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**EDITORIAL.**

**A GREAT HEALTH COMBINE REQUIRED.**

There is no question that the financial affairs of the voluntary hospitals have reached an acute crisis, partly, no doubt, the result of the abnormal cost of living. With the advent of the Ministry of Health, and the increased precision of scientific methods now recognised as necessary in the treatment of the sick, the co-ordination of all health agencies, curative and preventive, becomes necessary, and the hospitals will inevitably fall into line as factors in a State scheme—perhaps a scheme of National Insurance, covering provision for the varied necessities of the insured sick.

Other factors in the passing of the voluntary hospitals are the high wage now commanded by the working classes, and the shrinking incomes of the middle classes who, in the past, have been liberal supporters. The middle classes can no longer afford the financial support they have given hitherto, nor is it equitable that they should deny themselves to provide free hospital treatment for persons better off than they are.

Just as the support of hospitals by the Religious Orders gave place to control by lay committees, and the voluntary system, so the voluntary hospitals—which in their day have done such splendid work, and relieved an incalculable amount of suffering and sickness—must in their turn inevitably give place to State Hospitals, which, in all but name, our poor law infirmaries are at the present time, and responsibility for the largely increased cost of maintenance be thus assumed by the community at large—not by a comparatively few philanthropic persons.

A sign of the times is that the Governors of the London Hospital have decided to ask for a weekly payment from all inmates except those who are too poor to pay, the sum mentioned being 10s. a week.

In proposing the adoption of the new scheme Lord Knutsford said that each patient cost the Governors £4 a week. They owed their bankers £52,000. There were just enough securities to meet that, and then they were "on the rocks." He urged that the Government should allot the Amusements Tax to the hospitals, for he was sure that people who were amusing themselves would not object to doing something for those who were sick and suffering.

Such desperate expedients may, for a time, delay the inevitable, but it is as certain as it is equitable that the voluntary hospitals will come into a great "health combine," and be controlled, in so far as medical and nursing science are concerned, by professional experts. A system of insurance must cover the cost.

Now that we have the Ministry of Health at the head of the Health Department of this country, it is proper, and reasonable, that all the agencies concerned in the maintenance and restoration of health, and the amelioration of sickness, shall eventually be co-ordinated under its control on a systematic plan. What is required is a survey of the whole provision of public health services now existing, and the establishment of others to fill gaps at present vacant, which can then be linked up together, and economy in administration effected, by reserving hospitals for the treatment of acute cases, while district nurses, and preventive and remedial agencies of various kinds, will diminish the demands upon the more expensively equipped institutions.

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