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Special Articles

THE MORE IMPORTANT CAUSES UNDERLYING THE HEAVY INFANTILE DEATH RATE IN LARGE CITIES AND THE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MILK DEPOTS

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Of the many problems that occupy the attention of those interested in our public health and in the conservation of our national vitality, no subject has a greater claim for earnest study and thought than the appalling waste of life which occurs in all large cities during early infancy.

All physicians recognize that infancy is a period when the hold on life is feeblest, when depressing influences of all kinds prove most disastrous, and when the imperfectly developed digestive functions of the infant under the double strain of maintaining growth as well as nutrition, are most liable to be disturbed on the slightest provocation. The important changes which take place at birth, and the rapid development which afterwards ensues, are both fraught with special danger even to the healthy infant. Many, however, have to contend with the added weakness of hereditary disease, prematurity, and congenital defects. In all countries, therefore, even under favorable conditions the mortality of early infancy is a heavy one.

In England fourteen out of every hundred born die before the close of the first year; in France 22, in Italy and many parts of Germany the number reaches 25. In rural districts the death toll is much lighter than in large cities where, though among the well-to-do skillful care and sanitation greatly reduce the mortality, yet where in the poor and more congested districts, unsanitary conditions double and treble the death rate.

In the Province of Quebec out of every one hundred children born, eighteen die before the close of the first year of life; in the Province of Ontario, 15 per 100 only. In New York City, at the beginning of this century, the death rate was 26 per 100 born, but improved sanitation and a better milk supply have brought down this percentage to 18. Indeed, in all the large cities of both England and the United States the mortality rates of twenty years ago have been greatly reduced. Montreal still lags far behind. Out of every hundred children born in this city, 32 die