

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

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No. 1,805.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1922.

Vol. LXIX

EDITORIAL.

THE VACCINATION QUESTION AND INFANT WELFARE.

Speaking at the Annual Meeting of the National Baby Week Council, which was held at 117, Piccadilly, London, W.1, on Thursday, October 26th, Dr. W. McConnel Wanklyn, Principal Assistant Medical Officer of the London County Council, emphasized the enormous importance of vaccination as a means of safeguarding life, and particularly infant life, from the perils of smallpox. If we suddenly received the news that a ship containing 500 infants and young children had been lost with all hands we should be shocked at such an appalling tragedy, yet it is an actual fact that at this very moment we are confronted by the prospect of a calamity which may turn out to be worse than that. It is a calamity, in his opinion, that is now very near to us. He went further and said it is certain to happen unless steps are taken to prevent it. A large number of children's lives now depend upon the attention, the understanding, the determination and persistent efforts of all interested in the welfare of mothers and babies. When we, as citizens of a free community, in 1898 and again in 1907 passed the Conscientious Objectors Vaccination Act, we took the treatment of what he termed our own case into our own hands. At present, as a community, we were not prepared to have universal vaccination, there is all the more reason, then, to understand the position. To do this, three things must be considered: first, we must understand ourselves; second, we must know where further information can be obtained; and, third, we must spread that information among those whom we can influence. The ordinary citizen is waking up to the reality of things.

The last epidemic of smallpox cost £500,000 to the Metropolitan Asylums Board alone. That did not include the smallpox expenditure of the sixty other public bodies in London, nor the smallpox expenditure of the rest of the country.

"Were I a woman," he said, "I would not rest day or night till I had made absolutely certain that no child's life, not a single one in this fair country of ours, should ever be defaced, much less destroyed, by the easily preventable, the barbarous, the should-be-obsolete, the utterly loathsome and detestable stupidity called smallpox." A smallpox epidemic is a cruel and ghastly business. He spoke from a knowledge of about 15,000 cases. Smallpox is a wicked tragedy, especially for the children. One child dying of smallpox, a form of death in its suddenness comparable with that of a street accident, is heartrending, and he had known it altogether too much for doctors and nurses, who might have been thought too weary and worn out by their stress of work to be capable of displaying any emotion.

There had been 200,000 deaths from smallpox since 1840. It was not known how many of these were children.

Taking the earth as a whole, there are probably some millions of cases a year. In India alone there are often 100,000 deaths a year from the disease. In England our own position is simply this, that our island shares in the exposure to smallpox to which the rest of the world is subject. We endeavour, however, by our Port Medical Officers, to catch cases of smallpox at the ports, and to prevent them from infecting the population at large. Smallpox is as thick in the world as measles is in our own country. This island of ours is much exposed to it. Vaccination has been so much neglected that probably four people out of every five would take smallpox if well exposed to the infection; consequently, once smallpox gets in and takes a hold it will spread like fire in dry grass.

We know how many of our men were saved during the war by anti-tetanus injections before tetanus (lockjaw) could set in, and by anti-typhoid injections before typhoid fever could attack them: and in our own children's lives we know the incalculably beneficial results of anti-toxin against diphtheria. Anti-smallpox

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