

Editorials

Dr W. N. PICKLES

THE College mourns its first president who died on 1 March 1969. Dr Pickles was, in the words of *The Times*, "the most distinguished and the best known country doctor of his day and generation." More than this he was the greatest general practitioner of this century. His name will be remembered in the same breath as those of Francis Adams, William Budd, Robert Koch and James Mackenzie as one who contributed to the increase of knowledge. Not only in the study of the epidemiology of a few little-understood infectious diseases, but, also by the example he set of how medical progress can be advanced even in this day and age by meticulous note keeping, clear thinking and lucid exposition. His classic *Epidemiology in country practice*, published in 1939, was an object lesson in the description of the natural history of disease, from which all medical authors can learn.

Those who have known Dr Pickles will cherish the memory of a great character. A cultured gentleman, whose zest for life was over-flowing, whose wit and friendly repartee were a joy to hear, he carried with disarming modesty all the honours which came to him; and honours came in profusion.

Born in Leeds, the son of a doctor, he was educated at Leeds Grammar School and qualified L.M.S.S.A. in 1909. He served through the 1914-18 war as a surgeon lieutenant in the R.N.V.R. and in 1918 became an M.D. of London University. Soon after this he settled in the village of Aysgarth in Wensleydale, and no inducement was ever to tempt him to leave his beloved countryside. There, in the villages in which he worked, he became known to and beloved by all. Paying his visits at first by horse, in the days when nearly all the doctors' work was done in the homes of the people, he saw country practice develop from an art to a science, and kept abreast of the changes as they came. After the publication of his book, which was based on papers already published in the leading medical journals, he was invited to lecture in many places at home and overseas. In 1942 he delivered the Milroy Lectures to the Royal College of Physicians, in 1948 the Cutter Lecture at Harvard, and in 1954 the Mackenzie Lecture of the College of General Practitioners. In 1950 he was created an honorary D.Sc. of his own university of Leeds, and in 1946 he was awarded the Stewart Prize of the British Medical Association of which body he later became a vice-president. In 1953 he received the Bisset Hawkins medal and in 1955 the James Mackenzie medal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. In 1953 he was elected the first president of the College of General Practitioners at the first annual general meeting, a meeting which he himself described as "A solemn and historic occasion, probably one of the most momentous in the whole long history of general practice." Those who were there were fully conscious of the responsibilities which they had invited Dr Pickles to share. His portrait, painted by Christopher Sanders, A.R.A., hangs in the long room of the College with those of his successors.

It is a face full of character, calm and untroubled, with eyes accustomed to perceive and reflect. His passing marks the end of an era. We in the College sympathize deeply with his widow and with his patients and friends. A memorial service is to be held on Wednesday, 23 April, at 11.30 a.m. at the Leeds University Church of St Emanuel.

CHILDREN GOING HUNGRY AT SCHOOL?

FOR some years there has been in this country a comfortable generalization that in children, at least, malnutrition means over-feeding—and indeed, various surveys have failed to uncover any significant degree of under-nourishment. A recent paper,¹ however, rightly causes a chill little breeze to ruffle this idyllic scene. In a small survey among working-class children in the East End of London, the author found some food for thought. Twenty-five per cent of children had no breakfast at the accepted time, and thus fasted from 6.30 p.m. until next midday; of the total number of children studied, 75 per cent had dinner at school, and of these nearly half habitually left certain foods which were almost invariably vegetables; a small number of children ate at cafés and their choice was in the realm of pie and mash or sausage and chips—some even buying only sweets or chips. Interesting facts about the evening meal at home also came to light. Only a third of the children had a main-course meal, while over half are recorded as having ‘tit-bits’, sandwiches or snacks—a few had nothing. The author equates this long fasting-interval with morning inefficiency at school—so often attributed to late television—and points out the great economic cost to the country of this inefficiency. He also infers a rather remarkable indifference in both teachers and parents to what their children eat.

Although this all adds up to a *prima facie* case for further study, certain questions arise from this article. Is it proven that a long fasting-interval is deleterious provided that the total daily intake is adequate? Would a school medical officer examining this sample find a higher incidence of ‘generally unsatisfactory’ children than is to be found in the school population at large? Does an abnormally-hungry child habitually leave a portion of his dinner—even the dreaded school cabbage? Some doubt, too, arises in the reader’s mind about tit-bits, sandwiches and snacks—the range here is from cocktail canapé to baked beans on toast; from the polite afternoon-tea wafer to the Ploughman’s Banquet of the public bar; from a Bath bun to Smorgesbord—but there is no ignoring those children who have no evening meal.

Posing these queries is meant in no way to detract from the importance of this paper, which may well be the cloud no bigger than a man’s hand which presages storms on the sea of complacency. The author is engaged in further investigations, and these will be awaited with interest, for we may yet find that parental ignorance and indifference in our affluent society have taken the place of the old poverty, and that public education on nutrition leaves much to be desired. It is certain that no doctor would like to see his own children existing on this sort of régime.

REFERENCE

1. Lynch, G. W. (1969). Food intake and the education of children. *Med. Offr.* **121**, 41.