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EDITORIAL.

THE GOVERNMENT'S HOUSING BILL.

If the importance attached by the Government to business before the House is indicated by the precedence allotted to it in the Session, then the fact that the second reading stage of the Housing Bill introduced into the House of Commons by the Minister of Health, was taken on January 30th and 31st, is an earnest of its intention to pass this measure into law as speedily as possible.

The Bill cannot fail to be of deep interest to nurses, and especially to district nurses, who know full well how fundamental this question is in regard to the health of the nation, and how closely connected with it are such matters as the cleanliness, morality, sobriety, contentment and happiness of the nation's workers. How is a high standard of health to be maintained when nightly a family breathe the foul air inevitable in an overcrowded room? How is cleanliness to be expected of those living in such close quarters, whose only available hot water is obtained by first fetching water from a tap in the basement and then heating it over an open fire. Is it surprising if the breadwinner on his return from work deserts his crowded home-quarters, with nerves frayed and jangled, for the comparative comfort of the public bar?

Again, is it surprising when adolescents, including perhaps a lodger, of opposite sexes, live and sleep in such close proximity, that children are born out of wedlock, or that the nerves of infants and children, growing up in noisy and unrestful surroundings, must be prejudicially affected to the day of their death? That much has been done of late years to improve housing conditions we gratefully acknowledge, but we are far from having attained "the homes for heroes to live in," the hope of which was so enticingly held out to the men who, in the Great War, were risking their lives for King and country. Bitter, indeed, must have been the contrast between the hope and the reality on their return. Is it possible that as a nation we can be contented and happy while so many of our people live under conditions conducive of neither contentment nor happiness? All honour to the wives and mothers who, under most difficult conditions, strive to make husbands comfortable and to bring up children decently.

OBJECTS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S HOUSING BILL.

The objects of the Government's Housing Bill are: "To make further and better provision for the abatement and prevention of overcrowding, the redevelopment of areas in large towns in connection with the provision of housing accommodation therein, and the reconditioning of buildings; to make provision for the establishment of a housing advisory committee and of com-

missions for the management of local authorities' houses; to amend the enactments relating to the housing operations of public utility societies and other bodies; to provide for the consolidation of housing accounts; to amend the enactments relating to housing; and for purposes connected with the aforesaid matters."

The Bill further seeks to provide that a dwelling house shall be deemed to be overcrowded when the number of persons sleeping in the house is such that any two of those persons, being persons ten years old or more of opposite sexes, and not being persons living together as husband and wife, must sleep in the same room, or is in excess of the "permitted number of persons" as defined in the First Schedule to this Act.

THE GOVERNMENT POLICY.

At a Conference convened by the Association of Municipal Corporations, in March, 1934, the Minister of Health first announced the intention of H.M. Government to promote legislation dealing with overcrowding, stating in the course of his address:—

"We propose to proceed in our new housing measure to a direct attack upon the evil of overcrowding that will follow up and fulfil the direct attack on slums. We start from this principle—that overcrowding is no longer to be allowed, and that all measures must be taken by the Government and the housing authorities that are necessary in order to enable the new principle to be made effective and to be kept effective. It will be a great task, and one that cannot be performed in a short time; but it is a task that can be performed.

"What are the measures which are necessary for that purpose? We must first have a clear mind as to what we mean by overcrowding. Next, we must decide by survey exactly how much overcrowding there is and where it is. We must then do whatever is needed to provide dwellings enough to house the overcrowded people, and, when we have housed them, we must prevent future overcrowding by the firm enforcement of our laws against it, whether in the form of statute law or by-laws. In this process, everything depends on the provision of enough houses to reduce overcrowding."

AN HISTORIC DEBATE.

In winding up the Debate on the Second Reading of the Housing Bill in the House of Commons on January 31st, Mr. Geoffrey H. Shakespeare, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, referring to it as "an Historic Debate" said that the Ministry believed they had given to the country a Measure which, for the first time, would enable the problem of overcrowding to be tackled.

The Second Reading was carried by a very large majority.

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