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Editorial.

THE BLANKET BÊTISE.

The outbreak of enteric fever on the reformatory ship *Cornwall*, lying off Purfleet, has brought to light the astounding fact not only that eleven boys on this ship are suffering from enteric fever, as the result of sleeping in infected blankets brought from South Africa, but that 20,000 similar blankets are scattered over the country, with the result that the medical officers of health in places so widely apart as Birmingham, Preston, Portsmouth, Coventry, Bishop's Stortford, Congleton, Southend, Leeds, Glasgow, and Cookstown (Ireland) are now engaged in searching for these death-dealing goods and seizing them when found.

The moral of this deplorable episode is that until the Government realises that the human race was created male *and female*, and that both have their use in the body politic, scandals of this kind may be expected to occur. We ask any good housewife what would have been her verdict as to the fate of blankets used in South Africa by our troops during the enteric epidemic? Would she not unhesitatingly have decreed they should be burnt on the spot?—not only because this was the only safe procedure as regards the spread of disease, but also because they were certainly not worth the cost of carriage elsewhere.

That there has been some contravention of War Office Regulations is apparent, as these lay down that all blankets which pass out of use must be torn into four pieces and rendered valueless except for rags, and, in addition, the Secretary of State issued a definite order to the authorities in South Africa that all infected war bedding was to be destroyed. But how comes it, even if these regulations were evaded, that the Captain of the *Cornwall*, who, with the full sanction of a committee under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, purchased these blankets, on account of their cheapness, failed to

discover their condition, by inspection, before the boys under his care slept at night in blankets "stained with blood and indescribably filthy in other respects," or, as stated by Dr. Collingridge, Medical Officer for the City of London, in a letter addressed to provincial Medical Officers of Health, "in a filthy condition, being soiled with blood, food, &c.?" The question certainly requires an answer, and once again points to the advisability of placing domestic matters in the hands of women. We are accustomed to think of training ships as models of cleanliness, and the present revelation comes as a rude shock.

The public also will learn with dismay that it is possible for goods of this description to be bought up, and sold to them over the counter by local tradesmen. The whole story is inconceivable, were it not proved beyond doubt to be absolutely true.

And it must be remembered that the danger of enteric fever is not the only one to which the users of these blankets are subjected. Blankets so "indescribably filthy" are capable, we imagine, of conveying the infection not only of typhoid, but of other filth diseases rare in this country under the present improved hygienic conditions. And what about another disease, unhappily not so rare in the Army, which may have been present concurrently in enteric patients using the infected blankets? We refer to specific disease. Have the general public been subjected to the risk not only of contracting enteric fever, but also of further infection by the germs of a disease which blasts a human life, which, as the penalty paid for sin, is the most terrible that can be conceived, and which, if conveyed to the innocent by the carelessness of others, is the cruellest wrong which it is possible to inflict? These are questions which we hope will receive attention when the inquiry which must surely be made as to the whole circumstances of this appalling incident takes place.

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