

Editorial

A.S.H.

*Hail Tobacco! Queen of Flowers!
Solace of my lonely hours
Fume that fuddles as it goes
Tingling through my ruddy nose!*

Lancet (1823 Vol. i p. 213)

SMOKING is a curious habit. For the nervous it provides an easy first step in social introductions. The pipe or cigarette between the lips fulfils some deep desire in the adult thumbsucker. In others the fiddly fingers of the child have taken to fingering a fag end. The senses of taste and smell eventually deteriorate but bravado makes the young keen to acquire this manly skill, while also voluntarily overcoming their original dislike for the taste of a bitter.

Smoking is an expensive habit. The devotee must literally have money to burn. If someone stood on the pavement burning a pound note, passers-by would stare and perhaps might take him for a wealthy crank. Even a medium smoker burns several pound notes a week, apart from the cost of lighters, ash trays, pipes or other knick-knacks. Any smoker who wants an immediate tax-free rise in spendable income need only stop using tobacco.

Smoking is a dirty habit. In this respect pipe smokers are perhaps worse than cigarette smokers. The litter of ash on clothes, chairs or carpets and particularly fag ends in public places gives offence to many people and costs thousands to clean and tidy up. The atmosphere of a smoky room makes healthy people uncomfortable; yet they may particularly want to remain present at the meeting.

Smoking is a killing habit. Apart from the risks to health of which every family doctor should be particularly aware, fires have often been started carelessly by smokers, for example in coal mines, petrol stations, woods or heath land. The fatal fire in the French dance hall last year was thought to have been started by a smoker dropping a lighted match or fag end on a plastic covered seat. Smoking kills more breadwinners than the motor car.

Smoking crosses the generation gap. Fewer children take up smoking in households where neither parent smokes than in those in which one or more adults do so. Young children develop respiratory infections more frequently in households in which smokers are coughing than in those in which neither parent smokes or coughs. The young mother who smokes in pregnancy is throwing away part of her child's birthright by increasing its chances of death or malnutrition.

Smoking is a lucrative business. In the face of known and unknown disadvantages, pressures on the public to take up or continue smoking have to be strong. A man who has stopped since New Year had been smoking 40 cigarettes a day for 35 years. He felt ill for only four days and then said he was surprised how easily he had been able to give up, compared with what he had been led to expect. Very seldom does anyone start smoking pot who has not already been smoking tobacco. The best cigars are wrapped in Java leaf; and the old planters used to say the man was a fool who could not make his

fortune out there and retire within five years. Not only producers but also advertisers stand to lose a fortune if smoking is seriously curtailed.

Smoking is a rich source of national revenue. The total tax collected from tobacco usage, the profits of the tobacco and associated industries and the costs in terms of health care and working time lost to industry through smoking make uninspiring comparisons with each other. In such a confusion of ethics, we may yet see a paraphrase of Kitchener's famous poster: "Your Country *Needs* Your Lung Cancer."

Important contributions to this mounting indictment of tobacco smoking were two reports by the Royal College of Physicians on the dangers of smoking to health. The first in 1962 publicized the link between cigarette smoking and lung cancer; the second, much more detailed, came out in January this year. In order that the impact of this second report shall be even greater and last longer than the first, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) has been founded as a charity with the following objectives:

1. to provide information on smoking for the benefit of the health of the community at large,
2. to stimulate and support research into the problems of smoking and health,
3. to consult regularly with other bodies actively concerned with the smoking problem to strengthen and harmonize their efforts,
4. to influence public opinion-forming bodies who are at present uninformed and unconcerned,
5. to act as an authoritative voice speaking for all individuals and organizations seeking to influence public and private attitudes towards smoking.

ASH looks to individuals and organizations for voluntary support in its work. For the former the minimum annual subscription is £1, for the latter £10. Additional donations should be made in the form of seven-year covenants.

At its January meeting the General Purposes Committee of our Council agreed that the College should support ASH and the objectives for which it stands by joining as a corporate subscriber. Every family doctor after reading the RCP Second Report should consider how best to discourage his patients of any age from starting or continuing to smoke. Meanwhile, if he himself has not yet ceased smoking, he could help ASH by not allowing himself to smoke in public, whether on social or professional occasions.

ASH will have many battles to fight before its targets are achieved. To be realistic, perhaps even a new use of the world's tobacco crop needs to be found, more profitable than burning it. A new socially acceptable gadget needs to be invented, more versatile than worry beads, something which can be sucked, tasted or chewed like a pencil, a fiddle stick, perhaps even incorporating a gamble that one could offer to a new acquaintance.

Eventually a new name must be found for the "non-smoker". Not smoking must come to be accepted as the norm; the smokers should be the ones to be segregated. The normal person should no more be referred to as a non-smoker than as a non-spitter or non-shoplifter. Perhaps we will live to see notices on a few carriage windows saying "SMOKERS"; in all the remaining carriages that old wording might be revised to read: "No smoking or spitting. Penalty £5."
