

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

## WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF MAL-NUTRITION IN THE SCHOOL CHILD, AND WHAT ARE ITS EFFECTS?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Ména M. G. Bielby, Cranford, Middlesex.

## PRIZE PAPER.

"I do not wonder at what people suffer," said Ruskin, "I only wonder at what they lose." Let us be honest on this subject, and admit that before the war the sole cause of malnutrition was crass ignorance—sometimes well-meaning, oftener wilful—on the part of those responsible. Since the war the increasing cost of the necessaries of life has made it difficult, sometimes impossible, to provide adequate nourishment, especially as the first essentials—milk, butter and eggs—are now expensive articles, and every child needs a quart of milk a day.

For the bulk of the cottage children, who live chiefly on bread, their diet has always been insufficient because the impoverished white flour, demanded for its colour alone, is used instead of the genuine staff of life, finely ground whole wheat. Deprived of most of its phosphoric acid, iron, proteids, fats, and its valuable ferment, all of which stimulate the digestive tract into healthy activity, no wonder that its etiolated residuum, when used as a staple diet, forms the bedrock of malnutrition, and results in a C3 population. In the case of the present and the last generation, this began during the pre-natal life.

In England the method of cooking vegetables robs them of nearly all their nutriment; all the valuable salts are boiled out and thrown away. In potatoes the greatest value lies just beneath the skin, this is thickly peeled off and wasted; any remaining value is then boiled out, and that too goes down the sink. When one observes, analyses and reflects on the feeding of elementary school children, one can only marvel that they ever grow up at all. Other causes of malnutrition are ignoring the influence on digestion of fear, anxiety, grief, worry, mental or physical over-fatigue, and exercise immediately after a meal. Our grandmothers' plan of half-an-hour on the back-board for the child after dinner might be revived with advantage. Undoubtedly, to be huddled up in an armchair, or stooping over lesson books is a deterrent to digestion. Many waste the value of a meal for a child by insisting on its drinking half-a-pint of cold water immediately after, unaware that half-an-hour

before the meal is the most beneficial time to drink water. Digestion with many children is hindered by the habit of "bolting" the food. All authorities are agreed that food values are increased by the habit of Fletcherism. Far too little time is generally allowed for children's meals. They should be encouraged to give the minimum thirty-two bites to each mouthful, the food being unconsciously swallowed, instead of collecting it into a bolus and gulping it. Children should not be reproved for eating slowly as they often are.

Eating too much is another cause of malnutrition; while nervous emotional children generally eat too little, though their mothers often reflect on this point with pride. Not all realise that oxygen is a necessary food and that many children are starved in this respect, living and sleeping in rooms with closed windows. In the elementary school class, quite inadequate sleep is a common factor in the ill-nourished child. Children should be taught at school that growth takes place during sleep, and that their physical and mental welfare at maturity especially depends on their readiness to conform to the rule of early to bed. It would be a good plan were a table of the hours of sleep essential for all ages hung conspicuously in every elementary school, thus fitting the children for their own rule over the next generation.

The commonest results of all these mistakes are rickets, adenoids, anæmia, skin diseases, irritable temper, impatience, depression, restless sleep, bad teeth—at once a result and a cause—arrest of brain development, tuberculosis—ranging from glandular swellings to pulmonary tuberculosis. All this involves waste of money and education, also unmeasurable suffering.

To provide as nearly as possible the most nourishing diet for school children should be the aim of those in charge of them.

## HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention: Miss Catherine Wright, Miss M. James, Miss J. Bacon, Miss T. Robinson.

Miss Catherine Wright writes: The principal causes of malnutrition in the school child may be traced, in many instances, to the ante-natal period, where, from physiological causes, the child has failed to receive its complement of nourishment from the mother, necessary to produce a strong and vigorous infant.

## QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What special points should be observed in caring for (a) the blind, (b) the deaf?

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