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Editorial.

THE DANGER OF DIRT.

Cleanliness is a comparative term. To some it conveys the necessity for a daily bath, to others daily ablutions with immersion in a bath tub once a week appear sufficient. But one thing is certain: cleanliness is a necessity to health; dirt is the close associate of disease, and it is of supreme importance for the maintenance of the national physique that children should be brought up to observe the rules of personal hygiene.

No one can contend that this is done as a rule at present, when we consider the statement made by Dr. Ralph Crowley to the Teachers' Congress at Bradford, in 1907, that only about 22 per cent. of the children who attended the schools could be described as clean, that nearly 30 per cent. were in a miserably foul condition, and that the state of teeth and hair was such that from 60 to 70 per cent. of all the children must have been strangers to even the most elementary kind of attention. The uncleaned child is not only itself in a condition likely to contract disease. Dr. Kerr, medical officer to the Education Authority of the London County Council, has expressed his conviction that the illnesses which ravage child life to-day are the result of dirt. Want of cleanliness, therefore, on the part of some of the children attending a school is a source of danger to the remainder, and it consequently becomes a duty on the part of the Education Authority, which gathers the children together, to protect them from contact with conditions prejudicial to health. Further, the State has surely a duty to the child whose parents neglect to provide for its welfare by observing simple rules of cleanliness. A child has a right to the decencies of life, and if its natural guardians do not provide these, the State should see that they are not wanting.

The desirability of teaching hygiene in schools must be conceded, but it can have little effect if the children find that the theoretical teaching they receive is ignored in their daily lives, and they have no means of putting it into practice. Thus, Education Authorities are forced to consider how these means may be provided.

Some tentative efforts are being made in this direction. The nurses working in the schools under the authority of the London County Council are doing splendid work in visiting the schools and the homes of the children, and carrying out a scheme of cleanliness. As a last resort parents who, after repeated warnings, fail to cleanse their children adequately, may be prosecuted and fined; but this extreme measure is seldom resorted to.

In Bradford, in 1896, a simple leaflet was drawn up and circulated, giving directions as to the treatment of hair, scalp, teeth, nails, and skin, and a bath centre was established in a poor area, to the great delight and benefit of the children. There are now about sixteen school bathing centres in Bradford, and shower bathing, by means of which large numbers can be quickly bathed, is finding much favour.

The practice of bathing daily is one the English nation has adopted comparatively recently. It is one of the good things which has come to it from contact with its Indian Empire, and we are apt even now to regard the daily bath as a meritorious action, a luxury of the rich, rather than a necessity for the poor. But until we place within reach of the poorest the possibility of personal cleanliness, the nation must suffer, not only in the poorer physique and stamina of those to whom a high standard of cleanliness is denied, but also from the fact that carefully nurtured and scrupulously clean children are in danger of contracting disease from those in less favoured circumstances.

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