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EDITORIAL.

THE STATE OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

The Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health to the Right Hon. Sir Alfred Mond, Bart, M.P., Minister of Health, is a document of more than ordinary interest and importance, for on the health of the nation depends its happiness, its stability, its very existence.

Sir George Newman, in his introduction, alludes to the fact that the growth and expansion of the meaning of Preventive Medicine is one of the characteristics of the present time. Not only is increased interest being taken by the public generally in all questions of personal and public hygiene, but the somewhat remarkable advance of the science of Medicine and the new applications of its art tend continually to enlarge its scope. It is the universal experience that human life is crippled or curtailed by disease, which leads to disablement, incapacity or even premature death. The purpose of Preventive Medicine is to prevent such disease as is preventable, to lengthen man's life and make it happier and more effective. In order to achieve these ends we must, first, develop and fortify the physique and powers of resistance of the individual; secondly, we must seek to discover and then prevent or remove the causes and conditions of disease and its propagation. Thus, in a word, the science of Preventive Medicine means the establishment and maintenance of individual health and the avoidance of infection or other conditions which bring about disease.

A Ministry of Health to serve as a central co-ordinating Health Department for the whole country was proposed by Sir John Simon so far back as 1854. It was, in fact, established only in 1919 by the Ministry of Health Act of that year. It is

part of the inevitable organisation for dealing with the public health. For in this business there would appear to be no escape from the necessity of having in this country:—

(a) A central supervising Department, a Ministry of Health;

(b) local authorities or representative bodies charged with the administration of Acts of Parliament and the local governance of local affairs;

(c) voluntary societies and agencies for the advancement of health and social betterment, by means of which a free people inspire their laws;

(d) the medical profession as instrument and interpreter of true Hygiene; and

(e) an educated people willing and able to practise the way of health.

In the carrying out of this programme successfully the intelligent work and enthusiastic co-operation of trained nurses is an essential factor. As Sir George Newman points out, "it is in the local area, in direct touch with the patient, that the true integration of Medicine is to be achieved. It is there that the medical practitioner works, and that early diagnosis and a prompt and adequate medical service is to find fulfilment. It is there and not in Whitehall that the actual battle with disease will be lost or won. Maternity, child welfare, industrial hygiene, a sanitary environment, the prevention and cure of disease, the education of the public—these matters can only be dealt with directly where the people are born and live and work and die"

This applies with equal force to nursing; for the district nurse, the school nurse, and the midwife have, by reason of the confidence and esteem in which they are held, a considerable influence on the health of those among whom they work.

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