

some difference of opinion among those entitled to judge as to what the factors are which were formerly held to be productive of much ill-health and mortality in infants which have practically been eliminated and the part each plays. "But it is a matter of common agreement that improved housing, personal and domestic cleanliness, increased attention to sanitation, public cleansing, disposal of refuse, storage and preparation of food, and the relative freedom from dust of public thoroughfares, have all contributed to the result. In addition to these improvements in the environment of infants, there is now available a well-organised service of home visiting, medical consultations, treatment centres, etc., which is available for assistance of mothers in the *personal nurture of infancy*. Yet it remains true that the infant mortality rate is a sensitive index of the general health."

With regard to the total mortality rate, which remains practically unchanged at 4.51 per 1,000, the opinion expressed by local medical investigators in reply to a request for their opinions as to whether death could probably have been prevented by (i) better ante-natal supervision, (ii) better obstetric facilities at delivery, (iii) specialist treatment in hospital, and (iv) intelligent co-operation of the patient, "the opinions submitted show that *lack of ante-natal care* was considered a factor in the fatal result in 406 cases; that *obstetric facilities* and specialist treatment were inadequate or insufficiently made use of in 456 cases; and that *lack of co-operation on the part of the patient* played an important part in 298 cases. In 12 cases home conditions, and in 17 malnutrition and debility were noted as definitely contributory causes. In 21 cases it was stated that safety could only have been secured by avoidance of pregnancy."

MATERNITY HOSPITALS.

"There has been a marked change in recent years in the public demand for maternity in-patient treatment in the country as a whole, and the maternity beds available in municipal institutions and in private maternity and nursing homes have steadily increased. . . .

"Various factors have contributed to this change in social custom; one is undoubtedly the amount of public attention directed to the subject of maternity. Modern housing conditions and the increased difficulty of obtaining domestic assistance have, without doubt, contributed. It is impossible to predict with any certainty if this will become a permanent feature of our national life. This movement in the mind of the people is not looked upon with favour by all experienced obstetricians. There is not even a consensus of medical opinion as to the need for in-patient treatment for all primiparæ. It was, however, the unanimous opinion of the Departmental Committee on Maternal Mortality that although provision of hospital treatment for complicated cases at the time of child-birth and during the puerperium is an important means of diminishing the risk of maternal death, the aggregation of patients in hospitals, where they are treated in close association and by a staff in common, has its own by no means negligible risks of increased occasion of infection."

MOTHERS' CENTRES.

In regard to the use of maternity and ante-natal welfare centres for giving organised instruction in contraceptive methods, the Report points out that this is "alien to the purpose of a maternity and child welfare centre established by a Local Authority for *nursing and expectant mothers*, would militate against the objects of its establishment, and might well be distasteful to its clients. Such centres are maintained out of rates and taxes paid by all sections of the community, and therefore they should not be used for any purpose to which certain sections of the community might reasonably object. . . .

"Possibly there is a place in a national health service for a different kind of institution which would serve as a *Mothers' Centre* or Outpatient Gynaecological Clinic, where mothers needing advice on physical and health matters, both of nature and nurture, might well be assisted. Such an institution under adequate and skilled medical supervision could receive minor gynaecological cases, deal with some forms of post-natal after-care, accept responsibility for counselling mothers of subnormal physique or mentality, give advice on the practice of contraceptive methods when medically needed, and act as a clearing house for appropriate treatment of one sort or another by hospital medical practitioners."

There is much more of importance in the Report to which we would gladly draw attention did space permit. Certain it is that all sections of workers concerned with the national health should carefully study it, and that members of the general public can do so with profit.

COMMITTEE ON NOISE.

The Minister of Transport has appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Fowler of which the terms of reference are: "To consider and report upon the principal causes of noise in the operation of mechanically propelled vehicles and the steps which can efficiently be taken to limit the noise so arising."

The secretary of the committee is Mr. A. E. N. Taylor, B.Sc., A.M.Inst.C.E., whose address is Ministry of Transport, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.

THE EVIL OF NOISE.

Lord Horder, speaking recently at Portsmouth for the Anti-Noise League, said that this matter of noise is very much one in which medicine should concern itself. The problem touches medicine in its most important aspect, which is preventive medicine.

He was quite convinced that noise was an important factor in causing disease. So were many, if not most, of his colleagues. Noise caused disease by undermining the most essential part of our physical economy, the nervous system. Undermine the nervous system, and we become easy prey to all sorts of other irritants and disease-producing elements.

After all, it was not of much use to us if we were saved from acute affections of lungs, heart, and intestines, and became a nation of neurasthenics.

It was said that there were some noises which were necessary, though he was not convinced of that. What they were aiming at was the elimination of noise by day as well as by night. Among other things they wanted to get some control over railway companies and to prevent such noises as heavy shunting. What he objected to was unnecessary noise, such as that made by people at the breaking-up of a party in the small hours of the morning. The human nervous system was resilient and we were adapting ourselves to some of this incessant din—but why waste our nervous resistance?

SLUM CLEARANCE CAMPAIGN.

The Minister of Health, as showing the activity of the slum clearance campaign states that 50,000 slum tenants have been actually settled in replacement houses in the last six months, whereas the number rehoused in the last 58 years was 200,000. He is satisfied, from all the statistics which he has in his possession, that the rate of progress which has been already made in the submission of orders by local authorities and in the building of clearance houses ensures the completion of the programme within the allotted period of five years.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)