dealing with them are described in a convenient form in Dr. W. J. Howarth's "Report on Rat Repression in the City," commented on in THE LANCET of June 26th, p. 1374.

J. R. (Crawley).—We are afraid the case you mention is of no pathological interest.

M. F.—The Swiss Passport Office is now conveniently situated for doctors at No. 10, Upper Wimpole-street, London, W.1.