

THE  
**BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING**  
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
**THE NURSING RECORD**

**EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.**

No. 1,834.

SATURDAY, MAY 26, 1923.

Vol. LXX

### EDITORIAL.

#### SMOKE ABATEMENT AND CHILD WELFARE.

In the life of the people, and especially of little children, pure air and sunshine are the most essential factors, and when we permit the air of our cities to be fouled with smoke we deprive them of an elementary right.

The Medical Officer of Health for the City of London states in his annual report for 1921 that in the month of June alone no fewer than 54 tons of dirt of various kinds were deposited from the air in the City of London, which has an area of one square mile. This mass included eighteen tons of soluble matter—sulphates, chlorine, and ammonia—and thirty-six tons of insoluble matter—tar, soot, and grit.

It was therefore highly expedient that an influential deputation, which included amongst other societies representatives of the British Medical Association, the Society of Medical Officers of Health, the National Housing and Town-Planning Association, and the Central Council for Infant and Child Welfare, should last week be received by Lord Onslow, on behalf of the Minister of Health, to submit the views of these Societies with regard to the effect of an undue amount of smoke on the child life of this country. The deputation was introduced by Lieut.-Col. F. E. Fremantle, M.P., who pointed out that all are agreed as to the unhealthiness of the smoke evil, and the need to get rid of it, which could be done if the present powers were exercised to the full.

Points put forward by the deputation were that recent discoveries as to the therapeutic effect of sunlight rendered it necessary to do away with the obscuring effect of smoke. To restore the sunlight to our cities was, said Dr. Saleeby, the next great task of Public Health Authorities, and was no less important than was the giving of pure water two generations ago. In Essen, Pittsburg, and other industrial centres, where they had been compelled to reduce smoke, they had managed to do so to the extent of 85 per cent.

Dr. Eric Pritchard pointed out that the education of the mother had to a large extent put an end to the deaths and disease caused by wrong feeding, but no amount of instruction of the mother could defend her against the evils of smoke. The Medical Research Committee had pointed out the close connection between infant mortality and atmospheric pollution, and there was no doubt but that the cutting off of sunlight lessens resistance to tuberculosis and respiratory disease. The mortality rate for the latter was 35 per million in boroughs, 25 per million for England and Wales, taken as a whole, and only 13 per million in country districts. In Leeds, after six days of fog, the infant mortality rate increased from 50 to 175 per thousand.

Dr. Scurfield said it was impossible to expect decent homecraft from people who had to live under a pall of smoke; and Dr. L. Fairfield made the point that the budget of a working-class family showed far too much spent in proportion on cleaning materials, the cost of which greatly reduced the money available for other vital items.

Dr. Woolsey Stocks pointed out that there were frequently on Local Authorities, and on the Bench, people whose interests were against smoke-abatement, and who therefore prevented effective action being taken. He urged that the recommendations of the Committee on Smoke Abatement, which transferred to County Authorities the duty of enforcing the law and made possible the formation of Joint Committees for the purpose, be carried out.

Lord Onslow, in replying, said that everybody, even the manufacturers, agreed that everything possible must be done to minimise the admitted evils caused by excessive smoke. Last year, after the appearance of Lord Newton's Report, he introduced a Bill into the House of Lords on behalf of the late Government, and had given a promise on behalf of the new Government that a Bill should be introduced this Session, adding that it was necessary not to interfere with industry. We hope a Smoke Abatement Bill may speedily become law.

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