



Fabian Tract No. 120.

# "AFTER BREAD, EDUCATION"

## A PLAN FOR THE STATE FEEDING OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

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## “AFTER BREAD, EDUCATION.”

*The Report of a Committee of the Society appointed to consider the provision of meals for school children, presented to the Society on 27th January, 1905, by HUBERT BLAND, the Chairman of the Committee, and adopted.*

### After Bread, Education.

“AFTER BREAD,” said the greatest of the French revolutionary statesmen, “education is the first need of a people.” The fierce and intrepid common-sense of Danton enabled him to see the vital importance of public instruction, but it enabled him to see also that education is not and cannot be the first need of a people. The first need of a people is food; without proper feeding instruction is useless and worse than useless—it is indefensible cruelty. Feeding is of infinitely greater importance than education; for, in the last resort, you can do something with a race that, however ignorant, is healthy and physically well-developed; with anæmic degenerates you can do nothing, though you provide them with all the scholarship ladders in the world.

In this country we have established an elaborate system of national education. We have passed many stringent enactments, we spend annually a vast sum of public money, to the very laudable end that the people shall be properly instructed. That they may be properly fed we make no provision at all. No parent, no guardian, no local authority, is permitted to leave the education of children to chance; we recognize that education is a national concern. But so far are we from recognizing that feeding is more emphatically a national concern that we do not even allow a local authority to feed the most patently starving child, unless indeed it be a criminal, or of criminal's kin. In a word, instead of putting food first and education a good second, as Danton sensibly advised, we put education first and food nowhere. Our children ask for bread, and we give them a “ladder.”

### Are the Children Fed?

No one who has made even the most cursory study of the condition of children in elementary schools can doubt the existence of a quite appalling amount of underfeeding. The evidence given before the Royal Commission on Physical Training in Scotland and on Inter-depart-

*School children - Food.*

mental Committees on Physical Deterioration and the reports of these bodies furnish abundant proof. Doubtless the word "underfed" is one of indeterminate meaning, and no indisputable statistics can be obtained. But during the sitting of the Scottish Commission witness after witness from all parts of the United Kingdom told substantially the same tale, and the Commissioners, whose verdict is all the more valuable because their own bias would appear to be against State action, bear witness in their report to the widespread nature of the evil. The evidence given before the Physical Deterioration Committee is more striking still.

To take one witness among many, Dr. Eichholz, one of His Majesty's Principal Inspectors of Schools, put the number of underfed children in London alone at 122,000, and justified his view by a closely reasoned argument from which it is somewhat difficult to dissent. He also mentioned a Board School in Lambeth where he estimated that 90 per cent. of the children were unfit for work because of their physical condition. Even supposing such estimates to be exaggerated (an assumption for which there is no solid ground), they at least indicate the extent of the evil.

#### **Improper Feeding.**

Underfeeding does not always arise from insufficiency of the actual supply of food. Other causes than chronic poverty deprive the children of proper nourishment. It must be remembered that the parents are often both ignorant and overworked—too ignorant to know what is the best food for young children; too preoccupied with extraneous labor to be greatly blamed for giving them whatever is easiest to obtain and prepare without much reference to its value as a food-stuff. Nearly every medical witness before the Scottish Royal Commission laid emphasis on this fact.

#### **The Consequences of Underfeeding.**

It cannot be doubted that the social effects of underfeeding during the years of school attendance are marked and disastrous. It is the least part of the evil that all teachers testify to the impossibility of teaching an underfed child, that no effective physical training is possible without proper nourishment, that Mr. Legge has testified before the Royal Commission that "underfed children are positively injured by even light exercises," and Dr. Dukes that "bare subsistence diet becomes starvation diet when mental and bodily work are added." The worst and most menacing feature is the irrefutable evidence physical unfitness among the working classes.

#### **The Physique of the People.**

The widespread existence of such unfitness can hardly be questioned. Indeed, Sir Lauder Brunton told the Royal Commission on Physical Training that, while the physique of the wealthier classes was certainly getting better that of the laboring class seemed to be getting worse, and many of the medical witnesses summoned before the Inter-Departmental Committee confirm his view. But whether

or not there is actual degeneration of physique among the workers there is indubitably widespread defectiveness. Such defects are very largely due to insufficient food, especially to insufficient food during the years of growth. It seems probable that a child at birth is in all classes normally of about the same stamina. The scientific evidence given before the Committee was almost unanimous in concluding that "the influence of heredity in the form of the transmission of any direct taint is not a considerable factor in the production of degenerates" and that, as Dr. Eichholz puts it, "Nature gives every generation a fresh start." According to Dr. Hutchinson, Assistant Physician to the London Hospital, the effects of under-feeding are particularly disastrous during childhood. He put the critical period between the ages of ten and fifteen, the very period it will be noted of school attendance. He refused to regard even the period of infancy as of equal importance, for he held that up to the age of fifteen or thereabouts the defects produced by former neglect could be remedied, and pointed to the rapid improvement of children in the Navy and in Industrial Schools in proof of his contention. His judgment is to a great extent confirmed by the subjoined tables put in as evidence before the Scottish Commission by Dr. Clement Dukes.

TABLE showing the average and mean height and weight, and the annual rate of increase, of 7,855 boys and men, between the ages of ten and thirty, of the artisan class—town population :

Age last Birthday.	Height, without shoes.				Weight, including clothes of 9 lbs.			
	Average.	Growth.	Mean.	Growth.	Average.	Growth.	Mean.	Growth.
10	50'52	—	50'50	—	66'31	—	66'0	—
11	51'52	1'00	51'50	1'00	69'46	3'15	70'0	4'0
12	52'99	1'47	53'50	1'50	73'68	4'22	74'0	4'0
13	55'93	2'94	55'50	2'50	78'27	4'59	78'0	4'0
14	57'76	1'83	58'00	2'50	84'61	6'34	84'0	6'0
15	60'58	2'82	60'50	2'50	96'79	12'18	94'0	10'0
16	62'93	2'35	63'00	2'50	108'70	11'93	106'0	12'0
17	64'45	1'52	64'50	1'50	116'40	7'66	116'0	10'0
18	65'47	1'02	65'50	1'00	123'30	6'97	122'0	6'0
19	66'02	0'55	66'00	0'50	128'40	5'08	128'0	6'0
20	66'31	0'29	66'25	0'25	130'60	2'20	132'0	4'0
21	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
22	66'60	0'29	66'50	0'25	135'40	4'81	136'0	4'0
23-30	66'68	0'08	66'50	—	139'00	3'58	138'0	2'0

TABLE showing the average and mean height and weight, and the annual rate of increase, of 7,709 boys and men, between the ages of ten and thirty years, of the most favored classes of the English

population—publicschool boys, naval and military cadets, medical and university students :

Age last Birthday.	Height, without shoes.				Weight, including clothes of 9 lbs.			
	Average.	Growth.	Mean.	Growth.	Average.	Growth.	Mean.	Growth.
	Ins.	Ins.	Ins.	Ins.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.
10	53'40	—	53'00	—	67'4	—	67'0	—
11	54'91	1'51	54'50	1'50	72'9	5'50	73'0	6'0
12	56'97	2'06	56'50	2'00	80'3	7'39	80'0	7'0
13	58'79	1'82	58'50	2'00	88'6	8'27	88'0	8'0
14	61'11	2'32	61'00	2'50	99'2	10'61	98'0	10'0
15	63'47	2'36	63'50	2'50	110'4	11'21	110'0	12'0
16	66'40	2'93	66'50	3'00	128'3	17'92	126'0	16'0
17	67'84	1'46	68'00	1'50	141'0	12'69	140'0	14'0
18	68'29	0'43	68'50	0'50	146'0	4'97	146'0	6'0
19	68'72	0'43	68'75	0'25	148'3	2'20	148'0	2'0
20	69'13	0'41	69'00	0'25	152'0	3'87	150'0	2'0
21	69'16	0'03	—	—	152'3	0'27	152'0	2'0
22	68'93	—	—	—	154'7	2'44	—	—
23	68'53	—	—	—	151'7	—	—	—
24	68'95	—	—	—	149'2	—	—	—
25-30	69'06	—	69'00	—	155'2	0'42	154'0	2'0

### The Results of Feeding.

Quite as striking is the evidence of the rapid improvement in every respect resulting from even a few months of decent food. Thus the military recruit, who usually discovers at first all the physical defects of his class, improves out of all recognition after a very short experience of the comparatively regular and sufficient rations of the army, as the table presented by Colonel Napier sufficiently shows:—

#### ROYAL COMMISSION ON PHYSICAL TRAINING (SCOTLAND).

##### MEASUREMENTS OF CLASS OF 22 RECRUITS.

—	Age.	MEASUREMENTS.										—
		Height		Weight.		Chest.		Fore Arm		Upper Arm.		
		Ft.	In.	Stone.	Lbs.	In.	8th In.	In.	8th In.	In.	8th In.	
On commencement -	19 $\frac{1}{2}$	5	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	9	2	33	4	10	—	10	7	This class put in 110 attendances.
On completion	20 $\frac{6}{12}$	5	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	9	8	35	3	10	7	12	1	
Average	-	-	-	—	6	2	1	—	7	1		

Still more noticeable is the improvement of children in Industrial Schools. It is a bitterly ironic comment on our chatter about the responsibility of the parent and the danger of undermining it, that, while we invoke this argument against free meals, we practically give a bounty to complete parental neglect by making for the children, in Industrial Schools, on training ships, etc., that adequate provision which we refuse to the child of the responsible worker. What is the outcome? Several witnesses, of whom Mr. Wilson Bruce was perhaps the most emphatic, testified before the Commissioners to the startling difference between the physique of the two classes of children, to which testimony Mr. Bruce added the remark that, if you gave the children in Board Schools good food and suitable clothing (such as those in Industrial Schools receive) "you would make a new race of them." No wonder that the Commissioners, in their Report, describe this contrast between Board School children and the children of parents "who have altogether failed in their duty" as "both marked and painful."

#### The Faults and Failure of Voluntaryism.

A much larger proportion of children in the great cities would be underfed but for those voluntary agencies which have taken the matter in hand. In London, for instance, according to the Report of the Special Committee of the School Board in 1895, 122,605 meals were given per week to Board School children alone by the London Schools Dinners Association, and of these over 110,000 were given free of charge. It may reasonably be presumed that, but for private charity, nearly all the children so fed would come to school hungry.

Now it is clear that everything that can be said against the public provision of meals, on the ground that it demoralizes the parent and saps his sense of responsibility, can be said with equal justice against the feeding of children by voluntary subscriptions. Nay, a great deal more can be said. The public feeding of children is not charity, since every parent is directly or indirectly a ratepayer, and, under a system of municipal feeding, contributes his part towards the cost of the meals. But to feed a man's children by private doles is really demoralizing and calculated permanently to injure his self-respect. If the children are to be fed and their parents are unable to feed them properly, public provision is preferable to private.

Moreover, experience proves the total inadequacy of the method. In London, where it has been developed to the fullest possible extent, there is ample evidence that it does not thoroughly do its work. Mr. Thomas Chesterton, the Organizing Teacher of Physical Education under the London School Board, who is a competent witness, declared before the Royal Commission that there were "a great number" of underfed children attending the elementary schools in London, and that he was obliged to modify his physical exercises in consequence. We have seen that Dr. Eichholz estimates these at the astounding figure of 122,000. The London School Board itself admitted 10,000, which is bad enough. Nor need we be surprised that the voluntary system proves inadequate. The system of the

London Schools Dinners Association relies upon two things, the application of the parent and the report of the teacher. There are many parents who have great difficulty in giving their children proper and sufficient food, and who are too proud to ask for what they regard as charity; while at the same time it is obvious that to rely upon the watchfulness, insight and sympathy of the individual teacher is to rely on an uncertain quantity, and that even the best and most careful of teachers cannot be certain of knowing when any individual child is not properly nourished. The voluntary system, then, though it has done a good work so far as it has extended, has failed to solve the problem. This is the conclusion to which the Inter-Departmental Committee came after a long and searching investigation of the fact, and we may take that conclusion as final. The question remains as to how it can best be solved by the Municipality or the State.

### Foreign Experiments.

#### I. STATE AID TO VOLUNTARY AGENCIES.

In many European countries the State or the municipality comes to the assistance of those who are feeding the school children. One method, widely adopted on the Continent, is for the public authority to make grants in aid of private charitable agencies. This is the system in Belgium, in Switzerland, and in Venice and some other Italian cities. It is not a conspicuous success. It is to be noted that in Zurich, the most progressive of Swiss municipalities, it has practically been abandoned; the feeding is under the control and management of the municipal authorities, and though private contributions are received, they merely supplement the public provision. The Zurich policy certainly works more satisfactorily than that in vogue elsewhere. Indeed, the other arrangement is in its nature inadequate and impermanent. Here our experience of Voluntary Schools should help us. We have seen that when we make a school dependent partly on public and partly on private contributions the private subscriptions tend to diminish rapidly, and the government grants have to be increased to keep pace with the demand. The same tendency is visible in the case of the voluntary feeding agencies of the Continent—more especially in Belgium. We have had to rectify our mistake in the matter of education by putting it wholly on the rates; there is no object in repeating our former miscalculation when we come to consider the matter of food.

#### II. THE FREE FEEDING OF THE DESTITUTE ONLY.

In the city of Milan and in many of the provincial towns of France meals are given free, and the whole expense is borne by the municipality, but only children certified as destitute are fed. Application has to be made by the parent, a paper filled up and signed, a full statement of the circumstances given; the case is then investigated and relief provided or refused.

At first sight this seems satisfactory, but there are many serious objections.

Firstly, it is by no means certain that under this system the children who most need food will get it. It may be very unfortunate that parents should put their own sense of dignity before the well-being of their offspring, but it is an indubitable fact that a great many of them do. Few out of the many parents whose children do not get sufficient nourishment would be willing to write themselves down as destitute; and those who did would often not be those who most need and most deserve assistance.

Secondly, the system would lead to a most undesirable distinction (which would in the nature of things be generally known) between those children who were fed out of public funds and those who were not. The latter class would probably despise the former, and many parents whose children need food would keep them away from the free meals in order to spare them humiliation.

### III. THE "CANTINES SCOLAIRES" OF PARIS.

The Parisian system is better than either of the foregoing. In Paris meals are provided for all children without question or distinction. A small charge (generally 1½d.) is made; but the children of parents who satisfy the authorities that they cannot afford this are admitted free. No distinction is made as to the food between the children who pay and those who do not, and, as admission is by ticket, and tickets are purchased or given beforehand, no one can know whether any particular child has paid for its meal or not.

But, though this system removes one objection, it leaves others. Many parents, unable to pay for a meal, might even so be restrained by pride from making application to have their children fed freely. They would very likely doubt the absolute secrecy of the system, and would not care to inform even the local authority that they considered themselves destitute. The Parisian machinery makes no provision for compelling parents either to feed their children properly or to allow the authorities to feed them. Generally speaking, the objection to the ingenious "*cantines scolaires*" method is that it is so framed as to put obstacles in the way of the poorest children attending the meals instead of encouraging them to come.

### Sir John Gorst's Plan.

Sir John Gorst has put forward a proposal which has the backing of Dr. Macnamara and has received a considerable measure of general support. He would have the local authority feed any child that appeared to the teacher to be underfed; a small charge would be made for this and recovered from the defaulting parent unless the parent could show proof of destitution. We can make the point clear by quoting Sir John's evidence before the Inter-Departmental Committee:—

In the case of every child to whom this ticket has been so given, application should be made to the parents for the money, and the attendance-officer, or a policeman would be better, should go to the house and say: "Your child was fed at school this morning, and please to pay 2d. or 1d." or whatever it was. In cases where the parent, being able to pay, refuses, the amount should be made recoverable by summary process. Under the present law, if a child went on having food at the school for a



fortnight, and the parent, upon being applied to for the money, would not pay it and did not feed the child, that would be conclusive evidence of neglect of the family, and the man might be prosecuted and sent to prison.

Now, in spite of the wide acceptance which this suggestion has met, to us it seems hopelessly impracticable. It would involve an endless succession of police-court summonses, with conflicting medical evidence, such as would almost certainly arise as to the exact meaning of such an indefinable word as "underfed." A few defeats in the courts would have the effect of making the authorities chary of issuing summonses against parents and consequently loth to feed the children; while, where the prosecutions were many and successful, it would make the feeding policy extremely unpopular. Indeed, the proposal seems to secure the maximum of public irritation with the minimum of public good.

Mr. Loch, the Secretary of the Charity Organization Society, in his evidence before the Committee, pointed to the great difficulty once experienced in collecting the school fees as an example of what was likely to happen in regard to the cost of school dinners. This illustration, which he used as an argument against any kind of public provision of meals for the children, is equally valid as an argument for universal free feeding.

### The Case for Free Feeding.

Our own solution is that all children, destitute or not, should be fed, and fed without charge, at the expense of the State or Municipality. We propose that the regular school course should include at least one meal a day. Thus only can we make sure that all the children who need feeding will be fed. Thus only can we free the policy of feeding from the taint of pauperism. Thus only can the problem of improper feeding be dealt with at all.

There is a little town in Italy, Vercelli, where this policy is carried out with logical completeness. There attendance at the meals is as compulsory as attendance at the school, unless a medical certificate is produced to show that feeding would be injurious to the child. Perhaps one could not here go so far as to imitate this uncompromising example of Latin logic—though Vercelli is a conservative municipality. But it should certainly be the ordinary rule for children to attend the school meals, and if this cannot be effected without compulsion, then compulsion should be used.

### Objections.

Against the policy of universal free feeding here advocated, many serious objections are urged. We will take the most weighty, and consider quite candidly how far they are valid.

#### I. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

In the first place we are told that if you give the children free meals you destroy the responsibility of the parent. The parent, so runs the argument, brings a certain number of children into the world; it is a social necessity that he should be made, in some way, responsible for their upbringing.

Now this plea, like many others of a similar sort, has lost much of its force by reason of the most significant decline in the rate of increase of the population, which has smashed Malthusianism and brought us face to face with the opposite peril to that which Malthus feared. We no longer have any reason to discourage the begetting of children; we may soon be in the position of France which is obliged to seek by all means to encourage it.

Moreover, it is not easy to see that the argument as to parental responsibility is more applicable to the feeding than to the education of the children. Already we educate the children free of charge, and so, if the argument be sound, relieve the parent of what would otherwise be one of his heaviest responsibilities. No serious results have followed—parents have not deserted their offspring, homes are not broken up. Why should we fear that a free meal will have all sorts of calamitous effects upon the national character, when free education has clearly done nothing of the kind?

Lastly, it must be insisted that the provision of universal free meals does not destroy parental responsibility, but only communalizes it. If you feed destitute children only, there may be something in the contention that you are relieving the parent of part of his responsibility, but, if all citizens pay for the provision of the meals (from rates and taxes, direct or indirect) and all citizens can send their children freely to eat the meals, then they are simply providing for their children by co-operative methods, and there is no more interference with parental responsibility than if all the parents in a particular block of tenements agree to start a common kitchen.

## II. "BREAKING UP THE HOME."

Another argument constantly used against the public provision of a mid-day meal is that it would disintegrate the home. Now, putting aside the fact that in the case of many of the children the "home" is hardly an institution that society need be very anxious to preserve, and that it is a little difficult to get wildly enthusiastic about those happy English homes where two or three families live in one room in some foul and pestilent slum, it may reasonably be asked why, even in the case of children living under more tolerable conditions, there should be any deadly social peril in doing for them what is done, as a matter of course, for the children of a large section of the richer classes. In many schools of a more advanced type, secondary schools, girls' high schools, etc., it is the usual thing for the pupils to take their mid-day meal at the school; the arrangement is considered convenient, and no dismal consequences ensue. With the public schools the case is still stronger; the Eton or Harrow boy is kept at school not only for meals but for the whole of the term. Yet no one fears for the home life of the plutocracy.

It may be doubted after all whether it is necessary to regard "the home," in the sense in which the phrase is here used, as the final and immutable form of social organization. Humanity does not stand or fall by the arrangement whereby families take their food in segregated cubicles and hang their washing out of their back

windows. Domesticity does not centre around the pudding. In many parts of the Continent it is the custom for families of the working class to dine together at popular restaurants, and, whether this be an ideal custom or not, it is doubtful if our own arrangement—the wife and children in the “home” and the man in the public house—is so notable an improvement.

But in many ways it can hardly be doubted that the provision of school dinners would improve the home immeasurably. Common meals, provided under proper discipline and in humane surroundings, would civilize and humanize the children, who would learn what a dinner ought to be, and, when they grew up, would make better fathers and mothers than those who had never received such advantages, and in some cases had never been able to escape, even for a moment, from the cramped and debasing atmosphere of the slum tenement.\*

### III. THE RENT AND WAGES OBJECTION.

It has been suggested that the public provision of meals for the workers' children will tend inevitably to raise the rents and to lower the wages of the worker.

Precisely the same objection may, with equal validity, be urged against every proposal (free education, better housing, cheaper transit, to name no others) for lessening upon the shoulders of the underpaid classes the intolerable burthen of life. In point of fact, it is not difficult to see that, by feeding his children, you in a very real way increase the worker's power of resistance to the pressure of his employers. In nine cases out of ten it is the hungry child who breaks the back of the strike. Many a man and woman valiant enough against their own personal suffering are unable to endure the sight of their little ones daily wilting before their eyes. Let them feel assured that their children's dinner is secure, and they will continue the struggle to a victorious end.

### IV. THE COST.

Lastly, it is urged that the expenditure would be ruinous—that we could not afford to provide meals for all the children attending our public elementary schools. Undoubtedly the expense would be considerable. There would, as we shall see, be a good deal of additional building required, some capital outlay to start the system, and then, of course, there would be the actual cost of the meals, which the London Schools Dinners Association calculate to amount to 1½d. per meal, but which, if the meals are to serve all children and not merely the most destitute, might amount to a trifle more. Yet,

\* This suggestion on the part of our Society is not exactly new. In *Fabian Essays*, published in 1890, Mr. Graham Wallas wrote: “If this generation were wise it would spend on education not only more than any other generation has ever spent before, but more than any generation would ever need to spend again. It would fill the school buildings with the means not only of comfort, but even of the higher luxury; it would serve the associated meals on tables spread with flowers, in halls surrounded with beautiful pictures, or even, as John Milton proposed, filled with the sound of music; it would seriously propose to itself the ideal of Ibsen, that every child should be brought up as a nobleman. Unfortunately, this generation is not wise.”

while we admit the magnitude of the sum needed, we may safely say that it could hardly be more productively spent.

Sooner or later, in one way or another, the State must always suffer for underfeeding its children. If a child grow up underfed the chances are heavy that it grows up an inefficient worker and a bad citizen. Unable to earn his living by adequate labor, such a man drifts into the workhouse, the prison, or the asylum, where the State is obliged to support him. And this direct charge is by no means the heaviest price that the community has to pay. It has to pay indefinitely in the demoralization of its citizens, in the consequent instability of their character and inefficiency of their work. Such men fall an easy prey to drink, partly because their characters are weakened, partly because the underfed are notoriously susceptible to alcohol. Thus the price goes on mounting up till we have to pay the sum for which we could feed decently every child in the islands with something like four or five hundred per cent. interest.

The cost will be great, but the expenditure will be thoroughly productive; and large productive expenditure is from the enlightened Socialist point of view the only expenditure worth the incurring. Sir Oliver Lodge has well summarized the conditions of good economic government as "private thrift and public expenditure." At present more than £600,000,000 of the national income goes in the form of unearned rent and interest to support an idle class who spend it mainly on profitless and demoralizing luxuries. If the crying need of food for the children supply us with a powerful motive for getting some of this enormous tribute for public purposes, such opportunity should not be allowed to pass.

#### How to Meet the Cost.

It would be both unwise and inequitable to throw the whole of the cost of school dinners on the local rates. Our present system of rating has grave defects, and, even if it were reformed, there would still be a gross injustice in throwing upon poor boroughs, where a very large number of children would have to be fed, the whole cost of feeding them, and letting off rich boroughs, with few children of the elementary school class to provide for, with a burden comparatively light.

Some of the money should be raised by local taxation—enough to give the citizens and authorities of the locality a sense of their responsibilities and a direct interest in the matter. But the bulk should be raised by national imposts and transmitted to the local authorities in the form of government grants. The national revenue so required should be obtained by an increase and further graduation of the Death Duties, a graduated Income Tax (discriminated against unearned incomes), and other methods of attacking the unearned increment of the rich.

#### The National Minimum.

At present, as has been already pointed out, local authorities have no power to provide generally for the feeding of children. But it

must be insisted that merely permissive legislation, which gives them the power without compelling them to use it, will be of little avail. It is no more defensible in principle that a local authority should be allowed to starve its children if it pleases than that a parent should be allowed to do so. And in this case the practical disadvantages of permissive legislation are enormous.

If you make it a matter of choice whether a municipal authority shall feed its children or not, you make it at once a probable issue at elections. Suppose a progressive local authority undertakes the task; suppose (surely no improbable supposition) that the reactionary party seizes the opportunity to raise the cry of "ruinous extravagance," and turns its opponents out of power at the next election. The result would be that the children would be fed one year and unfed the next, and that their physical and moral welfare would be made contingent upon the chances of an electoral contest: an intolerable state of things.

Moreover, while it is likely that many local authorities would voluntarily undertake the task of feeding the children under their charge, it is quite certain that many would not, and among the dissentient districts would be those where the want is most acute. Take the rural areas, for example. Does anyone dream that a county, mainly agricultural, would be induced by anything short of the severest governmental pressure to undertake the feeding of the agricultural laborer's children. Yet everyone who knows rural England knows that there, if anywhere, ought the duty to be undertaken.

The question of the proper feeding of children is a national question if ever there was one. As we have already said, it is more important that a child should be well fed than that it should be well taught. Yet we do not leave it to the local authority to say whether it will teach the child or not. If we did, it can hardly be doubted that many local authorities would refuse. We insist upon a certain national minimum of education. It is high time that we insisted on a national minimum of feeding.

#### Half Measures.

Therefore we maintain that the only permanent solution of the problem is the establishment of a national minimum of feeding. This, of course, does not mean that we should not support proposals which, while they do not concede all that we think needful, go some way in our direction, and would, if carried, make easier the full enactment of our programme. Thus we should certainly support a measure for enabling local authorities to make provision for the feeding of children, even though they were not compelled to use their power. Still more readily should we support such a bill if it were accompanied by machinery for forcing local authorities, within whose administrative areas much underfeeding was known to exist, to make use of their powers to check it. Neither of these proposals would solve the problem, but they would do much incidental good, and the ultimate failure, which we believe would attend them, would strengthen our case in demanding a complete national system of feeding.

### Proper Feeding.

We have said that universal free feeding appears to be the only way in which the evil of improper (as distinct from insufficient) feeding can be removed. At present many children whose parents get fairly good wages cannot feed their children properly, either because they do not know what is the best food to give or because they have not the time or the skill to prepare it. Manifestly the case of these will not be met by any system which feeds only the patently starved and destitute child. But it will be met both directly and indirectly by a universal system; directly, because the children, whatever they get at home, will at least get proper food at school; indirectly, because it will serve to educate the next generation of mothers in the knowledge of what is the best and most economical way of providing for their families. This is not the place to go into the very large question of what is the ideal diet for a child. All that need be insisted on here is that the provisions should be bought and prepared under expert advice, and that considerations of cheapness should never be allowed to count as against the needs of nourishment. Every child should receive at least one solid meal in the middle of the day, and perhaps a glass of hot milk on arrival in the morning.

### Accommodation.

One of the principal difficulties with which the local authority will have to battle, especially in London and other large towns, will be the difficulty of finding accommodation for so large a number of children as will have to be provided for under our suggested arrangement. The London Schools Dinners Association has found the problem a difficult one, and of course the number of children to be fed under the scheme outlined above will be much greater. It stands to reason that if the children are to derive any physical or moral benefit from the common meals provided by the authority these meals must be served under humane conditions. There must be plentiful space, comfortable surroundings, and no deficiency of light or air. It is also desirable wherever possible that the meals should be given at the school, both for disciplinary reasons and because the essential connection between the meals and the regular school course should never be lost sight of. Now in some Board Schools the central hall or a covered part of the playground might perhaps be utilized for the purpose; in others a slight structural alteration in the buildings might provide the accommodation needed. But there are many Board Schools and a still larger number of Non-Provided Schools where this would be out of the question. In such cases the authority must build, and, if the capital outlay required should be considerable, a special grant from the central government might be made to meet it. Where, for one reason or another, it is impossible to extend the school buildings, the local authority must obtain some hall or other suitable building in the neighborhood and provide the meals there.

It would simplify the problem of accommodation if the children could be given their dinners in relays. Children, unlike Members of

Parliament, seldom care to linger long over their meals, and it would be easy in the time allowed in the middle of the day to feed two sets of children, letting the one set play while the other dines.

#### Medical Inspection.

One recommendation, common to the reports of the Scottish Royal Commission and of the Inter-Departmental Committee, is of great value, and would form an excellent pendant to the feeding policy. It is suggested that we might have a much more elaborate system of inspection, both local and national, of the physical condition of the children. This would certainly be a long step in the right direction. If we could get a really trustworthy and systematic set of statistics as to the condition of children in all elementary schools, it would not only provide us with a valuable mass of sociological data such as we have never had in the past, but it would also enable us to test the success of the feeding policy in the most accurate manner available. The children should be examined physically by medical experts at stated intervals, and the examinations could be checked by the visits of similar medical inspectors employed by the Education Department.

#### What the Central Authority could do.

Even though the feeding of children be made compulsory on all educational authorities, yet there will be much to be done by the central authority in the way of pushing forward the new policy with vigor. Some local authorities will probably use their new powers effectively; others will be disposed, unless continually kept up to the mark, to let them rust, or at best to perform the minimum which the law compels. It should be the business of the Education Department systematically to encourage the former, and systematically to discourage the latter. This they will have every opportunity of doing. The physical statistics already referred to will enable them to find out where an improvement in physique is most needed. They will also know how much each local authority is spending on the feeding policy. Finally, they will have to hand in the government grants a powerful weapon wherewith to enforce the national minimum. On the use which they make of these opportunities the success of the new policy will largely depend.

#### Conclusion.

The initiation of that new policy is required less by our philanthropic instincts than by the most urgent demands of national husbandry. It is true that the hungry scholar is a crime; but it is the worst of national blunders too. Every day on which we suffer our children to go to our schools unfed we are stupidly squandering something more precious than money, and yet something that money will buy—good human material to wit, human brains and human muscles on which alone may be founded a commonwealth that shall endure.

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