

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

PSITTACOSIS.

In the House of Commons on April 29th the Minister of Health (Mr. Arthur Greenwood) at the conclusion of his speech on the question of Supply in relation to his Department, made the following statement:—

"I wish to refer to the question of psittacosis. I must confess that until six months ago I had never heard the name of this disease, but since then it has been prominent in the newspapers, and since last autumn psittacosis cases have occurred in many countries—most of these cases, though not all of them, being attributable to parrots imported from South America. In this country, up to the present time, we have known of 115 cases of psittacosis, of which 22 have been fatal. All of them, I may say, were not associated with the importation of South American parrots. Apparently, all birds of the parrot tribe are liable to the disease, and some of the cases have been associated with African parrots, and others, I grieve to say, even with love-birds. On account of the seriousness of this problem the Ministry, in February, issued a memorandum giving advice and making suggestions to the public and arranging for co-operation between the medical officers of health and the medical officers of the Ministry in investigation work. That work has been going on, and a comprehensive report on the whole question is now being prepared in the Department. Meanwhile, events have made it imperative that action should be taken under the Public Health Acts to prohibit the importation of parrots for the time being. As hon. Members have probably seen in the Press to-day, a new Order has been issued which will come into operation on May 20th prohibiting the importation of parrots and similar birds. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why May 20th?"] That is sufficient time in which to warn people who (may be on the point of importing parrots.)"

Dr. DAVIES: And to let them come in.

"I had considered the question of fixing a quarantine period but apparently there is not yet sufficient information about the duration of infection. We could not therefore prescribe a safety line, and the solution of the problem seems to be to prohibit importation for the time being. It is becoming urgent to do so now because the trade is a summer trade, and it is all the more urgent because several other countries, including France, Germany, Holland and the United States have prohibited the importation of these birds. However much one may adhere to the principles of Free Trade, I do not see myself permitting this country to become the dumping ground for all the parrots from South America. I hope that the public will realise that this is the reasonable course to take, and when circumstances permit the Order will, of course, be withdrawn."

We are of opinion that the prohibition of the importation of parrots into this country should have been made months ago, and see no reason for it to be made what has aptly been described by the Minister as a "dumping ground" until May 20th.

MENTAL HYGIENE.

The Annual Report of the National Council for Mental Hygiene (1928-1929) states that the year, though uneventful, was none the less one distinguished by steady and useful work, during which further preparations were made for the time when funds will be available to set afoot a more active campaign to bring home to the people the value of sound mental health and the importance of preventing mental illness. A new and broader conception of the mental hygienic movement is slowly taking shape and impressing itself on the public mind, but the real awakening to the dangers of apathy on this important subject has yet to be accomplished. Social workers, in their efforts

for the welfare of children and of adults in distress, are impressed with the value of the psychological approach to such problems. But mental hygiene is not confined to prevention or amelioration of mental illness; it embraces character-building, efficiency, and all mental life. The mission of the National Council is to carry the message of mental hygiene to every individual, every home, and every community, and its delivery depends upon the support the public can be brought to afford the Council.

The Sub-Committee on Mental Deficiency, Crime, etc., has held ten meetings. Its terms of reference are:—

"To study the causes and prevention of mental disorder (in co-operation with other Sub-Committees as found necessary) and of mental deficiency.

"To study criminality, dependency, vagrancy, prostitution, and allied social problems, in so far as these are failures of adjustment by reason of mental disorder or defect.

"To enquire into the working of the Mental Deficiency Act and, where necessary, into such legislative measures as might have a bearing on these subjects, with a view to their amendment or revision."

This Committee states that it has been considerably interested in the study of the prevention of abnormal mental conditions, one of the most valuable items in its terms of reference. In this respect, the Sub-Committee has merely reflected the general feeling of the country to-day.

Though much of the current agitation for the sterilisation of the mentally unfit is based upon imperfect knowledge, the movement nevertheless is an indication that the social mind in England and elsewhere has begun to be concerned, even though crudely, with a very important prophylactic matter. The safeguarding of the race against the evils and dangers of mental disorder and mental defect is an undertaking the value of which cannot be over-estimated, and any manifestation of a national striving in this direction should be properly guided and used. It, therefore, becomes the responsibility of those whose knowledge and training place them in the best position to do so, to prepare themselves to counsel and direct this new social movement that is appearing in all civilised countries.

HOSPITAL DIETETICS.

A dietitian recently appointed to the Melbourne Hospital, writes in *Una*:—

"The dividing line between health and disease is frequently almost imperceptible. Without a knowledge of the normal body it is sometimes impossible to tell where the normal leaves off and the abnormal begins. A nurse should therefore understand normal nutrition before undertaking the task of ministering to the body attacked by disease so that she may be enabled intelligently to carry out the orders of the physician under whom she is working.

"The most important part of hospital dietary work is feeding the patient, and one questions whether this should be done by a group of dietitians specially trained for the purpose along scientific lines or by the nurse, with her background of hospital experience. When scientific dietary enters more and more into hospital treatment one realizes that the experience of the nurse who knows little about the chemistry of food is not enough to cope with the increasing demands made upon her to suit diets in disease. Yet it seems a grave mistake for the nurse to let this important and most essential of her duties pass entirely to a group of women who, however sympathetic and experienced from the scientific standpoint, yet lack the practical knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the sick patient, which should come to every nurse during her training."

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