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Government and Medical Service

In a recent public address* Rao Bahadur Dr A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar observed that:

“Occasionally a discordant note is struck and not infrequently the criticism is levelled against scientific workers that their work is not immediately of benefit to the crying needs of the country, and has no practical value to Statesmen and Politicians, or that their work has only led to the discoveries being utilised for increasing the destructive forces against humanity. That either of these criticisms is not justified will be apparent to any student of science.”

Almost simultaneously Lord Rayleigh in the second part of his presidential address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science remarked:

*The Sri Krishnarajendra Silver Jubilee Lecture, 1938, University of Mysore.

“Science, it is urged, is the source of all the trouble: and we may look to scientific men for some constructive contribution to finding a remedy. It is worthwhile to enquire what basis there is for this indictment, and whether in fact, it is feasible for men of science to desist from labours which may have a disastrous outcome, or at any rate to help in finding other men to use and not to abuse the fruits of those labours.”

Science is primarily the study of Nature in all her moods and tenses and her gifts are absolutely unmoral. They acquire an adjectival character only when man hastens to stand noun substantive to them. The business of science is neither to kill nor to save human life. Its only function is to add to the general stock of knowledge. When we apply this knowledge to human affairs, questions of value arise. In view of the abuse made of certain branches of scientific knowledge, leading to the destruction of civil populations, scientists may perhaps consider the desirability of reverting to the ancient practice of hiding their light under communal bushels; and it may not be unwise to do so, because human society in the middle of the twentieth century is still like a giddy-minded girl whose wisdom has not kept pace with the accumulation of fortunes. It looks as though a new type of society has to merge into being for handling the gifts of science without reproach and with beneficence for all.

The Jubilee address was set in a historical background, and the main thesis was “that while curative medicine has

got a large part to play in alleviating the suffering and relieving the distress of individuals, it is in the wider field of preventive medicine that the real solution lies for the eradication of disease”. Illness has an economic aspect which ought to receive comparatively wider attention in the programme of measures devised by society and governments for ensuring the health and happiness of the civil populations. It must be borne in mind that the economic loss comprehends not only the monetary cost of combating ill-health, but also the diminishing return due to sickness. If these two sides are added together in order properly to show the purely financial or numerical assessment of the cost of ill-health to the nation, governments may be induced to make a far greater contribution towards the prevention and speedy relief of sickness or disablement in the social community, whose health represents its prosperity.

The efforts of the medical profession and of governments are easily nullified by individual ignorance and unwisdom. We consider that more than “Ward-raising” our schools, a definite curriculum for the inculcation of health habits in the elementary schools, the instruction in biology, hygiene and health knowledge in the higher stages, and the encouragement and training in health wisdom in the later years of education would seem to be urgently called for, and such a policy might undoubtedly prove more significant to the interests of the community, than the futile efforts to solve the “Babeldom” of India.