adhered to and believed in as a religious rite by old nurses and midwives. The belief in the duty of carrying it into effect is fully shared in by many mothers and their friends, and what they believe and practise they teach the younger ones. It was but a short time ago that one of the recently trained midwives informed me that in confinement cases the mothers and friends have often intimated to her that they hoped she would see to the baby's breasts and other things, as other nurses did; on being asked how she managed, she replied that she "got over 'um by going round the corner." She is a Somerset woman and the "nipple strings" were not broken in her cases. One occasionally finds among one's patients a woman with ample chest and mammary development but with teats imperfect or absent, their places only indicated by puckered depressions, all owing, as I am constrained to believe, to this interference.

In October last year, at a small farmhouse, I casually asked the monthly nurse who was dressing a two-days' old baby at the time of my visit if she had done anything to the child's breast; she answered brightly, "Yes, yesterday; I don't hold with doing too much." I examined the bosoms; they were a little tumid, but nothing much. When I told her that it was wrong to meddle at all and that it injured the child's nipples she looked at me with surprise and said that she "had always done it" and added, "Dr. — saw me doing it in a case and he did not say anything." She, as well as the child's mother, believed that it was the right thing to do and that it was for the good of the baby, because, as they maintained, if it was not done the baby when she grew up would not have proper nipples. I directed the attention of the two women to the mother's bosoms, which were full and well-developed; only the right had no nipple that could be taken hold of, it was shrunken but the left was good. She had had 14 children and had suckled them all on the left. When I suggested that the reason why the right was defective was because in her early infancy it was so severely handled that the teat was so injured that it never recovered and had not developed, she appeared surprised at the suggestion, but I question if she believed me; but when I added that there were no strings to break she looked puzzled and said nothing. These women are not cruel or unkind and the operation is done by them conscientiously from a sense of duty. It is but a reasonable conclusion to arrive at that the reason why so many women do not suckle their own babies is because they are not able to do so owing to their having had their mammary organs injured by this mischievous practice soon after they were born.

Why and when this cruel and superstitious practice was first started I cannot find out; but I venture, however, to offer the following suggestion as to what may have been the reason for it. It seems to me an instance of "sympathetic magic" surviving from ancient times. The belief in this is still strong among many people in the land—at one time it was well-nigh universal. For instance, and keeping to the early infancy period: if the navel cord is permitted to fall on the floor as it separates from the baby it is believed to be unlucky and will cause the child to be a "wetter of its bed" as long as it lives. I have noticed a young mother exhibiting signs of real distress over the occurrence and severely reproving her attendant for the mishap. Next, if an infant's stooling is thrown into the fire the infant, owing to this, will suffer from abdominal pains. The burning of the after-birth is done that the mother may have painless catamenial periods in the future. Those of us who are in close touch with the people and observant can furnish more such beliefs and produce instances where they are carried into practice. The inducing of a semblance of flow of milk in the child's breasts by the milking action will by means of sympathy induce a flow of nourishing milk from the mother's breasts. This sympathetic tenet and the vigorous fingerings mentioned earlier appear to lack harmony, but so do all superstitions when the light of reason is turned upon them.

The following is an instance of the hold the belief has upon the people. A few weeks ago our district nurse attended a labourer's wife at her confinement and regularly visited her case for 12 days. Then she intimated that probably she would not call again. Up to then the child's breast had not been meddled with. On the thirteenth day she casually called in at the house and had a look at the child, when she found both breasts red and swollen. What had happened was this: the mother and her friendly sympathisers, thinking they had done with the trained nurse and her new ways, invited an old neighbour who was considered an "understanding woman in these things" and she

set to and "did the baby's breasts" in accordance with her practice. Later still, an inquest was held in the case of a baby who was suffocated by being overlain. My son, Mr. Herbert Meredith, was medical attendant, and in examining the infant after death he found a large abscess in one of the breasts. It was not deemed necessary at the inquest to inquire how it was caused. The woman in the place knew all about it.

Yet, as I have intimated, the women who practise and sympathise with this work are not cruel or unkind people; they are so deeply impressed with the necessity of interfering with the children's breasts that it is practically impossible to prevent their doing so when a safe opportunity presents itself. They only act as they have been taught, and evidence that the work is cruel and has never done good has not entered their minds nor influenced them. The inspector of registered midwives employed by the Somerset county council mentions in her official reports many instances where midwives meddle with infants' breasts and some resolutely defend their practice. A medical practitioner writes from the eastern side of the county that he has a midwife in his neighbourhood who cannot be induced to leave infants' breasts alone. In many cases these zealous and misguided women have extensive practices and the question how to put an end to such doings should be faced. Why not engage the services of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children? would be about the first course suggested. There can be no better field for the society's services than in this matter. But how are the officers to reach the scene of the evil seeing that usually the families in which it takes place are in sympathy with the acts as much so as the nurses who manipulate. What women of the order I am referring to believe as an article of faith, they teach the younger ones during those friendly chats and gossips which enter so largely into the social life of people. Teaching in this manner produces deep and lasting impressions upon the minds of young girls present at these gatherings. It is not to be wondered at therefore that many of the untrained midwives—I mean not trained in accordance with present-day requirements—should object to be told to discontinue the practice of *breaking the nipple strings* in newly born infants. They are only doing that which they have been taught to do and that it is all for the child's well-being in after life. 1. A body of midwives properly educated would meet the case, but this will take a long time. 2. The formation of a form of mothers' meeting under the auspices of a religious denomination would be the means of reaching many of the women sympathising with the custom. Ladies belonging to the denomination could and no doubt would act a good part in the work. 3. What is wanted is a line of action by means of which the pernicious superstition could be altogether eradicated and its practice brought to an end. To attain this the younger members of the community must be enlisted in the service.

I would recommend, therefore, that the head teacher of each elementary school take the senior pupils in hand and talk to them about the practice which is worse than folly in that it is the cause of lasting injury and has not one redeeming feature. Young girls between 12 and 14 years of age are very susceptible and special teaching given at such period is sure to bear lasting fruit and prove a corrective to some of the dismal "chatterings" told in the "gloaming" or at any other time. There are many superstitions in the county which tend to unhappiness beside "breaking the nipple strings" that might be fittingly classed with it for the teacher's special attention.

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

Nov. 26th, 1906.

JOHN MEREDITH, M.D. Edin.

GAS STOVES.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—Our attention has been drawn to a report in THE LANCET of Nov. 10th on the results of a competitive trial of gas stoves conducted by the Coal Smoke Abatement Society recently. We do not know what publicity may have been given to this competition but this is the first we have heard of it or we should certainly have sent into it the Euthermic Ventilating Gas Stove, designed nearly a quarter of a century ago by Dr. Francis T. Bond of this city. We claim that this stove, to which the silver medal of the Smoke Abatement Committee was awarded in open competition in 1881, is now in its improved form,

as it was then, not to be surpassed as an appliance for the economical and effective use of gas for warming and ventilating ordinary domestic or other rooms, consistently with a due regard for hygienic conditions. And we may say in support of this claim that, irrespective of the adoption and recommendation of this stove by a large number of members of the medical profession, His Majesty's Office of Works has within the last few years fixed a considerable number of these stoves in public offices in various parts of the kingdom.—I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

P.p. the Sanitary and Economic Association, Limited,
HAROLD F. TREW,

Acting Secretary; Sole agents for the Patentee.
Gloucester, Nov. 24th, 1906.

FREE FEEDING OF SCHOOL CHILDREN AT SAN REMO.

(FROM OUR SPECIAL SANITARY COMMISSIONER.)

San Remo, Italy, November.

SAN REMO boasts of being the first town in Italy where the municipality undertook to feed the children attending the primary schools. At Cremona and in other towns the children were fed but not by the municipality and at the public cost. Abroad San Remo is principally known as one of the most popular health resorts and winter stations of the Italian Riviera. The population consists of many small peasant proprietors who have land to till in the neighbourhood and of a number of artisans and waiters recruited in all the larger towns of Italy so as to do the work rendered necessary by the numerous visitors. These latter are mostly British and German and many villas and hotels have been built and furnished for them. The hotel waiters are so well organised that they have succeeded in electing one of their number on the municipal council. Indeed, in 1896 a Socialist majority was returned at San Remo. As the free maintenance of the children is one of the planks of the Socialist platform the organisation of free meals in the schools was one of the first measures adopted by the newly elected council. It was not till the year 1900 that the municipalities of Milan and of Vercelli followed this example. As a proof of the popularity of such measures it is encouraging to note that the municipalities of both these towns are Conservative. On this question of feeding the extremes of both sides of politics meet. If it was the Socialist municipality which commenced feeding the children at San Remo it was a member of a Conservative Government who introduced at Vercelli a system of school meals that is more complete and thoroughgoing than anything the Socialists themselves had ventured to attempt. The fact that to-day both parties are at one in this matter must greatly encourage those who advocate the establishment of the *refezione* or *cantine scolaires* for primary schools.

In the first instance, however, there was no such agreement. When in 1896 the majority of the San Remo municipality proposed to organise the *refezione* the minority laughed at the idea and treated it as absurd and as impracticable and utopian. Nevertheless, in spite of the opposition, a considerable number of meals were given during the very first year of office. Fortunately for the history of the movement elaborate statistics have been kept, and what the system means in money can be accurately estimated. Thus, during the first year that attempts to feed the children were made by the municipality—that is to say, from 1896 to 1897—there were 1618 pupils inscribed and 1384 actually attended the classes. The total revenue or receipts of the municipality that year amounted to 713,234 lire or francs. Out of this sum 46,731 francs were spent on primary education. This equals one-fifteenth of the total expenditure on the local government of the town. It is equal to 2.89 lire per head of the population, whereas the previous year only one-eighteenth of the total receipts had been expended on education, and this was equal to 2.40 lire per head of the population. The difference was caused by the fact that more assistance was given to the poor children and that 4518 lire, or £180 14s. 5d., were spent in providing meals. The annual average cost for each pupil thus increased from 26.24 lire to 28.88 lire, or from £1 1s. to £1 3s. 1½d. By the following year the *refezione* was better organised, more extensively applied, and the cost increased to 7943 lire, or £317 14s. 5d. The number of pupils inscribed increased to 1845, and those who actually

attended to 1492. The total outlay on education was 52,856 lire, and this is equal to 3.55 per head of the population. But while the expenditure thus increased the receipts were also augmenting and now reached the figure of 930,736 lire. Thus, though a larger amount was spent on education and on feeding, the proportion to the total expenditure fell to one-eighteenth.

At that time, however, public opinion had not been converted to the cause and the mere fact that the feeding of the children was the act of a Socialist administration helped to accentuate the opposition, especially of the Government. The auditors, acting on behalf of the State or central authority, threatened to disallow the amount of money spent on the meals and to compel the municipal councillors to reimburse out of their private pockets what they had illegally allowed to be spent out of the public funds. This, however, proved to be but an empty threat. According to the Italian law the Central Government has a right to interfere when a municipality is in financial difficulties. In that case the Government may limit municipal expenditure to what is strictly necessary and not allow any outlay on what may be described as luxuries. The municipality of San Remo had therefore a very easy reply. First and foremost it was not in financial difficulties. On the contrary, its receipts were increasing and the town was in a flourishing condition. If, nevertheless, the Government insisted on preventing expenditure on luxuries, then it should close the municipal theatre or the municipal casino, for surely such institutions were greater luxuries than the feeding of poor children. These arguments were irrefutable but the Government found another method of interfering. In 1898 some serious riots took place at Milan. There was much distress in the North of Italy and the Government appeared to be alarmed greatly by the state of ferment prevailing. The Socialist municipality of San Remo was dissolved and the Conservatives were installed in office. The two years of practical application had, however, sufficed to demonstrate so thoroughly the usefulness of the free feeding that it could not be absolutely abolished. The new administration sought, however, to re-introduce the charitable element. Instead of holding itself responsible for the expenditure it handed over the whole organisation to a committee of patronage and contented itself with giving this committee an annual subvention of 6000 lire, or £240. This it continued for the four years during which it remained in office. The annual municipal receipts rose from 908,733 lire in 1899 to 1,224,515 lire in 1902 and still only 6000 lire were given towards the cost of the free feeding of the children. It must be said, on the other hand, that if the municipal receipts were augmented there was no increase in the number of children attending the schools. Though the Conservative municipality did not spend much on the feeding of the children it increased the salaries of porters and various attendants at the schools and the subsidies to asylums where children are sent voluntarily. Thus the average annual cost of each pupil rose from 28.53 lire to 41.38 lire, though the proportion that this latter figure represents is only equal to one-eighteenth of the augmented total municipal expenditure.

Subsequently the Socialists returned to power. By that time all opposition to the feeding of the children had ceased. As already described, the Conservative party at Milan and at Vercelli had itself established the *refezione*. Consequently the municipal budget of San Remo for the year 1903 presents a very different aspect. Instead of a charity subvention of 6000 lire there was a direct municipal outlay of 12,934 lire, or £517 7s. 4d. The committee of patronage was abolished and direct management by the municipality, instead of being opposed by the Government, was on the contrary actively encouraged. Thus the amount spent on the meals given has increased each year, being 13,667 lire in 1904, 15,813 lire in 1905, and for 1906 the estimate is 16,153 lire, or £644 10s. 5d. During this last year the average cost per pupil for education and feeding is estimated at 58.15 lire, or £2 6s. 6½d., or 4.80 lire, or 3s. 10½d. per head of the population. This is about double the amount of the school budget of the year 1896, that is, the last year before the municipality attempted to feed the children. In 1896 the average cost per pupil was 26.24 lire instead of 58.15 lire, and the cost per head of the population was 2.40 lire instead of 4.80 lire as in 1906. In spite of this great increase, the proportion of the general income devoted to education has not increased and is