

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

The Seventeenth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, covering the year 1935-1936, has just been published as a Command Paper (5287), and may be obtained from the Stationery Office, Adastral House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2, or through any bookseller, price 5s.

Medical and Welfare Services.

Of special interest are the following announcements:—

Maternity and Child Welfare.—Ante-natal clinics now number 1,491 in England and 105 in Wales, and infant welfare centres 2,993 in England and 310 in Wales. About one expectant mother in every two now makes use of local authorities' facilities for ante-natal examination—a steady increase on previous years.

Maternal mortality was 3.93 per 1,000 births—the lowest figure since 1924. Further reductions are anticipated from the new Midwives Act, and the results of the medical investigation which will shortly be available will doubtless throw further light on the problem of maternal deaths.

Infantile mortality (i.e., deaths of infants under one year of age) was 57 per 1,000 births—the lowest figure on record, following steady reductions for the previous four years. A warning follows that there may be some slight setback for the present year, because of the bad weather and the prevalence of infectious diseases during the first quarter of the year.

Tuberculosis.—For the first time on record the total deaths from all forms of tuberculosis fell below 30,000, the death rate being 718 per million population—a low record. Striking evidence of the decrease of tuberculous crippling, especially among children, is shown in the fact that only 50 per cent. of the total accommodation of the Lord Mayor Treloar Hospital at Alton is now required for these cases, so that the hospital is now able to admit children crippled from any cause whatever.

Other Infectious Diseases.—Only one case of *smallpox* was notified during 1935. *Diphtheria*, which has shown an increase in recent years, showed some decline in 1935. There were nearly 1,000 fewer deaths from *pneumonia* than in the previous year, and *scarlet fever*, *measles* and *german measles* were all less prevalent.

Food.

The reconstituted *Advisory Committee on Nutrition*, of which Lord Luke is Chairman, and which includes Sir John Orr and other experts, has published a memorandum on "The Nutritive Value of Milk," and is actively continuing its investigations.

Special Designations for Milk.—The old grades of "Certified" and "Grade A" milk have now been replaced by "Tuberculin Tested" and "Accredited" respectively. A new test of cleanliness will also be instituted for these special kinds of raw milk. All licences for producers of special milks will now be granted by local authorities.

Public Assistance.

Institutions.—Progress continues in eliminating small and old-fashioned country institutions, out of keeping with modern ideas, but is still hampered in some places by sentimental considerations. A promising new development is the scheme of Northumberland County Council for erecting in different parts of the county groups of old people's homes, consisting of cottages accommodating a dozen persons in single rooms or rooms with two or three beds, with sitting-rooms and an infirm block for bed-ridden cases. The Ministry has prepared, on the lines of

this scheme but for larger numbers, plans for suitable bungalows.

Children.—There are 38,000 children in public assistance institutions, 22,000 of which are in children's homes; 7,000 are boarded out in private houses. The old "barrack" homes only survive in a few districts, the modern practice being to use ordinary dwelling-houses or country houses, or else small groups of cottages, from which the children go to school with other children. Special nurseries for infants and toddlers are another interesting development. The Report emphasises the importance of securing and training suitable staff for looking after these children; it also indicates that special consideration has been given to the important question of diets and that every child should receive at least a pint of milk per head per day, plenty of green vegetables and fresh fruit all the year round, and not too much tea. Much attention is given nowadays to placing boys and girls in good work when they leave the homes; it is much easier with the girls, who have usually had some training, than with the boys; the Ministry of Labour have now agreed to include the latter in the scope of their Juvenile Transference Schemes.

NEED FOR MORE PHYSICAL EDUCATION.

At the Annual Meeting of the Central Council of Recreative Physical Training, Lord Hampden emphasised the need for larger funds to assist the National movement for more efficient physical education.

"The purpose of our existence," he said, "is no less than the raising of the standard of national health, which has long been deplorably low, by developing physical activities of all types, by ensuring that the fullest use is made of existing facilities, and by instituting provision of facilities in districts where these are lacking.

"We are clear as to our aim; we are determined to realise it; but unfortunately there is always the restraining factor of inadequate finance. A glance at our balance-sheet will reveal how we have laboured with insufficient funds. Unless we can look forward to substantial financial support in the immediate future it is certain that the crucial work on which we are engaged for the welfare of the whole nation will suffer. The enthusiasm of all other nations for physical fitness is daily apparent in our newspapers, and Great Britain is far behind in organisation. We who so ardently desire the peace of Europe and the contentment of our people must take first things first and energetically tackle the problem of our national health."

The meeting decided to invite the Lawn Tennis Association, the Federation of Societies of Teachers in Physical Education, the Society of Medical Officers of Health, and organisations representing public authorities to become members of the council.

THE PROPER TREATMENT OF DENTAL SEPSIS.

The value of research work and, in consequence, of its endorsement is exemplified in the announcement made by Sir William Willcox, medical adviser to the Home Office, who, speaking at the Royal Dental Hospital prize-giving, said that research work carried out by a small group of experts of the hospital would save millions of teeth from being unnecessarily extracted. This work had definitely shown that it was the gum tissues that spread much of the infection in the human body, and not the teeth themselves. It had been demonstrated that the proper treatment of dental sepsis in its early stages was the treatment of gum margins and not wholesale extractions. There was no doubt that this research had already saved millions of teeth from being extracted, and would continue to do so.

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