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Editorial.

THE NATIONAL HEALTH.

On all sides there is an awakening on the subject of the importance of maintaining and improving the standard of the national health. The words physical deterioration, national efficiency, the falling birth-rate, infant mortality, infant consultations, Mothers and Babies' Welcomes, medical inspection of school children, and so forth, are constantly heard; caravans from which war is waged against tuberculosis are already doing good work in Ireland, and, as we report in another column, the first caravan of the Women's Imperial Health Association is now touring this country on a mission of sanitation.

And, indeed, a greater knowledge of the laws of health are necessary if we are to maintain our place amongst the nations. What thoughtful person can regard without alarm the undersized, weakly, undisciplined boys and girls who throng the streets of our large cities—boys to whom we must look in the future to be the defenders of our country; girls who will bear and bring up the future generation. What education have they had to assist them to perform those duties adequately? Visit the homes and see the surroundings in which they have grown to manhood and womanhood. What hope have things gracious and pure of flourishing in the one room tenement, which is all many families can afford? Here and there, despite every disadvantage, the pure white flower lifts its face to the sun, but many more are besmirched and stained owing to the prevalent conditions of life in the slums. These must be purified before a race which is strong and clean, morally and physically, can be bred in them.

The Board of Superintendence of the Dublin Hospitals have recently in their annual report, condemned the dispensary system as inefficient, because they rightly consider it a fundamental mistake to rely exclusively on medicine, when the remedy needed is food, sanitation or hygiene. The Board say "the question is one which is of great importance to the State. We refer to it hoping that it may strike the attention of the public as it does ours, and that the funds necessary to establish a better order of things may be forthcoming."

What nurse who has worked in the out-patient department of a great hospital has not been inexpressibly saddened, as the futility of hoping for a cure by giving bottles of medicine to patients who are systematically underfed, and who need healthy homes, pure air, and nourishing food, is borne in upon her? "But," says someone who has never known what it is to be without food, fuel, or even home, "the independence of the poor must not be undermined."

Truly there is not great danger. The independence of the hard-working poor is the very last thing they part with; they have shown not a few times that if they have to choose between independence and starvation they deliberately choose the latter. But is anyone justified in putting before them so terrible an alternative? Surely it is possible to ensure to the toilers in our cities—at rates which it is possible for them to pay—good food, fresh air, and general conditions of life in which they may rear their children in "temperance, soberness, and chastity."

If we paid as much attention to race-culture as to horse-breeding the nation would be better housed.

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