

unlimited expansion, and we shall watch its development with very great interest.

Any evidence of just appreciation of the mentality and work of Miss Nightingale must command the sympathy of those who realise the debt which humanity owes to her greatness.

M. B.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

"INFAMOUS AND INTOLERABLE."

The Departmental Committee appointed by the Minister of Health to inquire into the administration of laws relating to the relief of casuals has reported to the Minister certain institutions where the conditions "might fairly be described as infamous and intolerable."

"Some of the members of our committee, states the report, have visited wards where two men are locked in a small cell that was built for one person, and kept there in darkness for 12 or 13 hours.

They have seen at least one casual ward where there are no baths, and each man lies down on a dirty and dusty wooden floor in his own clothes for the night.

In others the sleeping accommodation consisted of a shed which, on a decent farm, would not be considered fit for an animal of any value. In some wards no heating was provided; in many others there were no day rooms or where there were day rooms they lacked ventilation and were crowded almost to suffocation.

In other wards there was no yard or exercise ground attached, and men detained throughout Sunday were never allowed to leave the little block of cells where they were incarcerated. On one occasion a casual ward was visited on a Sunday where the solitary occupant was discovered in the confinement of a small room throughout the day and night. He had been visited only twice between early morning and late evening by the workhouse porter, who gave him his bread and cheese for dinner and his bread and margarine for tea.

These conditions have continued for a number of years; the overcrowding that results in the double occupation of the small cell is not a sudden or unexpected phenomenon; but the regular and expected feature every night for several years. Defects such as these must have been known to the Boards of Guardians responsible for the maintenance of the wards but they have refused to spend the money that was necessary to secure even the decencies of life.

Furthermore, while the worst conditions prevail only in a certain number of wards, we have received evidence to the effect that in a large number of wards the regulations of the local authorities are not honestly observed. There are many places where towels, blankets and sheets are not clean—where the beds or hammocks are so uncomfortable or inadequate as to deprive a man of sound or continuous sleep.

"We were interested to find that in the main the complaints we received on the subject of tasks were not that the tasks imposed are excessive, but that they are frequently so trivial or so useless that the men feel that they are degraded in having to waste their time upon them.

Many witnesses, especially those with first-hand knowledge of poor law administration, emphasized the difficulty of compliance with the letter and the spirit of existing regulations in the small poor law institutions in which one or at most two male officers are employed. These officers, responsible for the management of an institution to which the casual ward is only an appendage, have their hands full throughout the day and have little energy left for attention to the casuals who are admitted in the evening. The tendency, therefore, in these small institutions is to allot the duty of attending to casuals to an inmate generally known as the 'tramp major,' who exercises some of

the functions, but has none of the responsibilities, of an officer. His ministrations are strongly objected to by the casuals themselves, and it is most unlikely that a man so selected will have the qualifications needful for his work. A Prison Governor who gave evidence to us mentioned the subservience to a promoted brother—the tramp major—and the attitude and manner of certain officers, as two of the main complaints which prisoners made against the casual ward system, but added his own view that the casuals' objection to the tramp major was because he was one of themselves and not because he was harsh or dishonest. An habitual vagrant who was serving a sentence of imprisonment, was asked by the Governor to write his views on casual wards, and in his essay he dealt with the tramp major as follows:—

'There is a lanky knocking about what they call a tramp major, this man is off the road and he is a dirty Broot as a Rool he stops in for a month or two doing part of the Porters work for a Bit of tobacco.'

On the other hand, we have found that the arrangements in a good many poor law institutions, especially those belonging to poor law authorities which have combined effectively in vagrancy committees and those in London, give very little cause for criticism so far at least as matters of accommodation, cleanliness and task are concerned. The management of the casual wards in London provides a good example of the working of the present system, and we have prepared in Appendix II a short note of these arrangements."

THE REGISTRAR-GENERAL'S STATISTICAL REVIEW, 1929.

Part I (Medical Tables) of the Registrar-General's Statistical Review for 1929 is now on sale at H.M. Stationery Office. The price of the volume, formerly 15s., is now 7s. 6d. The salient features are:—

The birth-rate for the year 1929 was 16.3 per 1,000 persons living at all ages. This is the lowest birth-rate recorded since the establishment of civil registration in this country, the lowest rates previously being 16.6 for 1927 and 16.7 for 1928.

The death-rate was 13.4 per 1,000 of the total population against 11.7 for the previous year: it is the highest rate since 1919, which had a figure of 14.0 based on the deaths of civilians only.

The increase in the death-rate was due almost entirely to the high mortality from respiratory and circulatory diseases and the epidemic of influenza during the abnormally severe weather in the months of February and March. The death-rate for the March Quarter rose to 20.9, or no less than 5.8 per 1,000 above the average for the first quarter of the eight preceding years, while the rate for the remainder of the year was slightly below the corresponding average for the same period.

The deaths of infants under one year were equal to a rate of 74 per 1,000 live births, or 9 per 1,000 above that recorded during 1928. Here again the excess was due to the high mortality during the March Quarter.

With the exception of the pandemic of 1918-19 the epidemic of influenza was the most severe experienced in this country since the disease reappeared, in 1890-91 the mortality being equal to 734 per million living against 196 in 1928. The mortality from respiratory diseases rose from 1,507 in 1928 to 2,104 per million, but the latter figure had been exceeded in 1920, 1922 and 1924. The mortality from circulatory diseases reached the record figure of 3,030 per million, due largely to the deaths of elderly persons during the cold weather of the first quarter of the year.

The death-rate from cancer was 1,437 per million living against 1,425 for the previous year, thus continuing the

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