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EDITORIAL.

THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE.

Public Health is purchasable: within natural limitations, a community can determine its own death rate.

One of the questions brought prominently before the nation, as a result of the war, is the appalling loss of life and the consequent necessity for conserving the health of the people and for eliminating, as far as possible any sources of waste.

The question indeed is one which was under consideration before the war, and during the years 1913-1914 a body of Unionist Members of Parliament conducted enquiries, through Sub-Committees, and in February, 1914, a Committee was set up to inquire into and review the administration of Public Health, with a view to its improvement, of which Mr. Waldorf Astor was Chairman. The declaration of war interrupted its work, and for two years nothing more was done. But in view of the war wastage of man power, and of the social and economic requirements of the future as well as the ignorance of the public concerning the administrative chaos connected with Public Health, the Committee have brought up to date and published their report, though it cannot be finished.

The general proposition emphasised is that the care and improvement of its subjects' health must occupy a large place in the outlook of every civilized Government both on human and economic grounds.

To attain this end the Report states that "we have a most expensive, and, unfortunately not less intricate, apparatus of statutes, central Departments, and local governing bodies engaged upon the protection of the nation's health—too bewildering for any but the closest student to grasp in its full complexity. Some of the jurisdictions are of a comprehensive type, while others are confined to particular

and specialized areas. But, taken altogether as the expression of a national policy, they present an aggregate effort the most complex, confused, lacking in rationale, and fertile in cross purposes that any administration system in the world has possibly disclosed." Six separate and independent Departments of the State deal incidentally with public health as an accessory to their more characteristic duties, but there is no single Department of which health constitutes the primary function and *raison d'être*, and with a health policy with too main aspects—Prevention and Cure.

This brings us to the need for the establishment of a Department of Health.

Mr. Astor's Committee expresses a preference for the Local Government Board as the basis for the new Department, and the President of that Board, Lord Rhondda, is very sympathetic as to the establishment of a central health authority.

The British Medical Association for many years past has taken the view that a Ministry of Health would provide the only remedy for overlapping in Public Health administration, but the *British Medical Journal* insists that "it cannot be pointed out too soon or too strongly that the co-operation of the general body of the medical profession, which, as Lord Rhondda recognises, is essential to the success of any scheme for a Ministry of Health, will only be obtained if it is made clear from the beginning that whatever Government office is to be remodelled as a basis of this new department, the Ministry of Health will not be the Local Government Board 'writ large.'"

No class of the community is more interested in the establishment of a Ministry of Health than trained nurses, for no class is better aware of the depreciation of health and loss of life which occur for the lack of it, and no such Ministry will be complete and effective without its sub-section of nursing.

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