

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
**THE NURSING RECORD**  
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No. 1,498.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1916.

Vol. LVII.

## EDITORIAL.

### NURSERY SCHOOLS.

The National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, which last week held its annual meeting in London, passed a number of resolutions bearing on social subjects of current interest. Of these, next to the resolution on Women's Suffrage, none in our opinion, was more important than that bearing on the care of children under five years of age in nursery schools, proposed by Mrs. Salmond on behalf of the Fabian Women's Group, and supported by the Parents' National Educational Union, the Women's Industrial Council, the Women's Freedom League, and a number of branches of the Union. The resolution was:—

That in the opinion of this Council it is a national disaster to close the schools to children under five, unless steps are at the same time taken to provide an adequate number of nursery schools under trained and educated supervision.

It is suggested that, as a war economy, schools shall be closed to children under five, and if this is done throughout the country the result will be that many young children who at present are under care and discipline while their mothers are out at work, will grow up to the age of five without the supervision which is essential both to their physical and moral welfare.

While it may be a debatable point whether the public elementary school is the best place for children under five years of age there is no question that under our present industrial conditions, when so many mothers of young children are compelled to go out to work daily in order to support, or help to support, those dependent upon them, centres should be provided where these children can be left during the mother's absence from home, with the assurance that they will be well cared for,

and to meet this need the establishment of the nursery school, whether as an extension of the work of the Education Department, or as an independent unit, appears to be the best solution. Otherwise, these little children during the all important early years of their lives when habits are formed, and when suitable feeding makes a life-long difference to the constitution of the child, will be left largely unsupervised, or at best in the care of an elder sister or kindly neighbour.

Everyone at the present time is impressed with the importance of conserving child life, the wastage of war is appalling, and every life is of importance to the State.

But medical officers testify that when children of five come under their supervision for the first time, at that age many defects have assumed a permanent character which, if taken in hand sooner could have been remedied. In nursery schools these defects would come under observation and could be referred to the proper authorities for treatment.

While it is undesirable that any pressure should be put on children under five years from an educational point of view, we know how much has been done under the Kindergarten and Montessori systems to enable them to assimilate knowledge unconsciously. Thus the latter system which originated with an Italian medical woman, Dottressa Montessori, allows the child the liberty which is necessary for his natural development, and by means of a carefully thought-out set of didactic materials enables him to carry on the work of self-education.

One of the most remarkable effects of this system is its effect on character. It is well known that children who are supervised and occupied are happy, while those who are uncontrolled too often grow up undisciplined and discontented.

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