

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH BILL.

On Monday, February 17th, Dr. Addison, President of the Local Government Board, presented in the House of Commons "a Bill to establish a Ministry of Health and a Board of Health, to exercise in England and Wales and in Scotland respectively powers with respect to Health and Local Government, and for purposes connected therewith."

The following are included in the provisions of the Bill:—

ESTABLISHMENT OF MINISTER.

Clause 1.—For the purpose of promoting the health of the people throughout England and Wales, and for the purpose of the exercise of the powers transferred or conferred by this Act, it shall be lawful for His Majesty to appoint a Minister of Health (hereinafter called "the Minister"), who shall hold office during His Majesty's pleasure.

GENERAL POWERS AND DUTIES OF MINISTERS IN RELATION TO HEALTH.

Clause 2.—It shall be the duty of the Minister to take all such steps as may be desirable to secure the effective carrying out and co-ordination of measures conducive to the health of the people, including measures for the prevention and cure of diseases, the treatment of physical and mental defects, the collection and preparation of information and statistics relating thereto, and the training of persons engaged in health services.

TRANSFER OF POWERS AND DUTIES TO AND FROM MINISTER.

Clause 3.—(1) There shall be transferred to the Minister—

(a) All the powers and duties of the Local Government Board.

(b) All the powers and duties of the Insurance Commissioners and the Welsh Insurance Commissioners.

(c) All the powers of the Board of Education with respect to attending to the health of expectant mothers and nursing mothers, and of children who have not attained the age of five years and are not in attendance at schools recognized by the Board of Education.

(d) All the powers of the Privy Council and of the Lord President of the Council under the Midwives Acts, 1902 and 1918.

(e) Such powers of supervising the administration of Part I of the Children Act, 1908 (which relates to infant life protection), as have heretofore been exercised by the Secretary of State.

(Here follow clauses amplifying, and explanatory, of the above provisions; for instance, it is declared to be the intention of the Act that in the event of provision being made by Act of Parliament for the revision of the Poor Law, in the present or any future session, that powers vested in the Minister of Health (not being powers or duties relating or incidental to the health of the

people) shall be transferred from the Minister to other Government Departments.)

Clause 4.—(1) It shall be lawful for His Majesty by Order in Council to establish consultative councils for giving, in accordance with the provisions of the Order, advice and assistance in connection with such matters affecting or incidental to the health of the people as may be referred to in such Order.

(2) Every such council shall include persons of both sexes, and shall consist of persons having practical experience of the matters referred to the council.

Clause 5 makes special provisions for the administration of the Act in Wales, and

Clause 9 deals with its application to Scotland, subject to certain modifications.

These are the provisions of the Bill of special interest to nurses and midwives. Those who wish to study it further can procure it through any bookseller, price 2d. net.

COMMENTS.

Trained Nurses and Midwives will welcome unalloyed satisfaction the prospect of the establishment, in the near future, of a Government Department whose special function it will be to safeguard the health of the people, and particularly that the duty of taking steps for the prevention of disease will be one of those imposed on the Minister of Health. How often have we nurses realised in hospital that many patients whom we have nursed would never have come under our care at all had the conditions of their life, and work, been hygienic; how often, as we bade good-bye to a patient, carefully nursed back to health, have we sorrowfully known that he was returning to an environment which had been the cause of his illness, and that a recurrence must be anticipated.

Again, every nurse employed in asylums for the insane knows that many (it is not too much to say most) of the cases which come under her care come too late for the best results to be obtained; that the treatment by mental experts of a delicate organ like the brain should be actively taken in hand on the first symptoms of disease, whereas a patient cannot be admitted to an asylum, or mental hospital, until certified as insane; by which time the disease has made substantial progress, and may even be incurable.

District nurses, also, know that conditions of overwork, underfeeding, overcrowding, and unhygienic conditions of life are responsible for much indifferent health, and disease; and the work already done by school nurses under the London County Council and other Education Authorities is an example of how much can be accomplished in the way of prevention.

It is obviously useless to expect the best returns from large sums expended on education when children's brains are suffering from malnutrition, and poisoned by carbonic acid gas from sleeping in overcrowded rooms. A sound education should be the birthright of every child, but health comes even before education, and had a Ministry of Health Act been passed before the Education Acts,

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