

## Medical Matters.

### THE EVILS OF THE RUBBER TEAT.



Dr. Tom Pedley, of Rangoon, in a lecture given before the Burmah Branch of the British Medical Association, directs attention to the evils arising from the use of the rubber teat and baby comforter including deformities of the jaws, irregularities of the teeth, nasal obstruction, hypertrophied tonsils, adenoids, and other diseases of childhood.

The lecturer, as reported in the *British Medical Journal*, showed that an infant in taking its natural food takes in not only the nipple of its mother's breast, which goes far back into the mouth, but a mass of the breast, a flattened truncated cone. The everted lips lie around the base of this soft cone, and there is slight if any contraction. The act is peristaltic, the alternate pressure and relaxation exerted by the jaws and tongue being analogous to that which the milker imparts with his fingers to the teat of the cow.

The ordinary rubber teat is, he said, an extraordinarily defective substitute for the human breast. The lips have to be screwed up to grasp it. The flow of milk through its orifices is usually far too slow, it must be drawn out by suction and cannot be increased much in volume by the recurring pressure of the jaws. Try, he added, to suck 2 ozs. of water from an ordinary feeding bottle. It will make your jaws ache for half-an-hour.

He also pointed out that the teeth and jaws of Eurasians, whatever may have been the dental peculiarities of their European fathers, are wonderfully good, regular, and well-developed, as in the native races, the vast majority of them being breast-fed. Irregularities amongst these people are so rare, that they attract attention, and an artificial cause is usually to be ascertained.

Finally Dr. Pedley says:—The conclusions which I have come to, and the suggestions which I wish to offer for the prevention of these evils are: When an infant is deprived of its mother's milk and has to be fed by hand, the substitute should be quite different in shape and consistency to the patterns now in vogue. It seems so difficult to make, even in india-rubber, a good imitation of nature, that it would be much safer to be satisfied with providing a soft end to the spout of a vessel from which the infant is to be fed, and through which the milk can be gently and slowly poured into its mouth.

No harm can result from a baby drinking without sucking.

As a substitute for the common rubber teat, I recommend the use of a good-sized soft rubber finger-stall; a baby a week old can accommodate the end of one which will fit a man's thumb. Such a teat may be used on the spout of a vessel like a feeding cup, or an ordinary feeding-bottle. If this teat is properly adjusted, and the cup properly held so as to regulate the flow, there is no need for a shield, and the teat will not go down the baby's throat. Some of my little patients have taken quite readily to this method. Finger-stalls may be obtained in different sizes, are soft, flaccid, easily cleansed, and cost little more than the ordinary teats.

But a baby three months old can quite easily be taught to drink from a cup. At this age, then, I would recommend that all teats and bottles be thrown aside, and that we should revert to the old-fashioned metal pap-bowl with the long open lip. Our grandmothers for many generations back (before American ingenuity brought us the rubber teat) fed the children from such vessels in pewter. We can have handy-shaped, easily cleansed, and unbreakable cups of this description in aluminium or silver. Of course, the baby "comforter" or "pacifier" must be abolished and forbidden; its use is injurious, and if, after warning, resorted to, should be deemed an indictable offence.

Lastly, every mother who can suckle her own child should do so. Much might be done by the State and philanthropy to encourage this ancient custom amongst the ignorant and illiterate of all classes of our population; for ignorance is accountable for much that is cruel. Many women might suckle their children, but will not; for any such the neglect of this duty should be deemed a crime. If those who in past ages gave the sacred laws which rule our lives had foreseen! If He, the Friend of the little children, had imagined that such glorious women as ours—English women—could withhold their breasts from their babies, what denunciations, what protests, would have been recorded against this unnatural and unwomanly sin!

One may envy Meyer of Copenhagen his reputation, and the benefits which his discovery and treatment of adenoids has brought to thousands of suffering children; but "higher merit," as our Burmese friends would say, awaits those who, in the names of humanity and patriotism, will persuade our women to remember and to fulfil the first duty of a mother.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)