

Editorial

The Health of the Children.

The recent report of the Chief Medical Officer of the British Board of Education, Dr. George Newman, is a most important official document from the standpoint of public health. It deals with the first year, 1909-10, in which the results of the medical examination of the public school children of England and Wales have been ascertainable and comparable.

For some years past there has been a question in the minds of the British people themselves as to the physical degeneration of the race, and this systematic inspection of school children it was believed would furnish the only practicable means of arriving at a fairly accurate knowledge of the facts. Thus, the Act of 1907, of the British Parliament had this point in view and the principle therein laid down was that local authorities should provide for the medical examination of all school children, immediately before, or as soon as possible after, their admission to a school, and at such other times as the Board of Education might select. Following out such directions, it is estimated that not less than one-third of all children attending the public schools could be inspected each year.

Dr. Newman points out as the result of the first year's medical examination that of the 6,000,000 children attending public elementary schools of England and Wales, about ten per cent. of them are suffering from nervous defect in vision, three to five per cent. from defective hearing, one to three per cent. from suppurating ears, eight per cent. from adenoids or enlarged tonsils of sufficient degree of obstruction to require surgical treatment, twenty to forty per cent. suffer from injurious decay of the teeth, forty per cent. have unclean heads, about one per cent. suffer from ring-worm, one per cent. from tuberculosis of the easily recognizable form, and half to two per cent. from forms of heart disease. The report enters into details regarding the magnitude of this evil as well as the character and extent of the attempts which are being made to bring it into subjection.

It is shown that medical inspection of school children should be followed up: (1) by informing the parents of any defect or disease found in the child; (2) making inquiries, after a reasonable interval as to whether the remedy suggested has been obtained; (3) ascertaining, in cases where action has been taken, what the reason is for failure to obtain treatment; (4) taking steps to remove obstacles in the way of the children's obtaining treatment, for example, considering how best to obtain or render assistance in the case of poverty, and bringing pressure to bear in the case of carelessness or indifference and affording further facilities for treatment should such prove to be inadequate in any given area; (5) re-examining all defective children at a reasonable interval, after a primary examination, in order to ascertain any change there may be in the condition originally noted, or the effect of treatment received.

Parental poverty or neglect is to be overcome by: (1) the teacher; (2) the school nurse or health visitor; (3) the attendance (truancy officer); (4) the voluntary worker on the care committee or similar organization; and (5), by the medical officer himself.

Then, in suggesting the order in which ameliorative measures should be applied, it is made clear that the organization of the work of medical inspection itself should be consolidated and perfected; the character of the requirements of each area in respect to medical treatment revealed by inspection should be studied, and a broad conception of the meaning of treatment should be taken and viewed as comprehending all influences, educational, preventive or curative, tending to better conditions of public school life.

Thus, while the defective visual acuity of children, particularly young children, calls for early correction, the rational treatment of many of these children would be an educational modification avoiding the necessity for spectacles. It would diminish the prevalence of bad habits, as working the eyes at a near distance, or insure adoption of suitable type of letter press, and, preced-