

fulfil its function. . . . "It can be asserted with assurance," says Professor McCollum of Baltimore, "that the chief factor responsible for human deterioration in recent times is in the *unwise choice of food*. More can be achieved through dietary reform than through any other agency."

(iv) *Dental decay* is the cause of much ill-health, impairment and invalidity in childhood and in after life, nearly all of it preventable. School medical and dental inspection has revealed the fact that more than half the school children at eight years of age are suffering from caries, and many of them from oral sepsis. In adolescents and adults this evil continues, producing many terminal conditions—gastro-intestinal trouble, toxæmia, joint affections, neurasthenia—which incapacitate workers to a serious degree.

(v) The commoner *infectious diseases*, such as measles, diphtheria, scarlet fever, smallpox, whooping cough, tuberculosis, and venereal disease, produce a devastating amount of disablement and death. These are spread almost entirely by contact with infectious persons. People must be taught that diphtheria germs do not live in drains, but in throats, and may be conveyed to others by the sick, by contact, and by "carrier" persons. That it may be dangerous deliberately to allow young children to be infected with measles, whooping cough, or scarlet fever in order that they may "get them over and done with," for these diseases are far less dangerous to older children. They must be taught that relatively minor diseases, such as measles, may prove mortal if not adequately treated and properly nursed. They must be taught that tuberculosis is not necessarily hereditary, and therefore predestined, but is the result of personal infection or drinking tuberculous milk. They must be taught that the wholesale ravages of venereal disease are not due to chance or caprice, but are the direct effect of personally contracted infection.

(vi) The nation loses by death 3,000 mothers a year in childbirth, and tens of thousands of young mothers are unnecessarily damaged or invalidated thereby every year. Much of this *maternal mortality* and sickness could be prevented by proper supervision of the expectant mother's health during pregnancy. . . . Yet only a small proportion of the 700,000 mothers who give birth to children every year submit themselves to ante-natal supervision. If the expectant mother could be taught the necessity of ante-natal care and medical examination, and could receive competent attendance at the birth of her child, a large amount of the mortality and invalidity attributable to child birth would disappear. The facilities are available, but they are insufficiently used.

(vii) In 1923 there died in England and Wales 52,582 infants who had not reached the first anniversary of their birthday. More than 32,000 of them died in the first three months from diseases in large measure preventable. . . . The young of all animals are dependent for survival after birth upon the care and protection of the parent, and the human species is no exception. . . . It is the health, capacity and maternal care of the mother which is the governing consideration. Since the establishment of schools for mothers, of maternity and infant welfare centres, and of other educational agencies for helping mothers in their maternal duty, the infant mortality rate in this country has fallen by 50 per cent. In 1900 it was 154 per 1,000 born in England and Wales. In 1923 it had fallen to 69.

(viii) A large number of crippled children owe their condition to one of two causes, *ricketts* or *bone tuberculosis*. The first of these is now known to be preventable, and is due almost entirely to faulty feeding and rearing in the early years of life; and it cannot be prevented without correct feeding, sunlight, and fresh air. Bone tuberculosis, even after the disease has appeared, can to a great extent be prevented from crippling its subject if early and appropriate treatment is given.

(ix) There is another scourge in which early treatment is essential. We know but little of the causes of *cancer*, to which 40,000 or 50,000 deaths are attributed every year, but we know some facts about it. . . . The essential point is that the patient should not postpone or delay seeking competent medical advice, and above all should not waste time or money in trying quack remedies which at best are useless and at worst aggravate the disease.

(x) It is usual to attribute the present day prevalence of *nervous and mental troubles* to the rush and worry of modern life. Psychologists tell us, however, that although urban conditions may be contributory causes, the predisposition to the trouble may arise quite early in life, often in infancy. Knowledge is accumulating of how this predisposition is acquired and how it may be avoided, and there is no doubt that in the future the question of mental hygiene will be one of the most fruitful fields for popular health education. We must begin at the beginning, in childhood. We must seek to maintain mental health and capacity, and prevent its breakdown; we must give more attention to early mental disorder, to intermittent and recurrent cases, to mental aberration associated with other disease; we must deal with all kinds of mental impairment, from mere retarded development up to insanity, and not wait to act only on the end result; and we must deal with them on the principles of psychology and physiology. We must not be content with conditions of life and labour which tend to produce 20,000 lunatics a year, or be satisfied with their segregation.

Sir George Newman proceeds to point out that these ten types of the condition or disease for their remedy demand personal knowledge and personal practice. "Only an educated people is an effective people." He sums up this Section of the Memorandum as follows:—

#### THE PRIMARY FOUNDATION OF THE HEALTH OF THE STATE.

"It is now seventeen years since Parliament in 1907 established under the Board of Education the national system of the medical inspection of all school children. This system constitutes in my judgment one of the primary foundations of the health of a State and one of the most fruitful applications of Preventive Medicine. For it is the administrative expression of two vital principles; first, it finds out periodically, and in good time, the actual facts of the physique of the individual, and provides skilled health guidance, or treatment of defects or tendencies; and, secondly, it draws the attention of the individual to the importance of physical health, and furnishes an opportunity for his education in regard to it. Now if the maintenance of health and the prevention of disease be, as we claim, more essential than attempts, many of them blind attempts, to cure disease, or in other words, if the science and art of Preventive Medicine is more important to the State than Curative Medicine, then these two principles stand out at once in bold relief, as supreme. . . . I believe that individuals or a nation who are willing to put these two principles, already inculcated in childhood, into practice—*i.e.*, to be medically examined, either periodically or when first indisposed, and accept advice on their health maintenance, and to learn the laws of hygiene—will do more to prolong life, increase its capacity and enhance its value than they would by the adoption of any other single method of procedure yet known to man.

The other sections of the Memorandum, *i.e.*, in the Educational Work of the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education, the Educational Work of Local Authorities, the Educational Work of Voluntary Bodies, Public Health Education in other Countries, and some General Observations and Conclusions, are just as illuminating and important as the one from which we have quoted so freely. We can only advise our readers to procure the Memorandum, and to study it carefully for themselves.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)