

THE INFECTIOUS DISEASES OF 8,900 CHILDREN.

Preliminary Note.

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The method of collecting the data here presented is believed to be comparatively new in its application; and it is believed that it has never been applied so widely before.

The method originated from the observation made in field epidemiological work that the mother of the household was usually well posted on what had happened in her family, and was usually the only one who could give, or calculate, the dates of these happenings. Hence it was recognized that the mothers of the race hold, in the mass, the minute personal history of the individuals of the race in greater detail and in better chronological order than any other class; moreover, that this is especially true of the diseases their children have suffered.

During an investigation of poliomyelitis extending over several years in Minnesota, the histories of the patients were so collected as to show the infectious diseases each had had. This has been done from time immemorial perhaps, but the figures obtained were tabulated and indicated infection so wide-spread amongst the children as to be appalling. True we all know and have laughed over the apparent inevitableness of measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever, etc., amongst children, and we all know in a general way that sooner or later the whole population suffers from some one or more of these infections. But these studies, inaugurated in Minnesota as a side issue of the poliomyelitis investigation, gave such definite and irrefragible figures* as to make it appear worth while to determine the same facts in the same way in Canada; *i. e.*, from the mothers, through the schools.

The usual medically collected statistics on the cases of infectious diseases are vitiated by two well known, absolutely established facts: first, physicians do not report all the cases they see; second, and far more important, although its importance does not seem to have been taken in really as yet, physicians do not see a very large proportion of the total cases, and, therefore, even if the health officers' ideal of every physician reporting every case he sees were realized, our medically collected statistics would be still very far short of the truth—at least 50 per cent., probably 75 per cent. in error.

* Much of the collecting and tabulating of the Minnesota data was done by or under Dr. A. J. Chesley, now Director, Division of Epidemiology, Minnesota State Board of Health.