

THE TWO LINES IN PUBLIC HEALTH WORK.

IT would not be wise to predict where in course of time the limit will be in coercive legal enactments for the prevention of disease. Legislation is now mainly limited to measures for the prevention or removal of accumulations of the excremental and other refuse of life, and dampness of soil, to care of cases of infectious disease, and some restrictions in reference to water pollution. In other words, nearly all public health effort is at the present time confined to the prevention or suppression of infectious or epidemic diseases. It is true this limited promotion of cleanliness aids in the prevention of other diseases too; still the great aim of all hygienic effort now is for the prevention of the communicable or zymotic diseases. Now all the zymotic or infectious diseases together, even including tuberculosis, cause much less than half the deaths—even of the premature deaths, which are indeed all practically preventable. The long list of "local" diseases,—of the kidneys, the lungs, the brain, the heart, intestines, skin, liver and other organs, destroy many more lives than do the zymotic diseases. The last named are no more the result of unhealthy habits and practices than are the zymotics. And moreover, besides this, the unhealthy habits which give rise to the local diseases strongly favor the development of infectious diseases as well. As in the development of all infectious diseases there are at least two factors, one, the specific germ, the other, the suitable soil—the favorable, unresisting body—the latter being hardly second in importance to the former, in all efforts to prevent or suppress the epidemic diseases, therefore, it is always, if not quite, as essential to use means for improving personal habits, as for removing nuisances and destroying the germs. Yet all public health efforts as we have said is to make war upon the germs, to the almost entire neglect of the other factor—the soil or unresisting

body. There is no reason why we should not, in all our hygienic efforts, go further and endeavor to correct unhygienic personal habits. Some, or many, of these, it is true, would not be easily reached, although others could be. Any attempts made of a coercive character to correct such habits and so prevent local diseases, would now be met at once with successful opposition on the ground of their interference with personal rights and liberties. But this JOURNAL has always contended that in any case more can be done in public health promotion, better progress can be made, by instruction or education of the public in the rules or requirements of health than by coercion,—this even in the prevention of epidemic or infectious diseases. It is only the few who cannot be induced with proper instruction, without coercion, to attend to all ordinary and even extraordinary, as now understood, sanitary requirements and demands. More general instruction, therefore, in relation to personal habits would not only aid greatly in the suppression of diphtheria and typhoid, and all other like diseases, which now destroy so many lives, but would also lessen the number of deaths from all other diseases. We would therefore urge upon local boards of health, generally, to put into regular practice, some means for instructing the masses of the people in relation to bathing, clothing, diet &c., and more than all, in relation to the ventilation of their dwellings,—their bed rooms and living rooms. Not only is this essential in the schools, along with physical culture, but it is most desirable outside the schools for the benefit of the present generation. This work is perhaps more essential in rural than in urban localities; for in the former there are probably fewer people who would not be favorably influenced by such instruction. All local boards of health have therefore a broad field for constant cultivation.