

Medical Matters.

SCHOOL MEDICAL INSPECTION.

Dr. Edward Magennis, D.P.H., contributes to the *British Medical Journal* an interesting article on the above subject, in which he reviews some of the conditions prevailing in the National Schools in Ireland, and points out the necessity for systematic medical inspection of Irish schools and scholars. After quoting from the reports of inspectors in the 77th report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, Dr. Magennis asks:—

How can any one, in the face of these extracts, maintain that these schoolhouses in Ireland are fit places in which tender youths are to be housed up five or six hours of the day?

What is the condition of the vast majority of these children on entering the schoolroom any morning? Many of them are obliged to walk, perhaps two or three miles, it may be, through rain, sleet, or snow, and when they arrive their clothes may be soaked with water. They enter a bleak, cold room, in which there may not be a fire, or, if there be, it is most inadequate, and here they are compelled to remain for hours, shivering with cold and altogether in a most pitiable condition.

There is no provision made by which the outer garments, at least, may be dried during their stay. The schools are, as a rule, placed on unhealthy sites, their general construction is bad, and the sanitary or insanitary state of the out-offices seems to be undreamt of by anybody except the inspectors. The lighting, ventilating, and heating are nearly always defective, and the seats are constructed without regard to age or size.

Sir W. Whitla, speaking recently at the opening of new National Schools, said that he did not know at the present hour of a more serious question than the condition of the National Schools in Ireland. With, he feared, but few exceptions, these were in a deplorably unsatisfactory state from a sanitary point of view. The most serious defect was the scandalous deficiency of the ventilation, whereby he was morally certain many lives were sacrificed and many children were permanently crippled or rendered unfit to take a proper place in their future life struggle through the physical delicacy permanently inflicted upon them by being compelled to respire the re-breathed and foul air of the crowded school-room. The languishing wail of the pining school child doomed to breathe daily such a tainted atmosphere as prevailed in too many of the class-rooms rose to heaven, though they failed to hear it, drowned as it was by the din of party strife and the clamour of political

agitation. . . . Every function of the child was depressed, and every organ starved and stunted in its development by the polluted air, so that their death-rate in Ireland from tuberculosis had become a standing disgrace.

The inspection of all such matters should be in the hands of a medical sanitary expert, and, in addition, he should also inspect the children themselves. On the Board of National Education in Ireland, consisting of twenty members, there is not a single medical man. On the Intermediate Board of Education in Ireland, consisting of fourteen or fifteen members, there is not a single medical man. These are the two principal education boards in Ireland, and yet the powers that be effectually exclude the medical profession from representation on them.

The following are some of the points on which a medical inspector should advise:—

1. School—Site, construction, ventilation, lighting, and heating.

2. Scholars—Overcrowding, posture, games, and play. Cleanliness, signs of fatigue, neglect, mental deficiency, defective vision, defective hearing, defective teeth, and communicable diseases.

How many clever brilliant children are brushed aside and neglected because of some physical defect in their sight or their hearing! What disastrous results to the ears might have been averted by the timely removal of adenoids! How many children are handicapped by the numerous ocular defects! How many squinting deformities might be remedied, without operation, simply by the timely use of proper glasses, if these defects had been recognised in early life!

All the preceding points the medical officer would take cognizance of, but the major portion of his duties would be the prevention and detection of the many contagious and infectious diseases, of which our schools are the principal media of dissemination. I have seen children in schools with an unmistakable rash of measles upon them, and I have also seen children with the skin peeling off after an attack of scarlatina, and I know of one school where a child of about eight years took a "fit" of whooping cough, and the teacher asked one of the other children to hold the hands of the little sufferer during the spasm. How is it that we in Ireland pay so little heed to the matters affecting the public health, whether of adults or of children?

Dr. Magennis advocated the appointment of a Minister of Health and thought the State would be more than compensated by a lessened mortality from diseases propagated in the schoolroom, and a radical improvement in the national health.

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