

A MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

The most pressing of all reconstructive problems is the foundation of a Ministry of Health; and Major-General Sir Bertrand Dawson, G.C.V.O., in an address on "The Future of the Medical Profession," in his Cavendish Lecture delivered recently before the West London Medico-Chirurgical Society, emphasised this point.

There is, he said, "a growing appreciation of the fact by the medical profession and the public that much disease is preventable; a growing sense that health is of supreme importance alike to the State and the individual; that the best means for preserving health and curing disease should be available for (not necessarily given to) every citizen, irrespective of his position, and by right and not by favour.

"There is an interesting parallel between provision for education and health, both as regards historical development and present needs. Education was at one time patchy, unorganized, and dependent on voluntary effort. In 1870 Parliament stepped in, with the result that State and voluntary education proceeded side by side. Since then the State Service has gradually overgrown the voluntary one, because it has been recognized that education should be available for all, that the State is responsible for the education of its citizens, and that the cost is too great to be supported by fees, or by voluntary effort alone. This cost is in part defrayed by an education rate chargeable on householders, and Dr. Gordon Dill's suggestion that a similar rate should be charged for health has a great deal to recommend it; it would be a local contribution to the cost, and would not be altogether an additional burden, for its application would soon be followed by a diminution in the poor rate.

"Health organization is following a similar development, though tardily and at a distance. Yet in reality health is a more fundamental need than education, and without doubt the two together form the foundation stone of the State. Notwithstanding there exists no Ministry of Health, and even now, when it is proposed to form one, such a Ministry is to be tied politically to the Local Government Board."

Sir Bertrand Dawson considers that medical services must have some kind of State aid and central control; that for their efficiency they need co-ordinated effort installed in specially equipped institutions, and reaches, by what he

regards as the irresistible logic of facts, the following conclusions:—

1. State aid: central control.
2. Co-ordinated effort—team work.
3. Development of institutions specially designed for diagnosis and treatment, styled for brevity institutional treatment.

To the foregoing he adds a fourth—that curative and preventive medicine are no longer separated in accordance with any sound principle, and should be brought together in thought, teaching, and organization.

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE MEDICAL SERVICES.

Conditions he regards as essential to any plan are that "all the buildings and equipments, such as hospitals, clinics, laboratories, necessary for the medical services, will be constructed and maintained by the new health authority. They would be available for all citizens, though in practice they would be only partially used by the well-to-do. . . .

"All professional and technical questions must be determined alone by the doctors, and administrative questions by a health board composed of both lay and professional members. Neither the professional nor lay members should be chosen from any area smaller than a county or large borough. . . . Though granted adequate powers, the health boards should be controlled as regards larger questions of policy, by the Ministry of Health.

"By this plan of choosing big areas for the Health Board electorate, one would hope to avoid the evils of local politics and to secure a better type of representative. By retaining the determination of policy, and the confirmation of the more important administrative acts at the Health Ministry, one would secure control without over-centralization. . . .

"But whatever the actual plan, the principle that technical matters must be decided by medical men must be adhered to, and thus one of the errors of the Insurance Act put right.

"The practice of putting the skilled under the control of the unskilled must cease. . . .

"With so much of the flower of our manhood sacrificed for the great cause, the rearing of a healthy race has become a supreme necessity.

"The Ministry will need to draw to its counsels representatives from all departments of medicine, both preventive and curative, and these counsellors must have real power, with direct access to the Minister, in contrast to the baneful tradition at the Local Government Board, whereby the medical officer can only advise the Minister through the intermediary of a lay official."

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