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EDITORIAL.

THE HEALTH OF MUNITION WORKERS.

The nation as a whole is alive to the need of caring for the health of the Navy and Army on active service, both along the lines of prevention by attending to sanitary and hygienic conditions, and by hospital treatment for the sick and wounded. Of equal importance is the health of those at home whose skilled work provides the munitions of war for our Armies in the field, without which they would be impotent in the face of the enemy.

The White Papers, 10 in number, issued by the Health of Munition Workers Committee are therefore of great importance, more especially those dealing with industrial fatigue, industrial diseases, and sickness and injury, including those of the lungs, heart, digestive organs, and the nervous and muscular systems, affecting efficiency, health, and expectation of life. Of all the causes predisposing to disease, fatigue must probably be put in the front rank, not the healthy fatigue felt at the end of a fair day's work, but fatigue which predisposes to indifferent work, to accidents and to ill-health. Thus, in one instance, in which men were working over time, both the sickness and accident rate rose to a high level, proving that it was directly attributable to fatigue.

How can the health of workers be best conserved? It is an axiom which is beyond dispute that "prevention is better than cure," and of all the agencies employed in preventive work the trained nurse is probably the most effective. She can inculcate habits of personal hygiene, can maintain the ventilation of workshops, and hygienic sanitary surroundings, can supervise rest rooms, visit employees detained at home by illness, render first aid in case of accident, and, provided she is the right kind of

woman, can act as the guide, philosopher and friend of the workers with whom she comes in contact. It has been abundantly proved that in factories where trained nurses are employed the health of the workers is maintained at a high level, and it is therefore specially important that they should be employed to care for munition workers whose work is performed under conditions of considerable strain, while the handling of high explosives constitutes an element of danger.

We are therefore glad to learn that the trained nurse has already proved her value in munition factories, and that she has come to stay. Thus at Woolwich the medical department includes nine medical officers (two of whom are women), a matron, four nursing sisters, and a staff of nursing orderlies. In 1914-15 there were no less than 150,000 attendances for treatment, or medical examination. That alone shows the necessity for a staff of trained nurses.

For too long the health of the producers of labour was little considered by those who benefited by their toil, but of recent years both employers of labour, and the public, have realized their responsibilities in this respect, and such firms as Messrs. Cadbury of Bournville, and Messrs. Southall Bros. & Barclay, Saltley, have shown what can be done to conserve the health and brighten the lives of their work people. Individual effort as a rule points the way to State action, and it is certain that in all factories due provision should be made to keep the health of the employees on the same high level. We are glad therefore to know that the Health of Munition Workers Committee of which Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Inspector under the Board of Education is chairman, is alive to the importance of this subject. At the present time, when the health of the nation is its most valuable asset, there can be few more urgent.

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