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Editorial.

THE POOR LAW CHILD.

The poor law child presents a pitiful problem, which those who are concerned in raising the standard of the national health—amongst whom nurses are numbered—cannot fail to study with attention, both from the humanitarian point of view, as regards the individual child, as well as from the broader standpoint, for the existence of the poor law child is a tragedy. Instead of the parental care and affection which is the right of every child, he is surrounded by the chill atmosphere of an institution, where he is a burden on the rates, a trouble to the officials, and is often handicapped by physical disabilities, the heritage bestowed upon him by forbears, who, in bringing him into the world, thought nothing at all of parental responsibilities. What wonder if the unloved child grows up unloving, unattractive, at enmity with society which has given him so unfair a start, and which not unfrequently remembers his birth against him till the day of his death; or that he, in his turn, in adult life, goes to swell the ranks of the undesirable and the wastrel, and becomes chargeable to the ratepayer, in our workhouses, our asylums, or our prisons.

If you plant a seed in a poor or congenial soil the result will be, if it succeeds in reaching maturity, that it will be marred, stunted, ill-developed, and, do what you will with it later, you can never restore to it the possibilities of the period of growth.

Why should it be otherwise with the human seedling? The logical and scientific method is to remove it at once from an unsuitable environment, and transplant it into wholesome surroundings where its natural development shall be fulfilled, and where its latent possibilities shall have full scope.

When we consider the upbringing of the poor law child we realise how essential is the work of women on Boards of Guardians, and other agencies which have charge of this forlorn waif. Even when a child is a man's own, and has all the affection which he can give it, its childhood is sadly incomplete if it is deprived of a mother's care. What wonder then that men blunder sorely when solely responsible for the upbringing of the children of the State. An interesting and humane experiment for the care of the London workhouse child has been tried with great success by Mrs. Close, of Eaton Square, which has developed into the Children's Farm Home Association, of which she is President, and which aims at "receiving children for upbringing in such parts of our Colonies as provide wholesome surroundings, good educational advantages, and an invigorating climate, calculated to make them self-reliant, self-respecting, and healthy citizens." Mrs. Close's farm in New Brunswick has proved a complete success, at half the cost of the home cottage system, and so have the farms in the Eastern province of Canada. The strong point of the scheme is that the children are sent out at an early age, and grow up in healthy surroundings, in which they learn to fit themselves for their future life, instead of being transplanted, when impressed with the workhouse taint, to surroundings and work with which they are totally unfamiliar. In Canada, while naturally objecting to the emigration from this country of children who have spent all their lives previously in the workhouse, Canadian farmers are glad enough to employ the child who is sent out early, and knows something of life in the Dominion when he is able to begin work.

We commend the scheme to nurses, who are frequently brought into touch in the course of their work with poor law waifs.

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