

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

On the State of the Public Health.

The Annual Report for the year 1937 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, Sir Arthur MacNalty, has just been published. In his introductory chapter Sir Arthur deals with a subject of considerable importance to the modern development of the public health services, namely, the provision of specialist services. A brief historical sketch tells us how specialism gradually came to be organised and how its growth was advanced by the great scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century. The State did not fail to appreciate the need of applying the accumulated wealth of specialised knowledge to the benefit of the people, and Sir Arthur sets out clearly the different specialist services which can now be provided by Local Authorities and voluntary institutions. It is an impressive list, but it does not pretend to cover the whole of the needs. Indeed, as the Chief Medical Officer recognises, the setting up of a complete and comprehensive scheme may not be practicable in present circumstances, and accordingly his main object in reviewing the present provision is to point out the need for the co-ordination, integration and development of the existing services, which, he affirms, could be effected by wise administration and good will with little expenditure of public money

The Balance Sheet.

There were 5,265 more births and 13,810 more deaths in 1937 than in 1936. The birth rate of 14.9 is the highest since 1932, when it was 15.3; the death rate of 12.4 is 0.3 higher than the rate for 1936. The natural increase in the population, however, was 100,983.

The infant mortality rate has fallen from 59 in 1936 to 58, which is only one point higher than the record low rate of 57 in 1935. The number of infants who died under one year of age was 35,175, and is more than 10,000 less than the number who died only 10 years ago. The maternal mortality rate, happily, continues to fall and the rate of 3.26 per 1,000 live births (3.13 per 1,000 total births) is the lowest on record since 1911. The number of women who died, namely 1,988, was for the first time below 2,000.

The Control of Infectious Diseases.

A hundred years ago infectious diseases "rioted uncontrolled to a large extent throughout England," and caused an "appalling amount of wretchedness, sickness and mortality." Conditions are very different to-day thanks to the medical and public health measures which have been provided combined with a ceaseless and vigilant watch on external sources of infection.

Of special interest is an account of the outbreak of typhoid fever in Croydon. The widespread prevalence of an epidemic catarrhal condition and of influenza in the first quarter were particular features of 1937.

Tuberculosis.

Though there was a slight increase in the number of deaths from all forms of tuberculosis the standardised death rate for 1937 remains the same as for 1936, when the figure of 657 per million was the lowest ever recorded. It is the most striking example known of reduction of the mortality of a disease in our own time.

Cancer.

Cancer mortality again shows an increase. The total number of deaths, 66,991, is 637 more than in 1936, an increase which is less than the increase recorded in 1936. The deaths for females show an increase of only 38, as against an increase of 1,037 in 1936.

The study of the causation of cancer is being carried on with vigour throughout the world, whilst the outlook

regarding accurate diagnosis and efficient treatment is brighter now than at any time in the past.

"Prontosil."

Though striking results are being obtained in the treatment of bacterial disease, particularly gonorrhoea and puerperal sepsis, by drugs of the sulphanilamide group, the public are warned that the use of this powerful remedy without medical advice is likely to have unpleasant consequences. This is supported by the account of fatalities which occurred in America as a direct result of taking a preparation of sulphanilamide put up by a commercial firm.

Maternity and Child Welfare.

It is encouraging to find that Local Authorities generally have not been slow in acting on the Ministry's circular which dealt with the main recommendations in the report on an "Investigation into Maternal Mortality."

On the question of the value of leaflets and small books on maternity and child welfare work the Report points out that such printed matter should supplement, not supersede, personal advice.

Insurance.

Two important matters are recorded for 1937. First, an Act was passed extending medical benefit to young persons, thus closing the gap which has hitherto existed between the medical supervision afforded by the School Medical Service and that available under the Insurance Medical Service from the age of 16 and upwards. Secondly, the former limited provision of post-graduate courses for insurance practitioners stationed in outlying rural areas is superseded by a larger scheme which will apply to practitioners irrespective of where they practise.

Nutrition.

The Report deals with the progress of the various investigations and surveys which are still being carried on. An interim report on the researches conducted by the Milk Nutrition Committee supports the evidence already accumulating that pasteurisation has no significant effect upon the nutritive value of milk.

Water Supplies.

This country has long enjoyed relative immunity from serious outbreaks of water-borne disease. An account of the outbreaks which have occurred since 1911 emphasises the serious responsibility which rests upon the various Authorities concerned and the need for maintaining the utmost vigilance to prevent any breakdown in the defences.

Treatment of Air Raid Casualties.

Though outside a review relating to the year 1937, Sir Arthur MacNalty refers in his concluding chapter to the new function recently assigned to the Ministry, namely, the responsibility for dealing with questions relating to the provision of hospitals for the treatment of air raid casualties.

THE CARE OF THE MENTALLY DEFECTIVE.

Mr. Robert Bernays, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health, recently performed the opening ceremony in connection with the extensions to St. Catherine's Institution for the Mentally Defective at Doncaster.

It was generally admitted to-day, said Mr. Bernays, that the Institution—or Colony as it was now frequently called—was the centre of the Mental Deficiency service. It was happily the case that large numbers of the mentally defective given the training appropriate to their individual needs were capable of living happy and useful lives in the community. It must clearly be the chief aim of the Mental

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