

LOCAL EXPENDITURE ON MUNICIPAL HOSPITALS.

Sir Hilton Young (the Minister of Health) has appointed a Departmental Committee, whose terms of reference are:

"To consider and report on the questions of the capital cost of construction and the annual cost of maintenance of the following classes of public buildings provided by local authorities, namely, hospitals (including mental hospitals), public assistance institutions, mental deficiency institutions, maternity homes (including maternity departments newly constructed or added to hospitals), and baths and wash-houses, special regard being paid to (a) the establishment and periodic revision of standards; (b) modern methods of construction; and (c) the possibility of securing a reduction in present costs without impairing the efficiency of the buildings for the purposes for which they are designed."

The Chairman of the Committee is Sir L. Amherst Selby-Bigge, Bt., K.C.B., J.P.; and the Secretary, to whom all communications relating to the work of the Committee should be addressed, Mr. J. Topping (of the Ministry of Health).

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICAL SUBJECTS.

The latest Report issued by the Ministry of Health on Public Health and Medical Subjects (No. 70) is one on Cancer of the Skin by Dr. Gretta M. Thomas, and is "An Inquiry undertaken at the instance of the Yorkshire Council of the British Empire Cancer Campaign under the direction of the Faculty of the General Infirmary at Leeds." It is published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, price 2s. net.

Sir George Newman, K.C.B., M.D., in a Prefatory Note addressed by him, as Chief Medical Officer, to the Minister of Health states that "one of the objects of the inquiry was an attempt to ascertain whether environmental conditions associated with occupation or industry, other than those already recognised as conducive to skin cancer, lay open to suspicion. This is a difficult line of investigation, largely because ideal conditions for its prosecution so rarely exist, viz., a definable group of workers exposed to a suspected carcinogenic agency over a prolonged period. Indeed, it may be that direct statistical investigation is inappropriate, and that the detection of hitherto unrecognised influences is more likely to result from minute observation of individual cases.

"Forward movement in the elucidation of the natural history of cancer seems slow, sometimes discouragingly so, and it is well to realise that it is inherent in the nature of the problem; the long period occupied in the development of the disease, and the lengthy interval necessary to be sure of its eradication, are in themselves cogent evidence on this point. That progress is being made, however, seems beyond dispute, and it is clear that one fruitful field of inquiry is the careful and detailed observation of the disease in man, an example of which is provided by the present Report."

Dr. Gretta M. Thomas tells us that the report embodies an analysis of 503 cases of Epithelioma of the skin treated in the General Infirmary, Leeds, during the period 1911 to March, 1931, inclusive.

In the term epithelioma of the skin are included all cases of squamous carcinoma and basal-celled carcinoma (rodent ulcer) of the surface epithelium of the body not only of the skin in general but of the special sites, lip, anus, and external genitals, these being grouped separately.

Both statistics and summaries in relation to each class of case are given, followed by detailed notes of individual cases.

Thus there is added to the information slowly accumulating in reference to this terrible disease a careful study of a class of case which is available for those seeking knowledge

on this particular aspect of its manifestations. As Sir George Newman points out "It is difficult to believe that a better understanding of the pathogenesis of visible cancers of the skin may not help towards elucidating those affecting other organs."

THE SCOTTISH HEALTH SERVICES.

The review of the Scottish Health Services by Mr. Skelton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Scotland, on June 22nd, when the House of Commons went into Committee on the Scottish Estimates, brought out the facts from the annual report on Public Health in Scotland, that "maternal mortality in 1932 showed a slight rise from 5.9 per 1,000 to 6.4. Fortunately the figures were not higher than some of those for previous years, but the remarkable thing about maternal mortality was that it had been steadily increasing ever since 1855. The tendency to increase was a most mysterious phenomenon, which he did not think was confined to Scotland. The Department were not being idle in the matter.

"From the middle of December, 1932, there had been instituted a six months' investigation into every childbirth in Scotland. That period was just over, and when the results of that investigation were examined he believed they would have data more complete than existed elsewhere for an attempt to grapple still further with this problem.

"There had been a very slight rise in the last year or two in infant mortality. The figures for 1932 were 86 per 1,000, which were four above those of 1931 and one above the last five years' average. When he investigated this matter he found that the most striking feature was the fact that for a long period of years the Scottish infant mortality was definitely higher than that of England, although over a previous period that of England was higher than Scotland. The English figures showed that, broadly speaking, infant mortality increased as one went north, and in Northumberland and Durham the figures were almost exactly comparable with those of Scotland. The matter was reviewed ten years ago by Sir Leslie Mackenzie, who came to the conclusion, tentatively, that there was some relation between climate and infant mortality. The point had been made, and it seemed to have medical foundation, that it was not the intensity of climate but the variability of climate that was the anxious thing in the life of the young."

PROVISION FOR RESEARCH FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWLEDGE.

The great aim of the late Sir Henry Royce was to make provision for research for the distribution of knowledge for the purpose of improving the health of and preventing disease to the human race. To that end the trustees of his will are directed to apply one-tenth of his estate in making payments to such universities, colleges, schools, societies, and other entities engaged in making researches in such proportions as his trustees might think fit.

Furthermore, the trustees were to apply the capital of four-fifths of the residue of his estate to similar purposes following the cessation of the life interests therein of the widow, Lady Royce, and of Miss Ethel Aubin, whom the deceased describes as having been "my nurse for over twenty years and who has done so much to prolong my life."

The gross value of the estate is about £110,000.

As a sort of appendix to the recent report on the subject of maternal mortality, the Ministry of Health has issued a special report on "High Maternal Mortality in Certain Areas," by Dame Janet Campbell, Dr. Isabella Cameron, and Dr. Dilys Jones (Stationery Office, 1s. 6d.).

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