

OVER-PRESSURE IN SCHOOLS.

The subject of over-pressure in schools, especially in the elementary schools, is just now receiving a good deal of attention in England, and a commission of enquiry is urged by medical and other journals. In Switzerland, too, the subject is being investigated, and it is attracting a good deal of attention in other countries in Europe and in the United States. The school children in Canada, with the present educational system, are quite as likely to suffer from over-pressure as the school children in any other country. Statistics of over-pressure are difficult to obtain. Many are of opinion, however, that much injury is being inflicted in our public schools in this country by the indiscriminate competitive system, with its multitudinous subjects of study, long hours and home lessons, and that it is high time something were being done to check the inevitable and increasing evil.

In England some months ago the President of the Education Department invited Dr. Crichton Browne, a physician of eminence there, to visit some of the public elementary schools in London in company with one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, Mr. Fitch, and to favor him with an opinion of their working from a sanitary point of view. Dr. Browne, as it has been said, was "sent to bless but came back to curse." He reported strongly against the present system. Mr. Inspector Fitch has been trying to take the sting out of Dr. Browne's report and a warm controversy has been the result. The Inspector, it appears, only accompanied Dr. Browne to a small proportion of the schools visited by the latter, and is not in a position to fairly question the doctor's statements. The *London Medical Times* (of 11 Oct. inst.) in an editorial on "the progress of the over-pressure question," asserts "it is now more than ever clear from this controversy that further investigation should be made by the Government on this matter, and should any corroboration of this contention be asked

for it may be found in the great consensus of medical opinion shown in the correspondence on over-pressure which has recently appeared in our columns. The letters we have received on this subject are certainly free from bias, representing for the most part the impressions received directly from experience, and by no means conclusions drawn from facts observed with any preconceived object of enquiry. The seven physicians who have addressed themselves directly to the question at issue, all of them on the active staffs of our hospitals for children, are of opinion that cases of chorea in its various degrees, frequent headaches, and disturbed sleep, are often to be attributed to overwork at school; and it must undoubtedly be inferred, though it may not be possible with the data at present at command to demonstrate conclusively the evidence of fatal or permanent effects of over-schooling, that the evils resulting therefrom are of sufficient magnitude and frequency to arrest the attention of those who administer the education code."

One of the *Times'* correspondents referred to in the above extract, Dr. Surges, of London, physician to the hospital for sick children, writes, "it is only upon the most direct evidence that these common complaints of children, and especially of London children, are to be put to the charge of what is called over-pressure. And assuredly such direct evidence is not wanting. Instances of nervous injury from over schooling are, I am persuaded, far from infrequent, and they are all of one pattern, girls suffering in far larger proportion than boys. Let the initial cause be hard lessons, or lessons which, without being hard, are to be learnt at home, where "home," as a matter of fact, is not a place suitable for study, but is put to far other uses; or let it be the fear of punishment or the excitement of competition in school examinations, the effect is broken and uneasy sleep disturbed by visions of sums and spelling, loss of spirit and appetite, and presently general failure of health. And it is very curious, as well as very pitiable, to notice how symptoms like these, once started, are kept going, so to speak, of themselves. Children so affected are