

## THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

The Annual Report of the Ministry of Health is one to which we always look forward, and, indeed, we wonder at the incompleteness of the Government of the country without this important Department.

This year's Report, presented to Parliament by the Minister of Health by Command of His Majesty in July, and relates to the year ended March 31st, 1937, is a record of achievement which it must be a satisfaction to the Minister, Sir Kingsley Wood, to present and to Parliament and the nation to receive.

In his introduction the Minister points out that "the developments in the Public Health and Social Services are rarely dramatic in their coming. . . . That is why the happenings of a year must, for a proper appreciation, be looked at not in isolation, but as part of a great integrated structure, of sure and certain growth, which belongs to our social heritage and seeks to give each citizen, as his birthright, a healthy and a happy life.

"Since 1919, when the Ministry of Health was established by the fusion of the Local Government Board and the National Health Insurance Commissions of England and Wales, the general standardized death rate has fallen from 13.0 to 9.2 per thousand, the death rate of infants below one year of age from 89 to 59 per thousand live births, and the crude death rate of infants between one and five years of age from 12.4 to 5.5. per 1,000 living. The maternal mortality rate, while still obstinate, is down to 3.81 per 1,000 live births and compares favourably with that recorded in most other countries. Most of the chief killing diseases take year by year a smaller toll of the population, especially of the young. English men and women, and more particularly English children, enjoy a healthier and fuller life than at any time since the Industrial Revolution.

"The provision of over 3,000,000 new and decent houses, coupled with the reconditioning or destruction of those which are unfit, is probably, the greatest contribution which this generation has made to better health. Much is also due to the general improvement in working conditions since the War—shorter hours, higher wages, better provision for leisure and, in general, a rising standard of living for the workers—to advances in medical science, the continuous improvement, especially in rural districts, of water supplies and the basic sanitary services, and the increased provision of recreation grounds, open spaces and swimming pools." Indeed "the services which aim at a healthy environment and changes for the better in the general standard of life, and in personal habits and diet," "in the prevention and cure of disease, the protection of mother and child, and the two great schemes for the insurance of the workers against the risks of ill-health, premature death, and impecunious old age . . . are to such an extent now accepted as part of the natural order of things that it is seldom realised that they are almost wholly the creation of the present century and especially of the War and post-War years."

"The several Parts of the Report record the progress made, service by service, during the year 1936-1937. It was in itself a good year for health, and future historians may perhaps find it and the current year especially noteworthy for the steps taken to strengthen what seemed to be the weakest links in the existing chain of public provision for health and welfare.

"The setting up on a national scale of a public service of skilled midwives, with the detailed improvement of their existing maternity services by a large number of Local Authorities, was designed to strengthen these services

at their most vulnerable point—the mother's own life and health."

The Minister also refers to the measures in hand to extend the child welfare and school medical services upwards and downwards respectively, and mention is made of an Act of Parliament passed while this Report was in the press extending the existing contributory Pensions Scheme so as to allow independent workers and professional and other persons of small means to insure for pensions if they wish to do so.

Sir Kingsley Wood states that:

"The year under review was marked by three Reports of outstanding social importance—the Report on the Overcrowding Survey, the First Report of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition, and the Reports on the Investigation into Maternal Mortality. Each Report has provided a secure basis for further advance, and those who were associated with the production of these documents may rest assured that their work is destined to be writ large in the social and economic history of their country."

The Minister concludes by paying tribute to all whose support has lightened the Ministry's tasks during the year and made possible the progress recorded in the Report. Amongst these he includes doctors, nurses, dentists, chemists, and many others, who have all responded without stint to the calls made on their time and energies, and have given of their best for the common purpose—the well being of the people.

### Sections of Report.

The Report is dealt with in the following Sections:—Part A, General; Part B, Public Health; Part C, Public Assistance; Part D, Housing and Town Planning; Part E, Local Government; Part F, National Health Insurance and Pensions; Part G, Welsh Board of Health.

*Part A. General.* (1) The Ministry and the Public; (2) Finance.

The Ministry's dealings with the public (including Local Authorities) are mainly by correspondence. Apart from insurance cards, no less than 8,106,525 written communications were received and 8,827,464 despatched in 1936. In addition 73 general circulars were issued to Local Authorities and five to Approved Societies.

In regard to Finance the various services administered by the Ministry of Health involved the expenditure in 1936 of £65,000,000 from monies voted by Parliament and £75,000,000 in respect of the financial obligations of the Health Insurance and Contributory Pensions Schemes. The Ministry by their annual accounts (which after audit by the Comptroller and Auditor-General are examined by the Public Accounts Committee appointed by the House of Commons) were thus responsible to Parliament for a total expenditure of £140,000,000 in 1936." An amazing total which we hope may bear fruit in the increased health and well-being of the nation.

*Part B. Public Health*—since the public health legislation in the 'seventies of the last century described and derided as "a policy of sewage"—an affair of mains and drains, as indeed it was. "First things first; the Government of the day recognised the vital and fundamental importance to the public health of a pure water supply and of the hygienic disposal of waste products, an importance which is no whit lessened to-day. Since then the scope of public provision for improving health and lessening disease has broadened out to include not only the basic sanitary services of water supply, sewerage, refuse disposal and public cleansing and the protective services for the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases and for the maintenance of a pure food supply, but also good housing and the various personal services which minister directly and positively to the health needs of the individual as, it may be, a prospective or nursing mother or an infant, or a sufferer

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)