

The Normal Infant.

The first of a series of lectures on "Babies" was given at the Infants' Hospital, Vincent Square, S.W., on Monday, by Dr. T. N. Kely-nack, Hon. Physician to the hospital.

Dr. Kely-nack said that the greatest modern discovery was that of the value of the child, who had in the past been often neglected and despised, and deprived of his lawful rights. The wise claimed dignity for the child. The unwise, and they, unfortunately, were the larger number at present, were heedless of the helpless child at life's portal. But happily there was an awakening on the part of civilised peoples to secure the entrance of the child into his kingdom. We had still to realise that in human development it was the beginning of life which mattered most. We were slow to understand that much of the national deterioration was the direct outcome of ignorance, apathy, and neglect in regard to the infant.

It was a sad fact that of 1,200,000 new lives added to the population in England and Wales each year, fully one quarter were born to want and squalor, and that a quarter of the total death rate was of children under twelve years of age. The mortality rate of infants during the first week of their lives was so high that it was estimated if the rate were maintained for 42 weeks all the children born would have succumbed. What was called the normal rate was 100 per thousand during the first year. In London, and in the country generally, the infant mortality was 150 per thousand. In some places one-third of the children born never attained their first year, and amongst illegitimate children the death rate reached one-half. Dr. Henry Ashby had stated the infant mortality rate of Salford to be 710 per thousand. Terrible as was the waste of life, the national disaster did not stop there. We might lament the loss of the dead, there was also the irreparable loss of those who survive. It was impossible to estimate the national loss arising from neglected or ill-directed infancy. The subject could be studied in the Inter-Departmental Report of the Royal Commission on National Deterioration.

There was profound ignorance of all classes in regard to infant feeding, the ill-effects of which were most evident not only amongst the poor, but at the other end of the social scale.

The lecturer then gave statistics obtained by Dr. Clement Dukes concerning the physical condition of 1,000 boys at Rugby school between the ages of 13 and 15, which showed a remarkable prevalence of physical deformity.

No less than 445 had lateral curvature, and a large proportion suffered from rickets, pigeon breast, flat foot, defective sight, or other deformities. It was somewhat depressing to register in the twentieth century amongst boys who would in future hold responsible positions in the world, such a large number of preventable deformities, which arose largely from faults of nutrition.

In the first lecture ideals would be defined indicating the purpose and intention of the institution. Life, said the lecturer, was divided into three main periods—those of development, maturity, and decline. The last terminated ideally by euthanasia, which should be as natural as the incident of birth.

The present lecture was concerned with the period of growth. The lecturer illustrated the course of life by a diagram of a ladder, divided by its rungs into the following periods: Prenatal (intra-uterine), Birth, Infancy, Childhood, Youth, Puberty, Adolescence. These formed the crescendo of life, then came Maturity, and then its diminuendo. Dr. Kely-nack desired to bring out as graphically as possible that as the stability of a ladder depends on the rigidity of its supports, so the health of the individual in after life depends largely on the foundations laid in his infancy. He emphasised the importance of pre-natal life, and referred to heredity and to the possibility of disease, and morbid tendencies being passed on to the child by father and mother or both. Maternal conditions greatly affected it. As the mother was, so was her offspring. We knew little at present of caring for the child in its prenatal condition, but hoped to learn more.

The object of the Infants' Hospital was to concentrate attention on the short and all important period of infancy. In the wards many abnormal infants might be seen. The object at present was to focus attention on the important characteristics of the normal and healthy child.

Dr. Kely-nack then gave the weight of the normal child as 8 lbs., and the increase which should be made; and its average length as 20.5 inches, with the average increase, up to three years. He defined the needs of the infant, as systematic cleansing, protection, warmth, clothing, hygienic management, and loving discipline, and discussed its care under these headings. In the study of the normal infant the individuality of each little life should be considered. No two babies were alike in relation to life's environment. Further in each infant was combined not only the history of past generations, but of future ones also.

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