

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,124.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1909.

XLIII.

Editorial.

THE FOOD OF THE PEOPLE.

"If the commissariat be one of the first concerns of the prudent commander in war, the food of the people is a not less important concern to the nation."—*Irish Independent*.

The present deterioration of the national physique is a cause of grave concern, and we therefore welcome the formation of the National Food Reform Association, 178, St. Stephen's House, Westminster, which has just issued its first annual report in an attractive form.

The *raison d'être* of the society is epitomised in the resolution passed at its foundation, when its founders declared themselves to be "profoundly conscious of the importance of diet as a factor in the moral, intellectual, physical, political, and economic life of the nation."

The value of foods is a question upon which nurses should be well informed, as suitable diet is one of the most important agents in the preservation of health, and also is of recognised value in the treatment of disease. Thus the diet cure of the drink crave is founded upon the connection between flesh-eating and the craving for alcohol; and, again, the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration placed "properly selected and prepared food" second only to improved housing as a means of combatting alcoholism.

Of serious importance is the finding of Mr. Seeborn Rowntree, in a recent investigation, that unskilled labourers are receiving on an average 25 per cent. less food than is necessary for the maintenance of physical efficiency. He adds that trained artisans are receiving just about enough, and that the families of the middle-classes are receiving something like 15 per cent. more than enough.

The large consumption of strong tea and white bread by the labouring classes is

pointed to as a great factor in physical deterioration. Thus a lady writes from the far north of Scotland: "In the Highlands the deterioration of physique, even during my own recollection, is so marked as to cause concern to all. When I was a child I remember well what splendid-looking men were to be found everywhere, and especially do I remember their beautiful teeth. Now very few have good teeth, and except on the more distant crofts (where they still keep much to their old food and habits) the men are not superior, and in some cases even *less* fine than in towns, and in England, while women are much more affected. Many have lost their teeth by the time they are twenty-five or even younger. They drink strong tea five or six times a day and live on *white* bread and canned meats. Many of them are anæmic, and most suffer from violent indigestion, in spite of coming from such healthy stock, and living in the most beautiful air in the world. Their homes and general sanitation are much *improved* from that prevalent in their parents' time, so that though I know it is below the English standard that cannot be the reason."

From Ireland comes the same story. A leading Irish paper, in a recent issue, drew attention to "the ignorance of food values, which causes the family of farmer and labourer alike to make bread and tea staple articles of diet in place of the coarser, but far more wholesome, food of preceding generations. . . . Better food does not mean richer food. There need be no increase in the quantity of meat used to make wholesome and appetising dishes which would enrich the blood of the pale anæmic young people who are too often to be met with in our country places, and increase the stamina of the growing youth of both sexes."

We direct the attention of nurses to this subject as one of vital importance.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)