

The Importance and Progress of School Hygiene.

The presence of three distinguished delegates at the International Congress of Nurses in London last year, sent by the Government of Cuba, demonstrated to the nursing world that this Republic is exceedingly alert and progressive in sanitary and nursing matters, and we are therefore not surprised to learn considerable attention has been paid to school hygiene. A recent issue of *Sanidad y Beneficencia* contains an interesting editorial article by Dr. Joaquin L. Dueñas, the Chief of Medical School Inspection, on the "Importance and Progress of School Hygiene," and the present organisation of this service in the City of Havana.

Dr. Dueñas says in part:—A few months before the establishment of the Republican Government in Cuba, the Municipal Board of Health, elected at the beginning of the American intervention, created in 1901 a service of school inspection, conducted by six physicians under the immediate orders of the Chief of the Municipal Sanitary Services.

Not long before, under the auspices of the same Government, a far-reaching reform in the school curriculum was carried out, and a large number of public schools founded, primary instruction being in this way extended through the country.

The service of school medical inspection created by the municipality had an ephemeral existence of four or five months, and was discontinued as a result of certain changes effected in the organisation and technical personnel of the Municipal Sanitary Services.

At the constitution of the Republic in 1902 the Sanitary Department of Havana assigned to two of its medical inspectors the duty of visiting periodically all the schools, with the object of enforcing the sanitary ordinances with respect to the requirements which they contained regarding public and private hygiene. The schoolhouses and the children were examined from that time; those who required it were vaccinated, and those who lived in infected houses were not allowed to attend the schools. Finally, the medical inspection of schools was entrusted to a single physician, and it was precisely the deficiency of this service, which was languishing with notable injury to the public health, which brought about the organisation implanted since the month of April, 1909, by our Secretary of Health and Charities, Dr. Matias Duque.

The Supervision of School Hygiene, as it has lately been organised in connection with the

recent sanitary reforms, represents one of the branches into which one section of medical inspection is divided. This section has been constituted in the following form:—First, a Bureau of Medical Inspection, devoted chiefly to the investigation and prophylaxis of contagious diseases; second, a Bureau of Bromatological Inspection; and third, a Bureau of School Inspection. The present organisation of this last department is far superior to any of the previous systems which have been introduced in this country for this object. Stricter responsibility, fuller authority, and more complex duties in harmony with the modern tendencies of this class of sanitary services, are the distinctive features of the new official organisation, which responds in this way to the peremptory demands of the child population in the schools of Havana. It is quite evident, from the brief description which has already been supplied, that there was wisdom on the part of the first rulers of the country at the beginning of the period of political, moral, and intellectual renaissance, which led them to begin the movement of social reforms by taking as their starting point the reorganisation of the schools and the preservation of the health of the children. The union of both ends, education and health, is an indispensable requisite for the constitution of a progressive State. The first of these factors, education, is the solid foundation, *par excellence*, for the attainment and preservation of self-government. And it is precisely in the Republican form of government, as Montesquieu has said, that the whole force of education is most necessary, because the quality of the legislators depends directly on that of the electors.

The second factor, health, is the basis of all the functions, a necessary foundation to resist the noxious influences which may exist in the school. Without health the development of the body is retarded, physical vigour declines, and the mental faculties are weakened; the work of the teacher is likely to be wasted, and often proves prejudicial. In human society the loss of health prepares the way for the degeneration of the race, for the increase of mortality and the extinction of the community. And without strong and healthy men there can be neither energies nor enterprise, nor material aggrandisement, nor national riches. It is, therefore, necessary to defend the health of the young, because they constitute the hope of the future. In the family and in the school, the physician has to be the best guardian. And as the English poet, Wordsworth, said: "the child is father of the man,"

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)