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Editorial.

THE PREVENTION OF DESTITUTION.

The National Conference for the Prevention of Destitution, organised by an influential Committee, of which the Lord Mayor is President, was attended at Caxton Hall last week by several hundred delegates from all parts of the country, who were welcomed by the Mayor of Westminster.

The Lord Mayor in his presidential address, said that the Conference was memorable, even in an age of Congresses and Conferences, as the first time that representatives of municipalities, and other local governing bodies, from all parts of Great Britain had ever been invited to consider how destitution could be prevented. At present they were emptying out the basin while the tap was still running. Each year 200,000 people became destitute for the first time. Much of this new destitution was preventable. It was high time that we organised our machinery for prevention, up to at least as high a degree of efficiency as our machinery for relief.

The Sections of the Conference were Education and Public Health—which had a joint meeting to consider the medical inspection and treatment of school children—Unemployment, Mental Deficiency, and Legal and Financial.

In connection with the medical inspection of school children, Dr. E. W. Hope, Medical Officer of Health, and Dr. A. A. Mussen, Assistant Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, in a joint paper, explained that it had been found convenient in Liverpool to associate the medical inspection of school children with the Department of the Medical Officer of Health. The results had been very gratifying. The large staff of female sanitary inspectors available for

following up cases of neglect and defect, whether of person or clothing, had been able to effect many improvements within the power of the parents to accomplish.

In the Section of Mental Deficiency the paper by Dr. F. W. Mott, Pathologist to the London County Asylums, had a special interest for nurses. The speaker pointed out that the relation of insanity to destitution was twofold (a) insanity was the cause of destitution from the fact that feeble-minded and epileptic, as well as insane, children were liable to be born of parents who were either insane themselves, or came from a neuropathic stock, and (b) destitution might easily induce insanity in temperamental conditions that favoured its development.

Again, in the Education Section, Professor Sadler, the President, pointed out that the care of the physical condition of the children, not only in the school but in the home, was at least as important as the continuation of their intellectual development. The supervision of education must extend beyond the limits of childhood to the furthest frontiers of adolescence.

In the Public Health Section Sir T. Clifford Allbutt described the hospital as but a patch on disease, charity organisation as a patch on pauperism, the refuge as a cloak for the ineffectual; State subsidies as a patch on destitution. Were we in the long run to expect much more of reformatories and colonies, or would they also prove to be no more than patches on grown-up indolence, shuffling, plausibility, and depravity? In a corporate life there should be no parts living an atrophied, a cankered, or a parasitic existence.

These are all subjects which are of the greatest interest to nurses, who in their degree can help to make the machinery for the prevention of destitution efficient.

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