

DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

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(Concluded from page 391.)

[ABRIDGED.]

He would be indeed bold who, at the present time, would forecast the future. Large schemes are afoot. The new Education Bill of Mr. Herbert Fisher is largely a Health Bill, widely extending the functions of State medicine. The provision of the care and oversight of the health of the population from 3 to 14 is being extended by this Bill to the population between 2 and 18. In addition, wide provisions for physical culture are a main provision of the proposals, and this is not limited even to the ages mentioned.

Schemes for the prevention of infant mortality are being discussed; the question of the State endowment of the service of midwives is occupying much attention.

The enforced attention of the State to conditions of nervous breakdown has already produced proposals for peace time psychiatric clinics and rest homes, whereby it is thought that much of the unfitness of the population from insanity and conditions bordering thereon could be prevented. There are proposals for the care of the blind, somewhat on the lines already established for the mentally defective.

Whatever the future may hold there is great scope, without added expenditure, for the co-ordination of all these activities. Co-ordination might even effect enormous economies while producing greater efficiency.

A MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH.

And this brings me to a question which I approach with bated breath, that of a Ministry of Public Health. I have described the vast interests which have, during the past few years, become involved in State medicine, the perplexing want of co-ordination, the baffling intricacies of the relations of local authorities, the multiplicity of central departments, and the absence of any central body whose function it is to take broad, fundamental, and wise views; in short, the want of a General Staff to survey the whole field of operations in regard to the health of the community, and the campaign against disease.

More urgent, to my mind, even than the necessity of a general staff is the unification of local authorities; but possibly the former is a necessary antecedent of the latter.

The general conviction which has grown up that some sort of unification of control is necessary has awakened, as was inevitable, fears and rivalries amongst all the great interests involved. The same sort of excitement has been produced as is produced in a hive from which the queen has been taken, but here it is due to the threat of the introduction of a queen where none has hitherto reigned.

State medicine in England to-day is a creature with no head and many tails, and each tail is at present actively engaged in the attempt at dog-wagging. The Medical Profession, unaccustomed to State control in its general practice, is alarmed and apprehensive. Central Government Departments have their feelings of individuality, and, like individuals, object to amputation, or annihilation; the big and little children in the scheme have the same sort of feeling which is aroused in a family when a new step-mother is proposed. All is in a state of turmoil.

The Insurance Committees have rushed into publicity with a draft Bill, and a very clever Bill it is; this Bill contemplates the establishment of a new ministry quite distinct from any existing central department, to which shall be transferred in the first place the whole of the activities of the Insurance Commissioners, but only portions of the health activities of other central departments, and of some none.

Now the greatest danger that could possibly arise is some hasty and ill-considered scheme of the nature of a *pis aller*; this danger is so formidable that, personally, I am relieved that the Prime Minister has decided that the formation of the Ministry of Health must be postponed for the present. Inevitably the bias that is given at the beginning to the Ministry will for all time determine its attitude even when other functions are added to it.

The establishment of such a Ministry as is contemplated by the Insurance Committees' Bill would mean the predominance of the idea of cure over that of prevention. This indeed would be topsy-turveydom in the relation of the State to the health of the people.

Take, for instance, the question of tuberculosis. From the State point of view tuberculosis is a symptom, and not a disease. The concentration of attention upon its cure rather than its prevention, which has been the tendency of recent developments, is, to my mind, a profound mistake. What are we to think of a Bill which would give the new Ministry of Public Health the charge, in the beginning, of arrangements for the treatment of tuberculosis, while leaving all powers in regard to the

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