

CHAPTER XIII

Air Pollution

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Air pollution is one of the foremost problems in public health today. People living in industrial areas are asking themselves, "Are we next?"—for episodes similar to those that occurred in Donora (Pennsylvania), the Meuse Valley, and London. An expression of this concern is the amount of newspaper space devoted to air pollution. Boddy¹ states: "One press clipping service has measured 55,000 column inches of newspaper space devoted exclusively to the Los Angeles smog situation during 1949, '50, and '51. In addition, approximately 6,500 column inches of space has been devoted to editorial comment on the problem." These figures apply only to the Los Angeles area, and can be multiplied several times over for the United States as a whole. This aroused public interest raises the question as to the origin and date of the first concern regarding the effects of air pollution.

I. History

The history of air pollution is the history of fuel, of increased industrialization, and of growing urban populations. An early prophetic clue of things to come was given in 361 B.C., when Theophrastus noted that "fossil substance called coal burns for a long time, but the smell is troublesome and disagreeable." By 1800, the poet Horace was lamenting that the shrines of Rome were blackened by smoke. In 1273, the first smoke abatement law was passed in England by Edward I. This law was passed because of the fears of the people that the air pollutants were detrimental to health. During this period it was believed that food cooked over burning coals would cause illness and even death. In 1306 the people became so concerned that a Royal Proclamation was signed, prohibiting the burning of coal in London. Because an owner of an industry was caught disobeying this Royal Proclamation, he was tried, found guilty, and subsequently beheaded. This is the first recorded penalty given as a result of violating an air-pollution code.

¹ M. Boddy, Pollution and the public, *Proc. Natl. Air Pollution Symposium, 2nd Symposium, Pasadena, Calif., 1952*.