

The person who is in charge of the infant should be told how contagious the discharge is, and warned against it being conveyed to their own eyes.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Gladys Tatham (who sends an admirable paper), Mrs. Farthing, Miss S. Simpson, Miss P. Thomson, Miss J. Bennett.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Point out dangers to citizens from milk, insects, drainage, water, food, and garbage.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH.*

By C. J. THOMAS, ESQ., M.B., D.P.H., &c
[ABRIDGED.]

In attempting to give some account of recent developments in Public Health one is almost bewildered by the rapidity with which the scope of State medicine has been extended, and the multiplicity of local bodies that have been set up one after another dealing with one facet or another of State medicine. Twenty years ago the whole of Public Health might have been summed up in two words—Drains and Infection. Now it comprises, or promises shortly to comprise, not only prevention of infectious disease, and the prevention of all classes of disease, but the cure of disease as well. Thus we find being brought into the orbit of State medicine (leaving out for the moment the Poor Law administration, which has long stood like a pariah apart), and in place of the Sanitary Hospitals, who stood alone in their glory between the State and the public, with the futile assistance of a busy general practitioner who acted in his very spare moments as Medical Officer of Health, a great army of such officers; whole-time medical officers of health, school doctors, factory surgeons, health visitors, midwives inspectors, school nurses, infant welfare inspectors, welfare workers in factories, inspectors of the feeble-minded, organizers of care committees, voluntary workers, bacteriologists, tuberculosis officers, panel practitioners, and others almost—the catalogue could be continued—too numerous to mention. In addition, the general practitioner, the Harley Street specialist, the district nurse, the midwife, the hospital surgeon, and the hospital nurse, are being very quietly, but surely, brought within its scope.

* A Lecture delivered at the Conference of the National Union of Trained Nurses, London, November 17th, 1917.

The curious thing is that this luxuriant growth has sprung up in a chaotic and unconnected way, just as if many hands had scattered different seeds over the same plot of ground; and this, indeed, is what has largely occurred, for almost every Government Department possesses some health function or other, and the great stimulus to growth and development arising out of the awakening of the conscience of the nation has acted independently in each one.

In addition to this the undefined functions of existing local bodies, and the habit of bringing into existence new local bodies to deal with different aspects of the problem of the nation's health, has increased the confusion, and still worse the apparent vacillation of the central authorities themselves, who possess, apparently, no settled plan, but issue order after order, placing analogous new duties now upon this type of local authority, now upon that type of local authority covering the same area, now appearing to have in view the necessity of co-ordination, now appearing to aim at producing confusion for some occult reason, has enormously complicated the question of the public health.

The general tendency of the growth of public opinion has, however, been sound; there has been a growing realization of the importance to the well-being of the community of intensive work in the sphere of State Medicine. The tendency has been away from the more materialistic attitude of the Victorian era and towards the more personal aspects; public health has allied itself with education, and much of its later developments are based upon the understanding that salvation must come from within rather than from without: that the strengthening of the people in knowledge, sobriety, and character are the most potent means towards the attainment of the highest degree of physical welfare.

In July, 1916, the Local Government Board issued regulations dealing with the State Treatment of venereal disease. The responsibility of organizing this was placed upon County Councils. Arrangements were made with great swiftness, and from the beginning of this year, in London alone, arrangements for the free treatment of all comers suffering from any kind of venereal disease were in operation at 22 hospitals, the whole cost being borne by the State.

This has had the important effect of still further bringing the general hospitals into relation with the Health Departments. Now turning to Sir John Simon's report to the Privy Council in 1868, we find the opinion that

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)