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EDITORIAL.

A MATTER OF CONCERN TO THE STATE.

The development of a public health conscience is one of the first essentials of a civilised Nation, and signs are not lacking that such development is on the increase in Great Britain, the latest evidence being the Conference organised by the Association of Municipal Corporations—and attended by over 400 representatives of Local Authorities—held last week at the Central Hall, Westminster, to consider the problem of the slum areas, and the effect of slums on public health and social development.

As a public health worker, the district nurse has no doubt on this question. She is intimately concerned with the lives of the people in their own homes—if, indeed, the word "home" can be rightly applied to slum dwellings. She knows the effect of life in the slums of great cities on the bodies, souls and spirits of those for whom her life is spent, and it is abhorrent to her. She knows it is impossible for the bodies of children bred and growing up in slum areas to attain their full development. Children, like flowers, develop in the sun, and little sunlight filters through to the drab houses and blocks of buildings set closely together in mean streets—often overshadowed by a pall of smoke—which comprise slum dwellings. In such insanitary surroundings where air is stagnant, and cool breezes rarely penetrate, physique and consequent resistance to disease are lowered, and slum dwellers form an easy prey to any prevalent infection.

And not only bodies but souls are too often infected in the conditions of squalor and overcrowding, predisposing to immorality and vice, which obtain in the slums. Beautiful souls there are in these sordid surroundings, but they develop pure and strong, not because of, but in spite of, the prevailing conditions, and no Nation should be content to subject any of its sons and daughters to the perils of slum life.

And if bodies and souls are imperilled, what of the development of the mind? Sir Robert Armstrong Jones, when lecturing recently to the British College of Nurses, reminded his audience that the mind is inseparable from the body, that it is clearest when health is best, and that physical fitness is necessary for clear thinking. Moreover, for the full development of the mind, quiet and solitude are at times essential, and these are unobtainable in the home of the slum dweller.

The clearance of slum areas is, therefore, one of the immediate problems to be considered by any Government in power, for the question is one above party politics. But it is by no means simple, for if slums are demolished and their occupants displaced, it is essential

that new homes should be available for them, and this is not a problem easy of solution.

We note, and endorse, the opinion expressed by Dr. A. A. Mussen, Medical Officer of Health for Liverpool, that "a great deal of good money has been wasted in trying to recondition houses which are quite incapable of being satisfactory dwellings, and such money would have been better spent in trying to improve houses of a little better class. In the majority of instances, demolition of insanitary dwellings and the rehousing of the dispossessed is the only logical solution."

The right of Life to Health is the fundamental right of every person born into this world, and this carries with it the right to the opportunity of wholesome and sanitary homes without which full health is impossible, which, again, reacts on national efficiency. The worker—man or woman—who is ill-housed and who returns after a day's hard work to an overcrowded and comfortless home, cannot obtain the rest which is his right, or recuperate sufficiently for the next day's work; therefore, any improvement of his condition must be based on adequate home conditions.

And British workers are worthy of these. Those whose privilege it is to work in the homes of the poor, and to be admitted to their confidence, are touched and amazed at the patience with which they so often endure conditions of great hardship due to the inconvenience of the tenements for which they often pay highly, and the deftness with which they contrive to make the best of such surroundings.

We cordially endorse the Resolution, moved by Sir William Hart, and carried unanimously by the Conference of Municipal Corporations, requesting the Housing Committee of the Association to submit proposals at an early date for impressing on all constituent members the urgent need of exercising their statutory powers to clear away insanitary dwellings and areas, to urge the Government to facilitate in every way all such proposals, and formulate a policy to ensure the removal of insanitary dwellings and areas, and rehouse the dispossessed within the shortest practicable period, a limit of ten years to be aimed at.

Dr. Saleeby, one of the greatest exponents of the evils of darkness, and the value of sunlight, writes in the latest edition of his book "Sunlight and Health": "It is, I believe, clear that the elucidation of the action of sunlight is the next great task for the medical sciences, and that the restoration of sunlight to our cities is the next great task for hygiene in this country. We need the physicist, the chemist, the biochemist, the physiologist, the clinician and the sanitarian for these tasks, and the outcome of their labours will certainly be 'more light'."

So will there be no more slums.

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