

WHOLESALE TONSILECTOMY.

IS IT JUSTIFIABLE?

The article on tonsilectomy by Miss Alix Churchill, M.B., B.S.Lond., in THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING for January 13th, 1923, will doubtless cause considerable concern to many lovers of children.

In recent years there has been growing up an intelligent body of medical, surgical, and nursing experts, who deprecate the light-hearted manner in which children (chiefly those of the poor) are subjected to an extremely painful operation of very dubious utility.

Miss Churchill herself states, and rightly, that "lymph glands are scattered throughout the body as a mechanism of defence; when germs gain a foothold in the organism they are carried to the nearest glands and there destroyed. If the germs are too numerous or powerful they set up suppuration in the glands; with a lesser degree of virulence they give rise to chronic inflammation; the enlarged gland becomes a septic focus, from which poisons are poured into the blood."

The method she recommends is not to treat the primary cause of the toxic gland but to remove the gland itself, and so, in fact, to deprive the body of a valuable natural means of defence against invading bacteria. Or, in other words, it is comparable to refusing to use a filter for straining an impure water supply because the filter becomes "a septic focus." Surely the remedy is either to improve the water or to cleanse the filter, *not to scrap it!*

Anyone who has worked among children of school age is familiar with the frequency with which adenoid tissue and tonsils are removed, and with the lamentable sequelæ which so often follow. The recurrence of constant "sore throats," swollen glands, and the not unusual second or even third operation to throat or nose.

These things are common knowledge, but those who cannot obtain direct information by attending school clinics and hospital out-patients' departments might usefully study *Truth's* article of November 8th, 1922, "The Children's Torture Room," also an article in the *British Medical Journal* by Mr. F. C. Pybus, to which reference is made in *Truth's* article. This well-known surgeon, commenting on the conditions existing in most hospitals after a morning's work on tonsils and adenoids, remarks: "Were our patients perhaps something less than human, we should probably have more humane methods of dealing with them."

Children in our elementary schools are being operated on under conditions which, if enforced on richer children, would raise a howl of protest from their parents. The helpless parents of the poor have perforce to trust that the Medical and the School Authorities are doing their utmost for the children entrusted to them.

Fortunately there is an increasing tendency to treat enlarged tonsils and adenoids without surgical interference, except in rare cases. One well-known London surgeon states that ninety per cent. of the operations performed on school children for tonsils and adenoids are unjustifiable.

No one denies the gravity of allowing septic foci, whether in throat, nose, or elsewhere, to flourish unchecked; but until all preventative medical measures have failed surgery should not, as a rule, be resorted to.

The whole question is closely associated with lack of sunlight, unsuitable food, bad teeth, and malnutrition generally. Remedy these errors in child hygiene and you have gone far to eliminate tonsillitis, adenoids and enlarged glands of the neck. Operate indiscriminately, and you deprive the child of one of Nature's weapons against disease and suffering.

District nurses can do much by familiarising themselves with medical preventative and curative methods available, and by educating the parents as to suitable food and hygienic conditions.

But not until the "community-conscience" is stirred will public opinion be strong enough to arise and say "These things must cease! Every child is a potential source of wealth to the country; therefore we must see to it that every child has sufficient clean air, good food and pure milk, and enough room to grow in."

Slums are not cheap, they cost the country more in maintaining C3 wastrels and degenerates than would be expended in sweeping away noisome tenements and rebuilding a fairer City.

G. FIRTH SCOTT (A.R.San.I.).

THE ROMANCE OF MEDICAL SCIENCE.

INSULIN.

Efforts are being made, states the Medical Correspondent of the *Times*, by the Medical Research Council to expedite in every way possible the manufacture on a large scale of the new remedy "insulin" which has proved so successful in the treatment of diabetes. It

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)