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EDITORIAL.

INFANT FEEDING.—I.

In many countries, at the present time, careful attention is being given to questions affecting the feeding and care of infants and young children, with results which it is in the highest degree necessary that trained nurses should understand.

From the very earliest times there have been proverbs in many languages to the effect that the health of the people is the supreme law, and that the health of the children means the strength of the State. Although these were universally recognized as great truths, it is a strange fact that only within recent years has it been understood that laws required to be made in order to prevent disease and to ensure the health of the community. In this country, which took the lead in these matters, it is only within the last seventy years that Acts of Parliament have been passed, regulating the conditions of labour in factories, coal mines, and other employments more or less detrimental to the health of the workers. Even more recently it has been found necessary to legislate for the provision of better dwellings for the poorer classes, and for the prevention of food adulteration. All the Parliamentary enactments in the direction of social improvement, which have been passed in recent years, have had as their ultimate end the removal of causes of ill-health amongst the people, or the improvement of the conditions of work and living of the community at large.

It is, however, only now being realized that it is of the most vital importance to every State that the death-rate amongst its children should be lowered as far as possible. It is obvious that this is even more important to a nation than that there should be a high birth-rate; because the latter

could easily be neutralized by a high death-rate among the newly-born; while History teaches that it is equally fatal to the progress and growth of a people whether its birth-rate diminishes, or whether its children are slaughtered.

Many philosophers and statisticians have deplored the marked diminution which is now evident in the birth-rate of various European countries; but it is only amongst medical men that much thought has been given to the other side of the problem; and the terrible mortality which always exists amongst children has been minimized or even altogether overlooked by the public. Happily, however, this attitude of indifference seems to be passing away, and we refer to the matter at length because we foresee that, in the near future, a great part may be played by trained nurses in preventing the excessive and quite avoidable mortality amongst young children which has hitherto occurred.

The chief causes, then, of infantile mortality have been proved to be firstly, inefficient or insufficient feeding; secondly, inefficient care; and thirdly, unhealthy surroundings. Whilst the third cause, including the want of proper air and light, and the second cause, due to ignorance or carelessness on the part of the mother, have undoubtedly killed many hundreds, the first cause, as we shall show next week, is, and always has been, the most potent in destroying child-life and so injuring the future welfare of the nation.

And the evil is not restricted in its effects to the death of hundreds, but affects the future lives of thousands who survive, leaving them deficient in bone, muscle and nerve formation; and so, through all their lives, stunted, crippled and weak, subject to disease at every turn; a source of misery to themselves, and of continual anxiety to their relatives and friends.

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