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**Editorial.**

**THE FUTURE CARE OF THE SICK POOR.**

As year after year science demands fresh perfection in hospitals in which the sick are gathered together for treatment and nursing care, the cost of maintenance of these institutions correspondingly increases, so that the question of how they are to be supported in the future is one of considerable urgency. Already there are signs that the bottom of the pocket of the benevolent public is within measurable distance, and the burdens of rate-payers and taxpayers are certainly heavy enough.

The point was one amongst many which were discussed recently by the International Nursing Officers and others at Amsterdam, and the conclusion arrived at by them was that, in connection with the health of the people, the most pressing necessity is the adequate housing of the working-classes. This would relieve the pressure upon hospital beds, and the consequent expense of hospital maintenance, in two ways. First, in wholesome dwellings, with an adequate allowance of cubic feet of fresh air to each person, and hygienic surroundings, the physique of the population would be improved, and so, instead of the under-sized and unhealthy denizens of slums we should have a sturdier race, not only less susceptible to disease, in consequence of which there would, of course, be less illness, but also better able to withstand sickness when attacked by it.

It follows, therefore, that under these conditions less hospital accommodation would be necessary, and thus the burden of maintenance would be relieved.

Then, in the second place, is it not a fact that many persons are removed to hospitals because in their own home surroundings, in the prevailing conditions of overcrowding and of lack of hygienic arrangements, it is hopeless to expect good results, or to place the patient in conditions favourable to recovery.

We therefore, perforce, remove the sick person, not because in many instances he might not be nursed at home if his home were what it should be, but because the public conscience is so apathetic concerning the housing of the labouring classes—that is, of the backbone of the nation—in big cities, that we permit many of them to live under conditions which are unfit for them in any circumstances, and intolerable when ill. So of necessity we remove them to hospitals, where they can have light, space, air, and fresh and sweet surroundings.

Obviously it is the right thing, not only in sickness, but in health, to secure to every human being a minimum allowance of cubic feet of air, and our borough councils should surely take upon themselves the duty of seeing that every man, woman and child has this minimum allowance.

If once our cities are purged of the overcrowding evil, then many of the poor when ill might be nursed in their own homes by district nurses, and so, once again, pressure on our hospitals would be relieved. In short, if we no longer allowed the beauty of our fair land to be marred by the overcrowding and inadequate housing of the poor, and the attendant evils, both physical and moral, which are the direct outcome of this condition, we should not only fulfil a plain national duty, but we should also reduce, to limits within which there would be some reasonable hope of dealing adequately with it, the question of hospital maintenance.

It is impossible ever to neglect a duty without suffering for this neglect. Symptoms are not wanting that our callousness in failing to secure to every citizen the possibility of decent and wholesome living will recoil upon our own heads.

“A country's true riches can never be in her money-bags; a nation's riches are in a race of stalwart and sober sons, like the yeomanry of old; but British Hearts of Oak were never raised in a city slum.”

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