

FREE MEALS FOR UNDERFED CHILDREN 103

The main difference between its methods and schemes such as those recommended by Mr. Barrow is, that whilst the latter offer a temporary and partial remedy for one of the causes of child distress, the C.O.S. endeavours, not only to relieve distress arising from want of food and other causes, but also to prevent the recurrence of the distress in future by striving to arouse the feelings of responsibility in the parents, and by assisting them to attain or regain the power and the will to maintain their children.

A striking example of what may be accomplished by these methods is afforded by the result of the work done by a school relief committee in Tower Street, one of the poorer London schools drawing its children from the streets and courts of the Seven Dials district, and having about 350 children on its roll. For years about sixty dinners on four days a week had been given in this school during the winter months. No systematic visiting of the homes of the parents of the children thus assisted had been carried out, and no real amelioration of distress resulted from the relief given.

This system ceased after Easter 1897, and since that time relief has only been given after complete knowledge of the home circumstances has enabled the Committee to judge of its necessity, and of the kind of relief required adequately to remove the distress. The result of the change of system has been that friendly communication with the parents showed their ability and willingness to feed their children, and that in very few cases has it been found necessary to give meals (the report for 1903 states that "in the past year only four children were fed"), but no complaints of the cessation of free meals were made, either by the parents or by the children; the health of the children has remained good, the attendance has improved, the inspector reports very favourably on the work done and the good tone prevailing in the school; the nurse inspecting the school stated "it was the cleanest out of fifty-one schools visited," thrift has been encouraged, and the school savings bank and boot club have flourished.