

## THE NATIONAL HEALTH.

### PUBLIC EDUCATION IN HEALTH.

A Memorandum addressed to the Minister of Health by Sir George Newman, K.C.B., M.D., F.R.C.P., Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health and of the Board of Education, has just been published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, Imperial House, Kingsway, W.C.2 (price 6d.), and, like all contributions from his pen, deserves careful study and consideration.

Sir George Newman writes:—

#### A GOLDEN AGE OF MEDICINE.

"In the last 100 years men have witnessed a growth in the science and art of medicine incomparably greater than in any other similar period in the history of mankind; one great discovery has followed rapidly upon the heels of its forerunner. At the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century the cell theory, technical methods of clinical examination, and the effect of social conditions and industrial occupation upon health were the principal themes of debate in medical circles. But these were soon followed by the discovery of anæsthesia, which brought reform amounting to revolution in surgical treatment and its possibilities. Even more far-reaching knowledge came with the establishment of the theory of the germ and parasite origin of disease, which found manifold forms of application in disinfection, antiseptic surgery, treatment by vaccines and antitoxins, and the means of control of infective disease, of plague and cholera, of typhoid and diphtheria, of malaria and yellow fever. In the latter half of the last 100 years there has been an immense advance in education, in domestic and communal sanitation, in the social amelioration of certain sections of society, in personal hygiene, and in the organisation of the public authorities concerned with the health of the people. Finally, in the last few years we have had opened a new chapter of knowledge of the vital part played by the internal secretions of the body; the body itself has been unveiled before us by the X-rays, and the therapeutic power of heat and light, of electrical and radium energy, has been brought to the relief of suffering. It can scarcely be gainsaid that we live in a golden age of medicine, which has seen more direct and unquestioned progress than all the long centuries since the fifth century B.C., when the Hippocratic School gathered together some of the accumulated wisdom of the ancient world before its day.

#### THE SOCIAL APPLICATION OF MEDICINE.

"Every advance in our knowledge increases the potential capacity of man. But the mere increase of knowledge, and particularly the knowledge of preventive medicine, or the ways and means of personal hygiene and well-being, can do nothing of itself to prevent disease and to safeguard health, unless it be *understood, accepted and practised*. So long as it remains exclusive or esoteric it can accomplish little, it can work no mighty deeds. It must filter down through all sections and conditions of society. It must become the common property of the people. It must arrest the attention of the individual and create in him a desire to know and to act on his knowledge—a desire which will spring from self-interest and self-preservation on the one hand, and from a sense of accord with public opinion and the collective consciousness on the other, an awakened sense of communal responsibility. Professor Dicey pointed out long ago that the development of English law was (a) slow but continuous, and (b) the result of public opinion and of practical self-interest. Thus also has it been with the growth of the social application of medicine. Sound practice, as a rule, lags behind the ascertainment of truth. Popular education is the process by which we reduce the interval between the two."

#### PERSONAL ASPECT OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE.

Dealing with the personal aspect of preventive medicine, the author repeats what he said in 1919 at the time of the establishment of the Ministry of Health.

"An essential part of any national health policy is the instruction in the principles and practice of hygiene of the great mass of the people. In this, as in other spheres of human affairs, ignorance is the chief curse. We are only now, as knowledge grows, becoming aware of the immeasurable part played by ignorance in the realm of disease. It is hardly too much to say that in proportion as knowledge spreads in a population, disease and incapacity decline, and this becomes more evident as the gross forms of pandemic disease are overcome. As in the individual, so in the community, knowledge is the sheet anchor of preventive medicine—knowledge of the way of health, knowledge of the causes and channels of disease, knowledge of remedy. The great reforms to which reference is made in these pages are dependent for their achievement upon an enlightened and responsive people."

Sir George Newman emphasises the need for close and intelligent co-operation between the health authorities and the individual citizen, and presents his views in plain terms, which are of necessity here abbreviated.

(i) *Sanitation*. The prevention of nuisances, household cleanliness, and domestic sanitation are matters which appertain to the careful housewife. If they are not attended to by her, they will not, in many cases, be attended to at all. There are, or should be, no doubt, many facilities provided for her—water supply, drainage, sewerage, and the removal of refuse; but it is on her own action, and her own understanding, that the domestic sanitation and the admission of sunlight and air into the home will largely depend. The appropriate and safe storage of food, and its protection from contamination by dirt or flies is also a matter of individual sanitary precaution.

(ii) Official returns show that *disease of the respiratory tract* is one of the two commonest causes of sickness in England and Wales. There are numerous contributory causes—many cases follow the neglect of other diseases, such as influenza or measles; but, speaking generally, personal infection and exposure to variations of temperature are also contributory. Neglect of the "common cold," and behaviour which ensures its direct transmission to others, are widespread and habitual. People suffering from "colds" shout, breathe, sneeze, and cough in each others' faces, careless or ignorant of the fact that *they are highly infectious*, and are thus spreading their infection by means of droplets of saliva, invisible, or even visible.

(iii) The second great cause of sickness is *digestive disturbance*, which is frequently due to errors of diet. Many an individual compels his stomach to work overtime, at irregular intervals and at inordinate speed; or he consumes ill-balanced, monotonous mixtures of indigestible food; the real needs of the organism he makes subservient to demands of convenience, habit or fashion. Even if he tries to eat the right thing at the right time, he does not know that milk, butter, vegetables, fruits and numerous other foods are preserved, coloured, or adorned by the addition of substances which may be harmless, but, on the other hand may be definitely injurious. Even flour may have a large amount of its valuable nutrient removed, and be treated with various undesirable chemicals to make it white and pleasing to the eye. Knowledge of food values and the needs of the body is lacking, with the result that much money is spent on unsuitable food, while many valuable and cheap foods are almost entirely neglected. Only by teaching individuals what, when, and how to cook and eat, and how to protect their food from contamination, can we ensure that the digestive system shall be treated with the respect and consideration that will enable it efficiently to

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