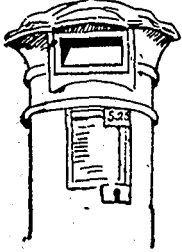


Letters to the Editor.



Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not in any way hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.

A CANKER AT THE HEART OF OUR NATIONAL LIFE.

To the Editor of the "British Journal of Nursing."

DEAR MADAM,—In reference to the letter on the subject of syphilis, which appeared in last week's issue, may I suggest that no measures which do not go to the bed rock of the evil can be effectual. It appears to me that in the majority of cases this disease is the logical outcome of a habit of many years' standing, often of the whole previous life. I allude to the habit of masturbation and vicious practices between children of both sexes. Because it is an unpleasant subject to tackle, lust is in thousands of homes allowed to develop secretly, and to become a dominating factor in young lives, and to form a veritable canker at the heart of our national life. If we can succeed in training our children in knowledge, purity of regard, and self-control in relation to physical passion, most of the other virtues would follow as a natural sequence.

In the villages surrounding me, not fifteen miles from London, this vice is so prevalent that I am credibly informed there are few cottage homes free from it, and that the mothers "think nothing about it." There are several groups of nice little children with whom I have almost daily chats during the summer, and I constantly observe evidence of this habit amongst them. I have discussed it with one cottage mother, in whose only child, a boy of two, I suspected the habit, and questioned her. She had felt much concerned, being a good mother, but had no idea how to deal with it. Is it any wonder that unstable, nervous systems, and early seductions, are so common amongst the youth of the lower classes? As a working man remarked, when someone was deploring the immorality of the young people here, "Well, what else can you expect? They've done it all their lives, and you don't suppose they're going to stop directly they become men and women." Even in homes where there are only girls, and in those where the mother is careful with her children, the practice often prevails, the younger children where there are boys being silenced by threats of physical violence from elder brothers. I know of many cottages where boys of twelve share not only bedroom but bed with a sister of seven or nine years. Indeed, in many cottages of two bedrooms, and with a family of two only, the boy and girl are made to share a bed until one of them is old enough to leave home. This housing difficulty is not, as the poor constantly assert, "all a question of money." It is far more often a question of

willingness to learn, and a readiness to put the essentials of right living before self-indulgence and external show.

Even amongst the upper classes the true state of things concerning the children is often known only to the servants, who say they cannot tell their mistress about it. There is something very wrong with our system of home education when it is possible for thousands of mothers of all classes to remain in ignorance of the existence of this evil and its terrible results. Doctors, who do know, are silent on the subject. Schoolmasters, who also know, are silent. Trained nurses sometimes know, and sometimes speak. Who is to do the necessary teaching, which should be universal? Personally, I feel convinced that no widespread evil has ever yet been cured secretly. The only effective means lie in a clean-minded, fearless facing of the facts, and in letting the wind of a healthy public opinion blow away the foul atmosphere which really fosters such an evil. As you yourself, Madam, have lately said, "The best moral disinfectant is publicity."

Here the ladies say, complacently, "We are very proud of our children and schools, and our pretty little village." Yet the whole parochial fabric is a whited sepulchre, rottenness within, and no one sees more than the outside. I wish one could induce the women of means and leisure, who "work amongst the poor" in country districts, to enter into true relations with the bedrock of rural life, instead of misdirecting all their energies towards producing pretty externals. Too many feel that when they have established a choral society, an annual play given by the school children, a weekly school procession decked in curled or be-frizzed hair, and gay muslins and ribbons, and have apportioned an ignorant, gossiping lady to pay a monthly or weekly visit to each cottage, that all is eminently well with the village, and they may command the admiration of all visitors!

If, instead of all this, such women were to make a study of the administration of cottage home life, and to teach the mothers how to carry it out, many of the causes which now fill our lunatic asylums, prisons, and hospitals would become extinct. Such sound root-teaching is a race question, and is one of the most urgent of the present day.

May I explain that owing to my peculiar position, socially, in this village, I am not considered "one of the gentry." For this reason, as well as because of my individual qualities, sources of information are open to me which are closed to all others not of the working class, and I have collected a mass of interesting facts which at some future date I hope to work up into a really useful book.

I am, dear Madam,
Yours faithfully,

A STUDENT OF CAUTION.

[Other correspondence is inevitably held over.—
Ed.]

OUR PUZZLE COMPETITION.

Rules for competing for the Pictorial Puzzle Prize will be found on Advertisement page xii.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)