

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 922.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1905.

Vol. XXXV.

Editorial.

THE MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

An interesting Blue-book just published is that of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Medical Inspection and Feeding of Children Attending Public Elementary Schools. We are only now awakening to the realisation of the importance of supervising the health of school children as well as of imparting knowledge to them, and the measures now being adopted for their medical supervision should result in the upbringing of a healthier, stronger, more enduring race, added to which such defects as imperfect sight and hearing, if detected and treated in time may be cured or considerably relieved, and thus the child may be in a condition to maintain himself throughout his life instead of becoming a burden on others.

In regard to medical inspection, the term of reference of the Committee was "to ascertain and report on what is now being done, and with what result in respect of medical inspection of children in Public Elementary Schools."

The Committee report there is no doubt that the establishment of proper organisations for the prevention of the spread of infectious disease has had marked results. Much also has been done to secure greater cleanliness, and to attack troublesome diseases. The results have been farther improved in certain areas by the prosecution of parents in extreme cases of neglect. Medical inspection has likewise caused more careful and widespread attention to be given to defective children. But to nothing probably has more attention been paid than to eyesight, and in no direction has benefit more certainly been obtained. Some steps have been taken towards dealing with the

more difficult question of defective hearing. Generally the Committee feel certain that medical inspection has done much towards bringing to view defects, the treatment of which secures the child from unnecessary suffering, and may save him from serious trouble in after life.

The Committee draw attention to the fact that the local authority does not attempt the treatment of the child's defects. It merely points out to the parent their existence, and except in very rare cases it has no power to force him to have the defects remedied.

In this direction there is need for improvement, for the casual attention paid by many parents to minor ailments is well known to all who have to do with the poorer classes. It is often not affection that is lacking, but a failure to comprehend the consequences of neglect, as well as the fatalism so common in these classes. Local authorities should have power to require the treatment of recognised defects.

Considerable space is accorded in the Report to the work of the nurses who are employed in London and also in a few other towns. In some places they are paid by the Local Authority, in others they are provided by voluntary effort, generally through the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute. The value of the work of the nurses is obvious throughout the Report. They render public service of great importance. But it is essential that the scope of their work should be defined and it is regrettable to find embodied in the pages of a Blue Book statements which lend colour to the supposition that nurses are competent to treat disease. Thus, in London and Brighton the duties of the nurses are purely inspectional, they "do not themselves *treat* the children." Further, "on the other hand, at Reading and Widnes,

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