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EDITORIAL.

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL MEDICINE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

"A Professorship of Social Medicine is being created in Oxford University," so we are informed by the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. Behind this announcement, which might appear at first sight to be merely of academic interest, lies one of the most important advances in the history of medical research. It should prove, in fact, a most momentous step towards a higher standard of human health throughout the world.

This may sound a bold prophecy, but it is not too bold when the implications of the term "social medicine" are realised. Its chief meaning is the prevention—as distinct from the cure—of disease, and the duties of Oxford's new Professor and of the Institute which he will control will be every kind of research into the causes, direct and indirect, of all "the ills that flesh is heir to," and the possibility of eliminating those causes.

For many reasons medical science has in the past concentrated mainly upon the cure of disease, and its prevention has taken second place in the realms of research. True, much has been done; smallpox has been virtually eliminated in this country by vaccination, typhus by the rise of the standard of cleanliness, cholera by the purification of the water supply, bubonic plague by the control of ship-borne rats, and typhoid by the scientific treatment of sewage. But the fact remains that in the last year before the war 25,600,000 working weeks were lost through sickness by Britain's insured population alone.

Can what has been done in the case of smallpox, typhus, cholera, bubonic plague and typhoid be emulated in connection with other diseases? This is what the Oxford Institute of Social Medicine will set out to discover, and who can tell how far its researches will carry us towards the prevention of those diseases of which we already know the cure, but which none the less go on contributing to those millions of weeks of suffering and lost time. Medical research in Oxford has already accomplished so much that important achievements from this new branch can be prophesied with confidence.

Its foundation is a logical outcome of the magnificent endowment of medical studies in Oxford University a few years ago by Lord Nuffield, whose gifts of over £2,600,000 have made it possible to build up in Oxford a medical research organisation unsurpassed throughout the world.

With this money a great school of research into the causes and treatment of disease has been set up; but the more these aspects have been studied, the stronger has grown the realisation that it is better to remove the cause than to heal the effects. That is why the Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust (which, like the Institute for Medical Research, owes its existence to the generosity of Lord Nuffield) has decided to devote £10,000 a year for 10 years to the creation of this Oxford University Professorship of Social Medicine and an Institute for the carrying on of its researches.

The purposes of the Institute will be to investigate the influence of social, genetic, environmental and domestic factors on the incidence of human disease and disability; to seek measures for the protection of the community against forces which interfere with the full development and maintenance of man's mental and physical capacity; and, if required, to make provision for the instruction in Social Medicine of approved students and doctors.

The carrying out of these objects cannot fail to have far-reaching effects upon the health of the British people, and in that more united world which we hope to see after the war, in which the discoveries of science may be more widely shared, its benefits should spread to all civilised nations.

May we plead that the Nursing Profession may be afforded participation in this beneficent work? Its special knowledge and skill would be invaluable.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY ON THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ESTIMATES.

When the House of Commons went into Committee of Supply on the Ministry of Health Estimates, Mr. E. Brown, Minister of Health, had much of interest to report, especially on the Supply of Nurses. Reference was made to the number of nurses on the State Register in April, 1942. The number as reported was 103,700, and it was stated the supply of nurses was a difficult one. We could have wished in this connection the Minister had reported that the entire financial stability of the service depended on Registered Nurses, as they pay every penny of the cost of administering the Nurses Registration Act, upwards of £1,000 a week. This body of highly skilled professional workers have hitherto been treated as dependents. They are no such thing. And it is well that the Ministry of Health and the Government should realise this fact, so that there shall be no attempt at degrading upon their part—a policy which, if attempted in ignorance, would mean a shortage of efficiency to vanishing point.

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