THE NOTIFICATION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

NO one questions the importance of isolation in the management of infectious diseases and the prevention of their spread. How to have isolation universally and systematically carried out is another question, and one on which the opinions of authorities differ. A good deal of discussion has been going on in the English Medical and Sanitary Journals in relation to "Notification of Infectious Disease," more especially of *compulsory* "dual" notification. Some authorities there believe that, the compulsory notification to the health authorities by the physician, prevents many parents and others employing a physician in cases of infectious diseases of children, from fear that the sick children will then be removed to a hospital, and that hence worse consequences follow than from imperfect isolation. There is doubtless a good deal of truth in this. The Medical Press and circular, under the heading, "Is Compulsory Notification of Infective Disease a Failure?" gives the following: It is usual for the advocates of the compulsory notification system, when confronted with the argument that it is unconstitutional in principle and oppressive in practice, to reply that, whether it is or not, it is expedient and useful, and that the "end justifies the means."

"We might contest this argument and urge that the justice and freedom of the subject should not be violated by any law unless for some manifest and coercive reason, and to effect some great and indisputable good, and that no such cause has been shown for introducing into legislation the new principle that an innocent person should be held responsible for the fault of a guilty. We, however, pass by all these considerations for the present, and put the simple question, does the end justify the means? In other words, we challenge proof of the statement that compulsory notification does produce any beneficial effects whatever upon the public health, and we raise the question whether, all things considered, it seems likely to do so, while at the same time we assert, for the sake of argument, that the system is absolutely hurtful, and is calculated to produce an increase of the disease, and a loss of life thereby.

"It will be admitted that those who ask the legislature to step outside recognized principles are bound to show cause, and if they fail to do so the recognized principles must stand. But we say that the notificationists, having been afforded all possible opportunity of proving their case, have failed to do so, and they have shown, no doubt, that compulsory notification has produced a crop of reports of infectious disease which does not surprise us, seeing that such reports are liberally paid for, whether the cases reported are infective or not. But have the compulsionists shown, or can they show, that in any one town in which compulsion is the rule, or in all the towns put together, the mortality is even a decimal lower than in other towns similarly situated and of equal population in which no compulsion exists? We think not; and we appeal to the figures given by Dr. Biddle, the statist of the General Medical Council, in a recent issue of this journal, to prove that the exact reverse is the case.

Dr. Biddle certainly makes out a strong case, in his figures comparing the mortality in notification and non-notification towns. In a late number of the British Medical Journal he writes as follows: "I have already shown how peculiarly unfavorable 1887 was to the dual system of notification, and this when the zymotic death-rate was (for these days), high throughout the country. As to 1888, I have the four quarterly returns of the Registrar-General, having been unable to obtain the annual summary, which was only in proof when I inquired for it; and I find, as I expected, that the zymotic death-rate was unusually low, namely, for the eleven non-notification towns, 2.435; for the three single-notification towns, 1.880; and for the fourteen dual-notification towns, 2.429. The general death-rates of the three groups were respectively 18.685, 17.649, 21.072. I have no reason to suppose that a further investigation would show any superiority on the part of the dual system, nor have I yet