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EDITORIAL.

A STATE MEDICAL SERVICE.

A memorandum on a State Medical Service, by Mr. D. T. Jenkins, F.F.I., F.S.S., and Mr. J. A. Newrick, Joint Secretaries of the Association of Approved Societies, 76-78, Swinton Street, Grays Inn Road, W.C. 1, is of great interest at the present time, when so much attention is centred on the working of the National Insurance Acts, and it is of particular importance, because it not only contends that "as a measure to prevent and cure ill-health the National Insurance Acts have failed," but it presents an alternative scheme. It is, in short, not only destructive, but constructive.

The writers claim that the experience gained by Approved Society workers in the administration of National Health Insurance during the past seven years has endowed them with a vivid realisation of the paramount importance of health reform, if we, as a people, are to hold our own physically, mentally, socially, and morally, and that all is not well with us when every year we lose by death, in England alone, nearly a quarter of a million persons under the age of 50, of which number 64,000 are infants.

Again, it is laid down that, without doubt, much crime and vice is due to a state of degeneracy which is largely produced by sickness and ill-health; that good health is the foundation stone of individual and national happiness and prosperity; and that our present machinery for the prevention of disease is hopelessly ineffective.

After discussing these at length, the weaknesses of the present system and the defects of the "so-called medical benefit supplied under the National Insurance Acts," including the lack of nursing and midwifery services, the writers of the Memorandum propose that medical benefit should be lifted from the Insurance Act altogether, if it is to be made at

all effective. It has, they say, been well observed that "there is no connection between a service to insure against ill-health and a service to prevent and cure sickness. The former is surely a matter of finance, averages, and administration, to be carried out on business principles by laymen. The latter is the concern of a learned profession, thoroughly trained in the science of medicine, surgery, and hygiene, matters upon which the laymen have only enough knowledge to be dangerous."

In substitution of existing medical services, it is suggested, as the only solution, that provision should be made for the extension of medical benefits to all persons, male and female, without distinction of rank or class, administered by a separate department of the Ministry of Health, working through the local authorities, who should set up health committees for local administration.

Further, for administrative purposes the country should be divided into convenient areas, each to be provided with a sufficient number of medical practitioners and consultant specialists—full-time, adequately salaried officials—working in a team under the direction of a Chief Medical Officer of Health, who should be responsible to the local health authority or to the Ministry of Health.

It is proposed that sufficient hospital accommodation to meet the needs of the area should also be provided, supplemented by the establishment of a Social Service on the lines existing in many parts of the United States of America, and that each team of doctors should have a sufficient number of full-time nurses and midwives to meet the requirements of the area, also staffs of Health Visitors and Household Helps.

Now that the reconstruction of the Health Services of the country is imminent, a scheme such as that outlined above should receive careful and sympathetic consideration.

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