

The Hostile Environment of Man

INTRODUCTION

Dr A. U. MacKinnon

Provost, The Yorkshire Faculty

On behalf of the Yorkshire Faculty may I welcome you all to this symposium. I should like to welcome our President, Dr Watson, and the Chairman of the College Council Dr Kuenssberg and Dr Scobbie, the Chairman of the Scottish Council.

Chairman

On behalf of the Yorkshire Faculty I would like to thank Geigy Pharmaceuticals for their support, and especially Mr Ruff, who has been a great friend to the College.

We have tried to blend subjects of a wide general interest with more domestic matters such as the unhappy home, iatrogenic disease, and the problems of the child.

The background to the problem of pollution begins with 450 million people living in comparative luxury while 2,400 million people live in varying degrees of poverty and hunger. The world population is going to double every 35 years unless we do something about it. It has been said that this is the "age of effluence, with man the dirtiest animal making a slum of nature."

We have been deluged with a great deal of material on this problem since Rachel Carson wrote her book *Silent Spring* in 1962. Much more frightening and alarming is a book by the Ehrlichs on *Population, Resources and Environment*. The problems have also been widely featured in the press. We are told by the *Yorkshire Post* for instance, that in a few years there will be no herons in Yorkshire; 20,000 sea birds have been found dead in the Irish Sea, allegedly poisoned by polychlorinated biphenyls. There are other problems with radiation hazards, mutational risks, noise pollution, diminution of forests, and pollution of the soil and water.

Insecticides like DDT and 'Dieldrin' get into nature's life cycle and produce many problems. One of the most dramatic findings is that most mothers' milk in the United States contains so much DDT that it would be declared illegal if it were sold as cows' milk; many babies in Britain and the United States also get ten times the maximum acceptable amount of 'Dieldrin.' Yet farmers are still allowed to use these insecticides on the basis of voluntary restriction.

It is the task of our speakers today to define the nature of the hazards and it is part of our function as doctors to bring about, with our educational authorities, a fundamental change in our attitude to nature. Man must stop thinking that the world is his oyster, and he must develop a true reverence for all living things in this, his only home.