

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

The Nineteenth Annual Report of the Ministry of Health, 1937-38, presented by the Minister of Health to Parliament by command of His Majesty, July, 1938, having first been presented, with a brief introduction, by Mr. Walter Elliot, the present Minister "to the King's Most Excellent Majesty," is now published. The Report itself relates to the year ended on 31st March, 1938.

Mr. Elliot states that "the several parts of the Report record the progress made, service by service, during the year. They show a steady improvement in the health of the people as measured by the usual indices, and a steady advance in the provision of improved environmental conditions, particularly in the rural areas, and in the extension of existing and the provision of new medical and welfare services. The maternal mortality rate has come down to 3 per thousand births, the infantile death rate to 58 per thousand live births, and the tuberculosis death rate to less than 7 per ten thousand living. These are all milestones, though they are not the final goal. . . .

"The comparison over a hundred years is, however, striking. It justifies a pride in past achievement, but, much more important, it provides an index for the future.

"There was in 1837 no comprehensive general Act relating to public health on the Statute Book. There was no recognition that health and sanitation were matters requiring public attention. The houses being erected lacked not merely modern necessities such as drainage, baths, proper water supply and gardens, but also light and air. . . .

"Personal services were equally lacking. There were no trained nurses, no organised nursing. There were no medical officers of health and the first, in Liverpool, was not appointed until 1847, and it was more than 20 years before such important towns as Birmingham and Manchester followed suit. There were no clinics for mothers and children, no health visitors, relatively few competent midwives. There was no effective control of infectious diseases, nor, indeed, was there much knowledge of its causes. There was a vague impression that dirt was a bad thing, and that it was perhaps vaguely connected with cholera and typhus. Something was known about small-pox and vaccination; but of tuberculosis, of the enteric fevers and many other diseases, nothing. Bacteriology had yet to be born.

"The effect of these sanitary conditions was shown in terribly high rates of sickness and death, particularly among the urban poor. In 1837 the average age at death was 20 years in Manchester, and 17 in Liverpool. . . .

"The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the development of which we to-day call the environmental services—water supply, disposal of waste products, control of infectious disease (including port health work). These services are by no means all complete everywhere to-day, and in one matter in particular, the purity of our rivers, while we have progressed some way since the days when most rivers were open sewers, there is still much room for improvement. . . .

"The present century has seen, in addition to developments in the environmental services, the beginnings and rapid growth of the personal health services—many of them based on voluntary initiative and experiment by which this country does so much. . . .

"The Report records plans for further advances both in environmental services such as housing, and in the more personal services such as the care of mother and child. There is ground for satisfaction with what has already been achieved, but there is no justification for regarding the present as a final stage beyond which little or no improve-

ment can be expected. We have not yet finished the clearing of the slums; we have not yet abolished overcrowding, not even of the grosser kind; we have not yet provided adequate housing in the countryside. . . .

"We are only beginning to realise how much can be done, even in the case of those who are at present considered normal and fit. Organised knowledge, energy and good-will have still, without question, great contributions to make towards the well being of our people. In future years it may well be that we shall read, in the light of progress, the health records of to-day with the same incredulity with which we now read those of a century ago."

While we visualise, therefore, that much has been accomplished we realise also that there must be no relaxation of effort; and the national health campaign conducted centrally by the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education in conjunction with the Central Council for Health Education in the autumn of 1937, and in the early months of 1938, was the application on a nation-wide scale of the effort directed to securing a wider knowledge, and thereby a wider use, of the existing health services.

Education by the eye is a valuable method which is still in an early stage of development. The Report states that there can be no doubt of the great potentialities and the growing popularity of the film as a medium of health education, and that the Minister is particularly glad to note that a number of Local Authorities have recently been making films (including colour films) about their own health services. He feels sure that much fuller use can be made of the film as a medium for health education, and he trusts that local authorities will not hesitate to make appropriations for this purpose and for health education generally.

The Report is divided into seven sections in addition to the introduction. *Part A.*—General, dealing with "the Ministry and the Public" and with Finance. *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, and, in addition, there are LIV Appendices.

It is impossible in the space at our disposal to deal in detail with the sections of this Report packed with information already highly concentrated. We may refer to the setting up by the Minister of Health and the President of the Board of Education of a Departmental Committee "to enquire into the arrangements at present in operation with regard to the recruitment, training, registration and terms and conditions of service of persons engaged in nursing the sick"; to the Rule of the General Nursing Council for the establishment of a test examination, in order to secure a minimum standard of general education for probationer nurses which has been in force since January, 1938, to the Conferences held at the Ministry during the year with representatives of the General Nursing Council in regard to the training of nurses in Public Assistance Institutions, and the statement that "by means of this exchange of views it has been possible to make considerable improvements in the training arrangements." The Report also states that in connection with the Registration of Nursing Homes "during the year the Minister made regulations prescribing a new form of application for registration under the Public Health Act which replaced the form prescribed under the Nursing Homes Registration Act."

We suggest to Librarians of libraries in Nurses Homes connected with hospitals, and elsewhere, that these Annual Reports of the Ministry of Health should be procured and available for consultation. They may be purchased from H.M. Stationery Office, York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2, price 5s. net.

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