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EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

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## EDITORIAL.

### A MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

One of the imperative needs of the immediate future is the Ministry of Health long promised and overdue. This is acutely emphasised by the epidemic of influenza now raging, and the fact that there is no central authority whose primary business it is to deal with the outbreak, though the Local Government Board has stepped into the breach, and called a special Conference of medical representatives of all the Departments concerned, including the Army Medical Department, and the Medical Research Committee.

There is no doubt that the fact that influenza is not one of the notifiable diseases makes cases much more difficult to locate, and the epidemic to control, and it is quite possible that, in the near future, the notification of this disease may be made compulsory.

Meanwhile laws of health well known, but not universally practised, should be strictly observed. Dr. Leonard Hill, F.R.S., Director of the Department of Applied Physiology of the Medical Research Committee, and a Member of the Army Medical Advisory Board, in a letter to the *Times*, points out the very great importance of breathing cool open air, and of exercise, which amplifies the breathing in promoting the defensive mechanism of the respiratory membrane, for many people unwisely seek to keep themselves and children in rooms which are over-warm and humid. The defence depends on the volume of arterial blood passing through the membrane, and on its being kept in a taut state and well washed with its watery secretion. He estimates that the water evaporated from the respiratory membrane out of doors, on a cool winter day, when exercise is taken,

may be at the rate of a pint in the 24 hours, while in a crowded room or ship, with the air saturated and over-warm, the water evaporated will not be more than a third of a pint. Similarly the total heat lost from the respiratory membrane by vaporization, and in warming the inspired air, will be about six times greater on the cool day out of doors, when exercise is taken, than in the over-warm room or ship."

Facts such as the foregoing would be most usefully crystallized and disseminated by a Ministry of Health, one of the first duties of which must unquestionably be the creation of a strong medico-scientific department, and while this department would be employed in investigation and research, the professions of both medicine and nursing would apply the laws of health framed as the result of the knowledge thus acquired, to the treatment and care of epidemic and other diseases.

It is certain that nursing must have a prominent and honourable place in any Health Department established by State Authority if the work of that Department for the community is to be effective, and the Public Health services of Nursing and Midwifery should be co-ordinated under its control, while still leaving individuals the right to practise their professions independently.

Nurses, owing to the fact that their appeal for State Organization has been ignored, are at present subjected to patronage, exploited, and sweated, but their trained, expert services are an invaluable national asset which should be standardized through a Nurses' Registration Act. Registered Nurses, whose knowledge would be of a tested and ascertained quality would then be available for enrolment in Government Services, including the Ministry of Health, the establishment of which, in the near future, the nation awaits.

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