

by the description of the suffering of children, and a scheme apparently so moderate may secure the support of many to whom the peril involved in its adoption is not apparent.

The danger to the national character in mistaken public action on this question is a very real and serious one, and it is well that a proposal such as that advocated by Mr. Barrow should be carefully examined, and to consider

(1) Whether there is any real necessity for the action suggested?

(2) Whether it would have the desired effect? and

(3) Whether it would be dangerous to the social well-being of our community?

First.—Is there any necessity for such a scheme? In other words, is the distress amongst school children, caused by under-feeding, so serious and so general as to call for exceptional legislation to deal with it?

It is quite impossible to form a trustworthy opinion as to the number of elementary school children suffering from this cause, for the reason that no statistics which will bear examination are available.

No definition of what constitutes an "underfed" child has yet been agreed upon, and the more that is known of the matter the more evident it becomes that no satisfactory definition is possible.

The number of children returned as being underfed in any school will therefore vary according to the interpretation put upon this word by the person making the return. Sir John Gorst, in his evidence given before the Physical Deterioration Committee (Q. 11,982), in reply to a suggestion that the numerical returns of underfed children are very vague figures to deal with, says: "Very. I think all attempts to get at the actual percentage of children are altogether vain"; and certainly a comparison of the evidence given on this point, by the various witnesses examined by the Committee, strongly supports his opinion. In London an immense amount of trouble has been taken to obtain statistics giving the number