

NATIONAL FOG

WE have lately realised, if we did not know it before, that it is a serious disaster for a great metropolis to be fog-bound. The interruption of all business arrangements, the indefinite delay and congestion, the breaking of social engagements, the anxiety and danger, the physical discomfort and the sense of blindness and helplessness, combine to produce a peculiar depression of the spirits. It is an even more serious state of things when a cloud of darkness and bewilderment, however unsubstantial in reality, descends upon the mind of a whole people. By many of us the month of November 1901 will be remembered as an unusually trying instance of this state of the national atmosphere. The trouble is, of course, a temporary one ; it is borne with doggedness or irritation, according to the temperament of the individual, and, on the whole, fortunately with much more doggedness than irritation, till some fine morning it is lifted by a breeze or penetrated by a gleam of sunshine, and in twenty-four hours is remembered only with a smile of self-commiseration. It is not, however, an evil to be ignored, nor is it, like the fog which besets the bodily eye, a matter for abuse rather than for discussion, for it is to a certain extent a preventible misfortune, and there are those whose duty it is to prevent it.

The origin of a national fog is complex, but it is not far to seek ; the present instance is a thoroughly typical one, and will repay examination. When the wind of discussion is no