

WARTIME ENGLAND

by

SIR WILSON JAMESON, K.C.B.

*Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health, England. Hon. Fellow of the
American Public Health Association and of the Royal College
of Physicians of Canada*

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MR. FELDMAN: Good evening! This is Arthur Feldman acting as spokesman and interviewer for LEDERLE LABORATORIES, a unit of American Cyanamid Company. Once again we bring to members of the medical and allied professions a discussion of one of the most important problems in the never-ending search for better health.

Our subject tonight is "Wartime England," and our most distinguished guest is Sir Wilson Jameson, Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health, England, Hon. Fellow of the American Public Health Association and of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada.

Sir Wilson, now that the war in Europe is over, I think the physicians of America would be interested in hearing from you some account of how the health of the people of England has fared during the almost six years of conflict.

SIR WILSON: I welcome this opportunity to talk to my colleagues across the Atlantic. I want to say, first of all, that the people of Britain are anxious to express their profound gratitude to America for all the generous help given them during these past years of trial. I hope a spirit of mutual service and understanding cooperation will continue to flourish in peace no less than in time of war.

MR. FELDMAN: That hope is echoed by every citizen of the United States, Sir Wilson.

SIR WILSON: And now may I give you a word or two of background. It must be remembered that, during almost the entire period of conflict, our civilian population has been literally in the front line of combat. First they were subjected to bombing — then, later, to attacks by robot bombs and rockets. After Dunkirk in 1940 we were under serious threat of invasion.

MR. FELDMAN: Are there any figures available, Sir Wilson, as to the actual extent of civilian casualties throughout the war?

SIR WILSON: Altogether more than sixty thousand civilians have been killed and over eighty-six thousand seriously injured. In the London area there are some five hundred and thirty-four hospitals. At least two hundred and twenty-five of them have been damaged by enemy action. Some have been hit as many as twenty times by high explosives, to say nothing of damage by numerous incendiaries. Throughout the country some three million five hundred thousand houses have been damaged or destroyed — the great bulk just damaged, of course.

MR. FELDMAN: How did the health and medical authorities of England cope with this very serious situation?

SIR WILSON: Well, first of all, we arranged for the early evacuation of mothers and children — especially from London. By the end of 1940 there were more than one million five hundred thousand evacuees in the reception areas. Whenever the bombing slackened up a trifle, many made their way back home. This added greatly to our difficulties. When the flying bombs began to come over in large numbers in 1944, we had to remove another three-quarter million mothers and children from London.

MR. FELDMAN: This mass displacement of population was further complicated by the dispersal of industry, was it not, Sir Wilson?

SIR WILSON: Yes, it most certainly was. Billeting became general. Most people's homes were no longer their own — they shared them with strangers. New hospitals and maternity homes had to be provided for our displaced population out of the reach of bombings. Wartime day nurseries had to be established in the industrial areas. Air-raid shelters of all types had to be constructed — from millions of simple shelters for single families down to a few deep underground shelters holding as many as eight thousand people.

MR. FELDMAN: How many people took shelter from the bombing in London's subway stations?

SIR WILSON: At the peak of the 1940-41 raids some one hundred and seventy-five thousand people slept nightly in the London subways. This number declined after 1941; and during the flying bomb attacks, only about ninety-eight thousand sought this refuge. Rockets seemed to worry Londoners even less, and the number of shelters continued to decrease towards the end of the conflict.

MR. FELDMAN: What about labor situation in England, Sir Wilson?

SIR WILSON: Everyone has had to work. There's been no unemployment problem. By 1944, eighty-seven per cent of single women between eighteen and forty were in the armed forces, in civil defense services, or in industry. Seventy-four per cent of childless married women were similarly employed. The armed service demands created an acute shortage of doctors and nurses to care for the civilian population. More than one-third of our doctors are with the Forces. And now there is only one general

practitioner to approximately three thousand of the population. The hospitals have been hard pressed. With depleted nursing and medical staffs, they've had to treat air-raid and battle casualties as well as their ordinary load of civilian sick. Other factors, to be remembered are the great blackout, the overcrowding, the very long hours of work, loss of sleep, the lack of public entertainment at times, transport difficulties, food rationing with its rather monotonous diet and the queues at food shops. Yes, it has been a trying time for civilians in Britain, with most of them worrying over husbands, fathers, sons or sweethearts fighting somewhere or other, in addition to their own hardships.

MR. FELDMAN: How have they stood up under all this pressure, Sir Wilson? What is the health picture in England today?

SIR WILSON: In the beginning we had many qualms. It seemed that the stage was set for serious happenings indeed. But what actually did happen? Let's take a look at the vital statistics for England and Wales. The provisional birth rate for 1944 is the highest since 1925. The standardized death rate for 1943 was lower than that for 1938 and 1939, in spite of the withdrawal of so many healthy young adults from the civilian population. In 1944 the infant mortality rate for England and Wales was forty-six per thousand live births and the still birth rate twenty-eight per thousand total births — both the lowest we've ever known.

MR. FELDMAN: How do you account for this amazing record, Sir Wilson?

SIR WILSON: I can't help feeling that these encouraging figures are largely the result of the special measures we've taken to safeguard the health of mothers and young children. Then our health control activities have helped to prevent any serious epidemic from gaining a foothold on our

island. Apart from an increase in cerebrospinal meningitis at the beginning of the war, we've had no serious epidemic disease during the war years. Tuberculosis deaths reached a new low level in 1942, though there's a tendency now for both deaths and reported cases to increase somewhat. Diphtheria deaths for 1944 were fewer than nine hundred — less than a third of what they were in pre-war years. This, we feel sure, is the direct result of our nation-wide campaign, begun in 1941, for the immunization of children against this disease by means of diphtheria toxoid.

MR. FELDMAN: What about the venereal diseases, have they shown any marked increase during the war?

SIR WILSON: Yes, they've increased greatly. They are not reportable here in England, so we have to estimate our increases or decreases from the number of new cases coming to our special treatment centers every year. In 1943 the estimated increase in specific infections contracted in England and Wales was one hundred and thirty-nine per cent over the figure for 1939. It looks as though 1943 was the peak year, and a slight decline seems to have set in. It's of interest to note that persons seeking advice at these centers who have *no* signs of venereal disease now greatly outnumber those actually infected. This is obviously the result of the widespread educational campaign of recent years.

MR. FELDMAN: What about the general health level of the British public, Sir Wilson, has there been much sickness during the war?

SIR WILSON: Sickness records aren't so easily obtained as mortality figures, but it's clear there's a good deal of what I might call minor illness in this country at the present time. The fact is that the war's gone on too long. People are getting thoroughly tired, they become sick more readily and they return to work less quickly. But, take it all in all, the

health of the people of Britain has stood up well under almost six years of total war.

MR. FELDMAN: That seems to be decidedly contrary to expectations. How do you account for it, Sir Wilson?

SIR WILSON: First of all, we've had a scientifically planned, though much restricted diet — with special priorities for the most susceptible classes, such as pregnant and nursing women, and young children. Our milk-in-schools scheme has been developed as widely as possible, and now some seventy-six per cent of children have an extra third or two-thirds of a pint of milk daily in school. A midday meal in school has been provided for about one-third of the school population. Additional milk and vitamin supplements have been made available to mothers. Then we've had the most nutritious bread the people of this country have eaten for many a long year, made from eighty to eighty-five per cent whole flour with the addition of a small amount of calcium carbonate. Bread has wisely been left unrationed, and most people have been able to get as much as they wanted of this essential article of diet. In the second place, there's the fact that everyone's been fully occupied. People have had enough money to buy what food was available. And then we've all been keyed up to winning the war. We never imagined we *could* lose it!

MR. FELDMAN: Then, too, when people are busy they haven't time to worry about themselves.

SIR WILSON: That's right. That makes a lot of difference to one's health. But, beyond these factors, is the simple fact that our preparations were as good as we could make them in the time at our disposal.

MR. FELDMAN: Looking ahead a bit, Sir Wilson, what tasks lie before the people of England in the next few years?

SIR WILSON: The task ahead is truly gigantic. There's been no building of new houses for five years, and — at the pace we were going before the war — that means a loss of one million five hundred thousand houses, apart from bombing losses. To meet this need — and housing is a public health factor as well as a social need — we shall have to embark on a vast building program that must be pushed forward just as fast as we can get the workmen. It will be houses before everything, even hospital reconstruction will have to take second place.

MR. FELDMAN: Do you think the social program instituted during the war will be maintained after final victory over Japan?

SIR WILSON: I do. We hope to profit by some of the lessons the war has taught us. We expect to have a much improved system of social insurance, with a comprehensive and unified national medical and health service. We've gone a long way towards reaching general agreement as to its form and content. The idea is that the scheme should be available to everybody and paid for not by charges made at the time of illness, but by individual insurance contributions and direct taxation. It's proposed that everyone — every man, woman and child — should be entitled to the services of a family doctor and to all forms of specialist and hospital care.

We've learned much about hospital organization during the war, particularly as regards the part to be played by special centers for the treatment of certain kinds of illness or injury. Blood transfusion and laboratory services have had to be planned and operated on a nation-wide basis. We think, too, that we know more about national nutrition, and we hope to continue the application of this knowledge when peace finally comes. The public, I'm satisfied, appreciates as never before the importance of having

the country covered by a well-planned system of public health departments. It's been amply demonstrated that such a system can withstand even the exceptional pressure of wartime emergencies.

Finally, we now realize more than ever the need for real international cooperation in health, and we hope to march side by side with our comrades in the United Nations in securing it!

MR. FELDMAN: Thank you, Sir Wilson.

“THE DOCTORS TALK IT OVER” has just brought you a discussion of “Wartime England” by Sir Wilson Jameson. Copies of this program are available to our professional listeners and may be obtained by addressing a request to Lederle . . . L-E-D-E-R-L-E . . . Lederle Laboratories, Incorporated . . . 30 Rockefeller Plaza . . . New York 20, New York. This is Arthur Feldman bidding you good-evening and inviting you to join us again next week at this same time as “THE DOCTORS TALK IT OVER!”

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