

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

The Institute of Hygiene, in Portland Place, is to be congratulated on being granted a Royal Charter. The Institute is doing much good work.

A Falling Death Rate.

The Annual Report of Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, is always of great interest, and that just published gives the inspiring information that 1928 was "an exceptionally healthy year in England and Wales, perhaps the healthiest of which we have record."

There was a decreased death-rate, equal to a saving of 24,000 lives as compared with 1927; infant mortality was the lowest ever recorded; and the general health attained a high standard. Life is being prolonged, and the number of persons over fifty-five is increasing substantially.

The population, however, is growing very slowly, the natural increase being only 5 per 1,000 per annum owing to the very low birth-rate.

A New Vaccination Order.

A new Vaccination Order, just issued by the Minister of Health, instructs public vaccinators to vaccinate in one insertion in all ordinary cases instead of the four insertions previously advocated.

The Order gives effect to recommendations made by the Committee appointed in conjunction with the Medical Research Council, to inquire into matters relating to vaccination.

The Lower Mortality Rate of Scarlet Fever.

It is a remarkable fact that although scarlet fever is as widely prevalent as heretofore, the mortality rate is much lower than it was twenty years ago. Indeed, measles, which used to be somewhat lightly regarded, now appears to be the more serious.

A report just issued by the Medical Research Council, (Special Report, Series No. 137, H.M. Stationery Office, price 2s. net) is therefore of special interest and will repay careful study.

It is based upon the clinical histories of all the patients suffering from scarlet fever, diphtheria or enteric fever admitted to the Eastern Fever Hospital of the Metropolitan Asylums Board at Homerton during the years 1895-1914.

The statistics comprise 21,290 cases of scarlet fever, 15,239 cases of diphtheria, and 2,324 cases of enteric fever.

Health Propaganda.

At the recent meetings of the British Medical Association at Manchester the Section of Medical Sociology held a public session on health propaganda, at which Dr. Wigmore expressed the opinion that all organisations that want to dabble in the public health ought to be registered.

Councillor Robinson (Manchester) expressed the disquieting belief that in all forms of food production and distribution there were diseased people at work who ought not to be engaged with food in any way. As the law now stood there was no way of restraining them. The time was ripe for a thorough investigation on both local and national lines into the food we ate and the way it was handled. We hope such an investigation will be undertaken without delay.

Deaths from Cholera.

The number of deaths from cholera which have been officially reported since the last week of June in various districts of the Bombay Presidency is 4,272. The total number of cases of cholera which have been reported in the same period is over 11,000.

Six Government medical officers are working in the affected areas. The Director of Public Health is at present making a tour of these areas.

AN IMPORTANT PRONOUNCEMENT.

Sterilisation of the unfit as a means of coping with the serious menace of mental deficiency was emphatically urged by Mr. Justice McCardie to a surprised court at Birmingham Assizes on July 12th at the conclusion of two cases of a revolting character. "For years past," the Judge said, "I have given very wide reading and much thought to the question of feeble-mindedness, and I have long since come to the conclusion that people of this country should face the need for the introduction of some system of sterilisation of the unfit. I know it is said that public speakers refrain from dealing with this subject—first, because it is thought the public are not yet prepared for it; secondly, because speakers are too modest to deal with the subject in adequate fashion—but I state that, in my view, sterilisation should be introduced at once, and I believe it will help greatly towards reducing the grave state of mental deficiency which exists in many parts of the country. Nothing is more horrible in our civilisation than that a man or woman should be able to beget eight, or nine, or even twelve illegitimate children, all of them cursed with this horrible taint of mental deficiency. I think it is my duty to make this declaration publicly."

The National Asylum Workers Magazine which reports this declaration states that the first of the two cases which had just been dealt with by Mr. Justice McCardie was one in which an Aylesbury woman was sentenced to six months in the second division for infanticide. She was, it was stated, the mother of eight illegitimate children, and one of her daughters was in trouble, the man responsible being the father of the woman's last child. The medical officer of Holloway Prison said the woman was mentally defective, but could not be certified as such under either of the Acts.

In sentencing her the Judge said: "This was the ninth illegitimate child born to you, all of them more or less mentally defective, as you are. If I had power I should deem it my duty, not only in your interests, but in the interests of the nation, to send you to a mental institution so that you could be safeguarded for the future and so that the people of this country should be saved from the curse which falls upon them continuously—the curse of feeble-minded children. However, the law is defective. I feel justified in saying the scope of these Acts will be enlarged so that the nation may be saved from the growing peril of the unintelligent, the inferior, and the almost insane."

In the second case a man found guilty of an offence against a young girl was ordered to be sent to a mental institution.

George Wallace Clark, aged 64, was recently at West Ham sentenced to six months' hard labour for indecently assaulting Minnie Lee, age 10. He was also charged with stealing Hilda Harvey, aged six, who was missed from her home in Manor Park on August 9th and not found until the following night.

A number of previous convictions were proved against Clark, including a sentence of two months after being found with a five-year-old child in a park.

And for these unspeakable crimes this sex pervert was sentenced to six months imprisonment! The leniency with which magistrates and others treat these criminals is often scandalous—as in the above case. Surely now that we have women in Parliament some of them will tackle this abuse. We have called attention to it for years.

This monster might well be subjected to the treatment approved by Mr. Justice McCardie.

The Romford (Essex) Board of Guardians has decided to ask the Commissioner of Police to investigate the cause of an extraordinary sequence of cases of criminal abortion which are coming into their Oldchurch hospital.

These cases come from the L.C.C. Becontree Estate.

Mr. J. E. Boyce, a member of the Board, stated at a meeting that there had been many such cases during the past few weeks, and he thought the Board should take action to put a stop to them.

Dr. L. H. Booth, the Medical Officer, said they were getting an extraordinary number of these cases. A few weeks ago an inquest on one woman who had died was held, but nothing could be proved.

The Board decided to communicate with Scotland Yard.

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