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Editorial.

A CANKER AT THE ROOT.

From time to time the physical deterioration of the nation is discussed in the public press, but so far few practical steps have been taken to touch the root of the evil. These subjects are unpleasant, they are ignored. We must keep the youth of the nation innocent—innocence being in the minds of many synonymous with ignorance—so in our midst a festering sore saps the life blood of the nation, while those who might help are silent. But it is time for all false prudery to be put aside, and for every one who has the love of humanity at heart to do all in his or her power to make known that disease, terrible, insidious, unmentioned, is rampant.

This fact has been forcibly brought home to us by the report, published in a new paper for women, *Mrs. Bull*, that at the Hospital for Sick Children in Great Ormond Street, two little girls who were admitted to the hospital for other diseases were sent home suffering from a foul discharge, and incidentally with dirty heads. The charges were so serious that we considered it essential to call at the hospital and ask for precise information, which was willingly given to us by the Secretary, Mr. E. Stewart Johnson.

We learn that two children admitted to the hospital have undoubtedly developed gonorrhoeal vaginitis. One who was sent to Cromwell House, Highgate—the Convalescent Home—was readmitted to the hospital, the second was found on her return home to be suffering from an unnoticed discharge, and it is suggested as just possible, though scarcely probable, that it may have come on after the child left the Home. As to the charge that

the children were sent home with their heads in a dirty condition this is absolutely denied. The head of every child admitted is combed daily with a fine comb, and, if lice are found, appropriate remedies are applied.

But the most important and appalling revelation in connection with this matter is not even that cases of vaginitis have occurred in the hospital, but the condition of the children outside the wards. "We live," said the Secretary, "in constant dread of infection. In the out-patient department this disease is the commonest possible; it is perhaps a *facon de parler* when one of our medical officers says that 'every other little girl seen in the out-patient department is suffering from it'; but it is a fact that we constantly have to refuse to admit sick children to the wards because they are suffering from this contagious disease." Asked what became of these children, the Secretary said he supposed they went home. "Of course," he added, "in case of an acute illness we have to admit them, open a special ward, and isolate them. Our present trouble is due to the fact that an acute appendicitis case was admitted, and the discharge present was supposed to be connected with her illness. The routine practice of the hospital is that when a child, admitted the wards, is found to have a suspicious discharge, an infectious card is put over her bed as a precautionary measure, a swab taken, and if it is found that she is suffering from an infectious disease she is at once isolated."

How infection spreads is uncertain, but the Medical Superintendent considers that the thermometers used in taking rectal temperatures may be a source of danger. Do we realise what it means? The little girls of the poorer classes of the metropolis—the future mothers of its citizens—infected in

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