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EDITORIAL.

THE HEALTH OF SCHOOL CHILDREN.

The health of the rising generation is one of utmost importance to the nation, and, therefore, the report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education (Sir George Newman), although profoundly disquieting in relation to the health of elementary schoolchildren, is of value in showing where the weakness lies, for this is the first step towards improvement. Incidentally it proves the wisdom of the legislation requiring the medical inspection of school children, and the futility of pressing education upon those whose health does not permit them to benefit by it.

At present children are medically examined on entering and leaving school, and the work already accomplished brings to light the fact that a large number of school children are suffering from disease and malnutrition, the original cause of the former being in many instances the direct result of the susceptibility of the child to infection owing to his low condition of health. This malnutrition is due in some instances to extreme poverty, but also to the ignorance prevailing as to the nutritive value of food stuffs.

Since the passing of the Act providing for the medical inspection of schoolchildren, some million and a half have been annually inspected, and, out of thirteen counties and sixteen urban areas investigated, in only one did the percentage of "good" nutrition reach 45, and in one it was as low as 3.8.

In London, out of 200,000 children examined in 1911 over 100,000 were found to be defective, 78,000 were recommended for treatment, and over 27,000 were treated under arrangements made by the London County Council at hospitals and clinics. One wonders what happened to the remain-

ing 51,000, and incidentally the extreme importance, and indeed, necessity of the work of school nurses is evident, for if the cases recommended for medical treatment are not followed up, and the parents urged to secure the treatment required, medical inspection fails of its object and becomes a farce.

The extraordinary amount of feeble-mindedness among school children, estimated by Sir George Newman at no less than 50 per cent, varying from stupidity and dullness to imbecility, and in one-fifth to one-seventh of the cases being so far developed as to render the child uneducatable, must give cause for great anxiety. No doubt it is due in part to malnutrition, which affects the brain as well as the other organs of the body, and might be improved by better environment and feeding. But the existence of so large a body of feeble-minded children in our midst, and the fact that the fecundity of the feeble-minded is known to be greater than that of the normal individual, indicates a growing national danger which will require all the knowledge and wisdom of eugenists to avert. In this connection again the work of the school nurse is of the utmost importance, and if she performs it with an intelligent grasp of the principles underlying the effort for raising the standard of national health, and understands the necessity for the prevention as well as the cure and alleviation of disease, she can render aid of the very first importance at this national crisis, and materially assist in preventing national disaster. It follows that school nurses should be picked women, with at least three years' hospital training, followed by special instruction in the social problems with which they will be brought into intimate touch. This work for the preservation of the national health is too fundamentally important to be delegated to half-trained women.

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