

would be a standing temptation to the parents to avail themselves of the relief offered. Many parents who would struggle to fulfil their duty rather than apply for "charity" would feel no hesitation in availing themselves of aid offered by the State, which they do not consider to be "charity," and to which they are so frequently told they have a "right," and the difficulty of a just discrimination between the applicants for this relief would be insuperable, and could not be efficiently performed. The natural and inevitable result would be that a continually increasing number of parents would avail themselves of the assistance offered by the State, and thus the tendency of the measure would be to weaken and destroy family life and the sense of parental responsibility.¹

It would soon become apparent that occasional meals are far from being all that is required to effect a real improvement in the condition of the children, and it would be recognised that insufficient clothing, want of boots, overcrowded dwellings, and many other causes of distress call for remedial treatment fully as much as under-feeding.

The difficulty that would be met with in attempting to limit the assistance when once the principle is admitted, is well shown by the following extract from a pamphlet recently issued by the Social Democratic Federation. Commenting upon the scheme for the State feeding of school children, it is said: "The proposal is a most revolutionary one, since its adoption would be a step, impossible to retrace, towards the establishment of the Great Commonweal which is the goal of Social Democracy."

There is, indeed, no logical answer to arguments for extending the relief, and the pressure, certain for political reasons, to be steadily applied, would ensure the gradual extension of the principle of State assistance. Nature has her own methods

¹ The importance of the "family" as a factor of social well-being and stability, and the danger of its injury by a system of free meals for school children is admirably described by Canon Barnett in an article on the "Public Feeding of School Children" in the *Independent Review* for June 1905.