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EDITORIAL.

THE HOUSING SCANDAL.

No members of the community feel more strongly than trained nurses the urgency of the housing question, and the shame of the housing scandal; for well they know that it is at the foundation of the most crying evils from which the nation is suffering.

During the war we heard much about the "houses fit for heroes to live in." We saw pictures on cinemas of attractive houses with modern conveniences, and a happy wife explaining their delights to a hero on leave. Alas! these houses have not materialised in anything like an appreciable degree, and the conditions under which many ex-Service men and their families are forced to live are calculated to breed bitterness, disloyalty, revolt, in loyal subjects of the King.

To instance a few results of bad housing. Health of both adults and children is impaired by overcrowding; air space is insufficient; lungs are not oxygenated; capacity is reduced; and public money is wasted because school-children are not in a condition to benefit as they should from the educational facilities provided at the public expense.

Again, overcrowding is probably the largest cause of immorality, incest, and prostitution, which, setting aside the moral question, cause expense to the ratepayers and the public by necessitating provision for the care of lying-in cases, of patients suffering from venereal disease, and in prisons of criminals created largely as a result of these moral lapses.

One of the most terrible evils connected with the housing question is the moral contamination of the children of respectable parents by their close contact with those of undesirable families resident in the same house, and the ease with which little children can be violated by criminals and aliens owing to this close proximity. Compared with this horror, infection with lice, with skin and other diseases, is a minor evil, though calculated to disgust and

embitter mothers who endeavour to bring up their children respectably, and in habits of cleanliness and order.

The housing question is also held responsible for some of the cases of murder, arising from the overstrain and irritability occasioned by the lack of privacy and the constant contact day and night with other human beings, who under normal conditions would be loved and cared for.

Is it to be wondered at that with the double attraction afforded by the public-house, of escape from intolerable home conditions, and the temporary relief afforded by their dulling or obliteration by alcohol, many millions of pounds are spent annually on drink which might otherwise be spent on productive labour, with resulting lowering of mental fibre in both men and women, and later of the physical capacity of the children born to parents who are chronic alcoholics?

We are glad to note that at an inquest held recently by the Kingston Coroner (Dr. M. H. Taylor) concerning the death of a two and a half months' old infant, Dr. Goffe, of High Street, Kingston, spoke strongly on the housing question, as we report on page 272.

The mother, Mrs. Winifred Collins, in the course of her evidence, said that she, her husband, and four children slept in one bedroom. There were eight adults and six children living in the house, which had four bedrooms. Her husband was an engineer in the Post Office, and could afford to pay for better housing accommodation if it was obtainable.

This was corroborated by Mr. Collins, who said he had been searching in vain for a house ever since he was demobilised in 1919, but nobody would let him have one because of his children.

Trained nurses, of whatever politics, will thankfully welcome any well-considered scheme for adequate housing, and for the relief of unemployment, introduced by any Government. They have no politics where the health of the nation is at stake.

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