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## EDITORIAL.

### THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

The Right Honble. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., Minister of Health, gave an interesting general survey of the public health as it is to-day in the House of Commons on June 28th, when the House went into Committee of Supply on the Vote to complete the sum for the salaries and expenses of the Ministry of Health.

The Minister emphasised the importance of preventive work, and mentioned that in the year 1922 upwards of 19,500,000 weeks of work were lost through sickness among the insured workers. In other words, the equivalent of the work of 375,000 people for the whole year had been absolutely lost to the State. When to that was added the corresponding figure for the non-insured population some idea of the importance of preventive work could be obtained.

He continued by pointing out that the work that was being done by preventive medicine was not in vain. An examination of the vital statistics was remarkably encouraging, especially when one considered the exceptionally hard conditions under which our people had been living for the last three or four years. Thus during the first ten years of the century the death rate was 15.4 per thousand. Last year it was 12.8 per thousand. In the five years 1910-1915 the infant mortality rate was 111 per thousand; last year it had reached the "record" low figure of 77 per thousand. Simultaneously the expectation of life among all classes was increasing, and the baby born to-day could reasonably expect to live twelve years longer than its grandfather.

Mr. Chamberlain stated that the diseases first in their fatal effects were those classed as respiratory—pneumonia, bronchitis, and diseases of that kind—and he was afraid we must attribute the very high mortality from those diseases to the congested conditions and the polluted atmosphere in our large towns. The Minister's statement that he hoped it might be possible for him before very long to intro-

duce some new legislation which would carry us a step farther in the cleansing of the atmosphere will be welcomed by Dr. H. A. Des Vœux, Dr. Saleeby, and others of the group who have worked so long and so earnestly towards this end.

Next in order the Minister placed diseases affecting the heart, and diseases of the nervous system, and in the fourth place, cancer, which now accounts for 96 per thousand of the deaths from all causes. There was no doubt that cancer was steadily on the increase, and that up to the present we knew little of its cause, and did not know what was its cure. Investigations were constantly going on in this subject, and he had at the Ministry of Health a standing Medical Committee on Cancer, which advised him from time to time, and researches were also being made by three bodies.

In regard to tuberculosis, the figures were much more encouraging. In 1867 the deaths from tuberculosis were 2,653 per million; last year they were only 855 per million.

Comparatively lately two new remedies had come under the notice of the Ministry of Health, the first devised by Mr. Spahlinger, the second by Dr. Dreyer.

The statistics as to venereal disease showed it to be fairly rapidly on the decline. A good deal of that result might be attributed to the establishment of a number of clinics throughout the country. Through those clinics a great deal of information had been spread, which had caused people to realise, more than they used to do, the dangers to themselves and to other innocent people who had had nothing to do with the cause producing the disease.

Concerning smallpox, the Minister said that in 1917 there were only seven cases in the country, but there had been a very serious revival in the prevalence of this disease. In 1922 there were upwards of 973 cases, and this year, up to June 16th, we had already had 955 cases. He considered it his duty to speak plainly on this matter; the situation was distinctly serious. Twenty years ago 75 per cent. of the children born were vaccinated, to-day only 38 per cent. He desired to emphasize that

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