

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE COAL CONDITIONS.

A White Paper just published entitled "Report on Investigation in the Coalfield of South Wales and Monmouth" (Stationery Office, Cmd. 3272, price 3d.) is a review of the present conditions of life and health in the South Wales Coalfield by Sir Arthur B. Lowry, the Chief General Inspector of the Ministry of Health, and Dr. James Pearse, a medical officer of the Ministry, who were instructed by the Minister to make the inquiry.

Sir Arthur Lowry and Dr. Pearse find no increase in the general death rate, and state that neither the infant mortality rate, nor the prevalence of tuberculosis give cause for anxiety, but they do call attention to an increase in the occurrence of rickets indicating a deficiency in the quality if not the quantity of the diet of the child population, and in some areas to languor and anæmia especially in the mothers of young children, and among the older men persistence of debility after illness. There is also insufficiency of proper clothing and footwear, "another factor which must tend to impair the physical condition of the poorest of the population."

The Commissioners further stated:—"From the observations which we made personally in the houses we visited, observations which were confirmed by what had been told us by various informants, the diet in the households of the unemployed men comprised little beyond white bread, butter or margarine, potatoes, sugar, jam, tea, and bacon in limited quantity. Meat was seldom eaten except in very small amounts on Sundays, very often not more than a shillingsworth for the whole family. Fresh milk was not seen by us except when supplied from a welfare clinic, the usual milk being skimmed condensed. Fresh vegetables other than potatoes were seldom eaten, and it was noticeable that almost invariably the bread was not baked at home."

Local medical practitioners express apprehension that "the inevitable sequel of the prolongation of such conditions must be a deterioration of physique."

In our view present conditions by no means represent the extent of the injury to health, serious as this is. The aftermath of the four years of underfeeding, and sometimes starvation, must be even greater.

The following facts as to a family in another coalfield are known to us, and it is a family whose health previous to the distress owing to unemployment was normal. (1) The mother of the family is an invalid owing to malnutrition; (2) a little girl of eight has ulcers in her eyes; (3) a boy of four has abscesses on the head, and the baby of two has never yet walked or stood up. In the future what will be the health of these children? Is it to be expected that they will be normal members of the wage-earning community? There must be thousands in a similar position, and malnutrition in childhood inevitably brings evil results in its train to adults.

THE STERILIZATION OF THE UNFIT.

The sterilization of the Unfit is a subject which just now is receiving widespread attention, and the position has been crystallized in the following Resolution by the Grand Council of the National Citizens' Union:—

"With a view to the reduction of the numbers of mentally afflicted, unfit, and diseased persons, an inquiry should be held into the best method of dealing with mental deficiency and incurably diseased persons, including a special inquiry into the possibility and advisability of legalizing sterilization, under proper safeguards, and in certain cases."

The Resolution is supported by a very influentially signed Statement which points out that in certain circum-

stances legislation authorising sterilization has been passed by 23 of the United States of America, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Alberta (Canada), New Zealand, and the Canton de Vaud (Switzerland).

This is a question which should have very serious consideration throughout the country.

NOISE AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

Dr. Dan Mackenzie, M.D., F.R.C.S.E., who gave a Chadwick Public Lecture at University Hall, Gordon Square, on Thursday, February 21st, Sir William Collins, M.D., K.C.V.O., being in the chair, said modern civilisation is attended by serious drawbacks, among them being ugliness. Ugliness to the eye and to the ear.

Ugliness to the ear is noise, and there are other points of view, not necessarily the same as the physicist's from which noise may be regarded.

Any sound that disturbs repose and mars rest is noise. The effect of noise upon the human nervous system is twofold. It startles and exhausts.

The Lecturer suggested:—

1. That zones of silence during hours of silence should be demarcated by police or public health authorities.
2. That streets in front of schools, colleges, hospitals, and nursing homes should be paved with rubber blocks.
3. That size, weight and speed of motor lorries should be reduced, and
4. That heavy goods should be relegated entirely to the railways for transit.

Dr. Dan Mackenzie concluded by reading a letter from a patient in a hospital complaining bitterly of the noises not outside but *inside* the hospital, and stated that after inquiry he had found the complaints to be true for all hospitals. They were much too noisy, and recovery of the sick within their wards was interfered with by neglect of a primary rule of treatment.

He appealed to all hospital authorities to go into this matter with their nursing staffs. They would be astonished and humiliated by the result of their inquiries.

Reform was needed in the matter of subjection of invalids to noise, and reform, like charity, should begin at home.

THE CROWN A SYMBOL OF SERVICE.

During the Great War the world learnt what the Crown stood for to King Albert and Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, who never left their tortured country while the war endured, or considered their personal safety; but no finer exposition of what a monarch holds to be the obligation of sovereignty has ever been given than that of Queen Elisabeth, as related in the *Sunday Despatch*.

"The Crown has no meaning unless it is a symbol of service," she said emphatically to a representative of the Press, when stating with pride "I am the President of the Society for the Prevention of Venereal Disease," and when asked, "What persuaded your Majesty to accept the Presidency of the organisation?" replied, "As a mother and as a Queen, I know no work that is more important. I was associated in this sphere of activity with my friend the late Cardinal Mercier. I accepted the Presidency of the organisation to smash a prejudice that was an obstacle to the protection of our children. The subject cannot be tackled effectively without knowledge, and without the assistance of mothers."

To the remark that it must have taken courage for her Majesty to take the initiative in this movement, the Queen replied: "On the contrary, the world-wide conspiracy of silence on the subject made it my duty. To lead, where other women entangled by conventions and prejudice might hesitate, is the finest privilege of being a Queen."

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