

THE PUBLIC HEALTH.

NEW HEALTH RECORDS IN ANNUAL REPORT.

A standardised death-rate of 8.5, an infantile mortality rate of 53 per 1,000, and a maternal mortality rate of 2.97 deaths per 1,000 births—all record low figures—are among the statistics contained in the Annual Report* of the Ministry of Health for the year 1938-9.

In presenting his report, the Minister of Health remarks that "there has been no faltering in the upward tendency of every recent year." There were 2,353 fewer deaths from tuberculosis than in 1937, the biggest fall in one year since 1934. The slight upward turn in the birth-rate which first became apparent after the low record of 14.4 in 1933 carried the figure for 1938 to 15.1, though the latter figure is still below that of every year before 1933.

NEW PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES.

An important step forward in combating cancer was the passing of the Cancer Act, 1939, which places an obligation on the Councils of Counties and County Boroughs to ensure that the facilities for the treatment of the disease in their areas are adequate to the need. Under the Act, authorities must submit arrangements to the Minister for approval by March 29th, 1940, or such later date as he may allow, and financial assistance is to be given by the Exchequer. In the year under review, cancer continued to increase. The number of deaths from cancer in 1938 is estimated provisionally at 68,600, as compared with 66,991 in the previous year.

Other developments recorded during the year were the passing of the Food and Drugs Act (which comes into operation in October next), bringing together for the first time the statute law relating to the purity and soundness of food and drugs; completion of the four-millionth house built since the war; the removal of the millionth person from the slums since the beginning of the Slum Clearance Campaign in 1933; and the receipt of 652,899 initial applications for admission to the new pensions scheme for black-coated workers.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

There were few striking changes in the incidence of infectious diseases recorded during the year. Three deaths occurred from smallpox—the first since 1934. The number of notified cases of enteric fever (including para-typhoid fevers) dropped from 2,149 in 1937 to 1,322 in 1938, and the deaths from 206 to 163—the lowest number recorded with the exception of 1934 (159 deaths). There were 1,489 cases of acute poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis) notified during the year, the highest since the disease became notifiable in 1912. Cases of diphtheria increased by 3,667 over the 1937 figure, but deaths decreased from 2,963 to 2,931.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

The average numbers of persons in receipt of Institutional and Domiciliary Poor Relief were respectively 148,972 and 900,746, a total of 1,049,718, representing 255 per 10,000 of the population. Corresponding figures for the previous year were 154,233; 892,180; 1,046,413; and 256 per 10,000.

The total cost of out-relief was £17,973,000, compared with £16,829,000 for the previous year.

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE AND PENSIONS.

The number of persons insured under the National Health Insurance Act at the end of the year was 17,119,000, as compared with 16,773,000 at the end of 1937, an increase of 2.1 per cent. In addition, 717,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 16 became entitled to medical benefit

at the end of the year under the National Health Insurance (Juvenile Contributors and Young Persons) Act, 1937, which came into operation early in 1938.

The Report contains a separate section giving details of the work of the Welsh Board of Health.

COMPULSORY NOTIFICATION OF MEASLES AND WHOOPING COUGH.

The Minister of Health has sent to the County Councils and to Local Authorities in England and Wales a statement that Regulations relating to measles and whooping cough have been made to come into operation forthwith.

The Regulations provide for the notification of all cases of measles and whooping cough by medical practitioners to Medical Officers of Health. The object is to enable the Department to ascertain readily and rapidly the incidence of these diseases as it may be affected by the displacement of child population caused by the recent emergency measures, and the changes that may have occurred in the geographical distribution of infectious diseases.

At present measles and whooping cough are notifiable to a limited extent in certain districts. Such limitation is usually confined to the first cases occurring in a household or to children under five years of age.

DEBILITATED LONDONERS.

Blind Masseurs stay to treat them.

Every blind masseur at the Eichholz Clinic in Great Portland Street, London, has remained at his post to attend to patients in need of treatment. The clinic, which was opened five years ago by the then Prince of Wales, is staffed almost entirely by blind men and women who are all experts in physiotherapy and electrotherapy.

The adjoining massage school of the National Institute for the Blind, the only school of its kind in the British Empire, is also carrying on as usual. For some years it has run a special evening clinic for Londoners of limited means, and this service is being maintained.

Although a few of the more "mobile" departments of the National Institute have been moved outside the London area, the bulk of the work at headquarters has not been interrupted. The blind staff, more than sixty in number, have remained quite unperturbed throughout the crisis, and Braille literature and music continue to be printed and despatched to the blind throughout the Empire.

PROOF READING IN 15 LANGUAGES.

A sightless cripple who is the only blind employee to be evacuated from London by the National Institute for the Blind has been for many years one of its most expert proof readers. In his time he has checked the proofs of books in fifteen languages, including Urdu, Welsh, Chinese and Hebrew.

EXIT THE REGISTERED NURSE.

We have already drawn attention to the inevitable result of the competition of the Nursing Auxiliaries of the Civil Nursing Reserve—a corps considered efficient after *fifty hours'* hospital work, by the laity who control it—so we are not surprised to learn from many heads of training-schools for nurses, that there is the acutest shortage of applicants to be efficiently trained as Registered Nurses, and that if the young women are enticed by the Government scheme to be content with a fortnight's experience and then be sent on active service, few will wish to begin at the foot of the ladder after the war and become qualified for the honourable profession of nursing. There is little doubt the denial of the Minister of Health for efficient professional representation on Nursing Committees set up during the past two years for the better organisation of nursing conditions, sounded the death knell of high educational standards and *esprit de corps*.

* Cmd. 6089. Published by the Stationery Office, price 5s.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)