A MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

BY

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Dods

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A MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

THE need for reform in Public Health, great before the war, is greater still now. The health of the people has become more important. We are losing hundreds of thousands of lives and we must replace them. Yet not only are we doing nothing to replace them, but the chaos of conflicting authorities grows worse and worse.

Lord Rhondda's statement that we are losing a thousand babies a week has not been questioned. What are we doing to cure this deplorable neglect? The answer is that we are doing little. What can we do? We can do much, and the remedy is so simple that, with the help of an influential organisation such as the one I am addressing, I hope we may succeed in carrying it. What are the evils? *Neglect in the past: Mistakes of law-makers: The effect of war.* These are the reasons. When war broke out we had not taken a clear and single view of *Health* problems. *Health*, the most important of all services, was regarded as an incident to be hidden away in the corners of a Government Department. One single incident shows the regard in which it was held. Municipal hospitals, when first started, were isolation hospitals and nothing more. They were regarded merely as places where you hid an unfortunate man who had scarlet fever or small-pox—not to cure him, but to prevent him from infecting his fellows. That shows the attitude of mind taken towards health questions, and it is an attitude which, unfortunately, has not disappeared.

Now it is impossible to understand the problem without details, and I should be paying to this assembly less respect than it deserves did I not go into details. Dry they must be. I will make them as short as possible.

Before the war, health was split into certain broad divisions: overlapping at many points, not correlated to each other, leaving tracts of "no-man's land" between them, springing up on no system except chance or administrative convenience. There are no less than eight Government Departments which have large health responsibilities. The general health of the people is looked after by the Local Sanitary Authority, supervised by the Local Government Board; that of workers in factories and shops is under the Home Office; that of paupers under the Poor Law Guardians, again supervised by the Local Government Board. School children are under the Local Education Authority, controlled by the Board of Education, and ships are looked after by the Board of Trade. The 14½ million insured persons are dealt with by the Local Insurance Committees, supervised by the Insurance Commissions for England, Scotland and Wales. The Board of Agriculture has important health functions in regard to the purity of our food and the diseases of animals. Then there are the Army and

Navy, whose health services, large before the war, are now enormous. Lastly, we must not leave out the voluntary hospitals, semi-public bodies that exercise invaluable health activities. So here you have eight public authorities, or, if you include the voluntary hospitals, nine, all doing health work, acting through a bewildering multiplicity of local bodies, overlapping and conflicting on numberless points. Can it be wondered that the result is unsatisfactory?

It will be seen at once that the divisions between these bodies are, in many cases, arbitrary, not natural and real, resting on no proper foundation. For example, a man may be a pauper or rich—if he is sick he requires the same treatment. It may be asked, "Why should he get what he does not pay for?" The answer is that the Poor Law has long ceased to be the division between free doctoring and paid service, and there is more free doctoring given outside the Poor Law than in, and yet the old distinction remains. Again, a child in school is the same child, with the same requirements, as a child in the home, and yet one is treated by the Board of Education, the other by the Local Government Board. From another point of view, look at the absurdity of the functions piled upon some Government Departments. Take the Home Office. Now I have the greatest respect for the Home Office; it has always been an orderly and well-conducted Department. It hardly catches the public eye except to secure approbation: but the result has been disastrous. It, being "the good boy" among Government offices, has had Health Service after Health Service piled upon its unlucky shoulders, until it now administers no fewer than eight. Let us see what they are:—

1. Factories and workshops.
   Important work excellently done.
2. Mines and quarries.
   Quite a different function.
3. The Board of Control for lunacy and mental deficiency.
   As may be supposed, a large medical staff.
4. The Prison Authority.
   A medical staff for this also.
5. Authority for Reformatory and Industrial Schools.
   Again with a medical staff.
6. Authority for aliens.
   Requiring inspection and medical treatment.
7. Inebriates have to be looked after.
8. Medical referees have to be appointed under the Workmen's Compensation Act.

All these are separate services with separate officers.

So much for neglect in the past and the resulting confusion. Now a word about the mistakes of law-makers. The standing example is the Insurance Act. That Act, with all its merits, and I do not underrate them, has the cardinal vice that it cuts right across local government. It supplants the elected Health Authority

by another authority not elected, not responsible to the people, and yet in many of its activities doing the same work as the elected body. In so far as Local Insurance Committees deal entirely with funds subscribed by insured persons, nobody has a word to say against their powers; but when not only do they deal with huge funds subscribed by the State, but also administer treatment, such as the tuberculosis treatment, to insured and uninsured alike, totally different questions arise. This mistake—the clash of Local Insurance Committees with the Sanitary Authority—was pointed out again and again when the Bill was passing through Parliament. These warnings were disregarded, and we are now reaping the fruit.

Lastly, there is the potent effect of the war on health problems. The stress of war work and the strain of the war have introduced new evils; and these evils, creating, as they have, special problems, have called for new treatment. The war again has caused the aggregation of workers in certain areas, thus raising new and difficult health questions. And the war also has seen the starting of certain dangerous processes which require special protection. Now, owing to the very unfortunate fact that we had no Health Ministry, but eight Departments each administering a little bit of Health, there has been no one body who can deal with these new questions. Take for example the Ministry of Munitions. They have had enormous health problems to deal with: problems of maternity, problems of poisoning, problems of welfare, problems of overcrowding and bad housing. Had there been a single Health Authority it would have been easy to hand over all these matters to that authority, who doubtless would have dealt with them well. But, as a matter of fact, there has been no authority who could do the work, and yet the work had to be done. Children don't wait for Government Departments: they get born. A remedy had to be found, and the only remedy was on the old lines, which are bad lines—each Department doing the work itself. When I say bad lines I do not mean that Dr. Addison was wrong in increasing the health activities of the Ministry of Munitions. I think he was entirely right. But there ought to have been no necessity for it. The result has been that a vast new Health Service has been created to fill the gaps not filled by another Department, and you therefore have a fresh problem on your hands when you form a Ministry of Health.

The Ministry of Pensions again shows the same spirit. Mr. Hodge has stated his intention of setting up a Health Service to deal with pensioners and their dependents. These persons are entitled to health treatment, and the very best treatment too, but their health requirements are not different because they are pensioners. Had there been a proper Health Service, pensioners would have been treated by it and no one would have questioned the arrangement, and we should have been spared the creation of another competitor and another obstacle on the road to unity.

Therefore the war has added to the number of central authorities dealing with health, so that there are now eleven. Let us see again what they are, for the muddle cannot be too often exposed.

They are:—The Local Government Board, the Insurance Commissions, the Home Office, the Board of Education, the Board of Agriculture, the Board of Trade, the War Office, the Admiralty, the Ministry of Munitions, the Ministry of Pensions and the Voluntary Hospitals. Such is the list, and it is still growing.

It is hardly necessary to refer to the other problems the war has produced. We have lost hundreds of thousands of our best lives, and we must replace them. We have the means of replacing them in our birth-rate, as long as we do not waste our babies as though they were valueless. Does this meeting realise that in the last forty years our birth-rate has fallen by one-half? A large amount of this loss is preventable.

Before I leave the existing chaos I want, at the risk of wearying you, to take the question from another point of view. Just see what happens to a baby. When born, if he is brought into the world by a midwife, as the vast majority of babies are, he enters this planet under the auspices of the Privy Council, the licensing authority for midwives. As soon as he passes out of that lady's arms he is received by the Local Sanitary Authority, who, through After Care Centres and similar bodies, look after his infantile requirements. When, however, he goes to school the Local Education Authority lays hold of him and puts him under a different doctor, but mark—he is only under this doctor in so far as he is a school-child. In respect of his home life he still remains under the Local Sanitary Authority, and therefore his young body is shuttlecocked backwards and forwards between these two powers. But his troubles do not end there. Misfortune may overtake his father, who may come under the Poor Law. If he does, our unfortunate child is at once rapt off to a different healer. The Poor Law doctor appears on the scene, and our infant, who had the same medical requirements before and after his father's unfortunate financial catastrophe, suddenly finds that that disaster, for which he was not responsible and which does not affect his health, makes a complete difference in his treatment. He may be carried off to a Poor Law Infirmary and there fed up on the fat of the land, but should his father recover his financial stability his child then returns to his home. He leaves the Poor Law Infirmary probably in the middle of his treatment, and reverts to the tender care of the Local Sanitary Authority.

Now we will suppose that he has survived these quick translations and has left school. His health still remains under the Local Sanitary Authority, but should he work in a factory or shop he comes under the Home Office. Here again we must distinguish. If the factory is one working for the Minister of Munitions that gentleman, as well as the Home Secretary, is responsible for his welfare, and for his industrial health. Nor does that exhaust the possibilities. His father has possibly served his country with distinction and comes home disabled with a pension. The boy, if still dependent, finds another body interesting himself in his health, and Mr. Hodge, Minister of Pensions, appears on the scene with his doctors and his medical treatment. Again, his father may have been an insured person—almost certainly is so—and the Local

Insurance Committee have their say in the health of this young life. Lastly, all through his life he is the unconscious object of the benign activities of the Board of Agriculture, who try to ensure him pure food and to keep from him tuberculous milk. Therefore our child, before he has reached years of discretion, has been passed through the meshes of eight different authorities, and has gone from one to another, not because his health required it but because of circumstances in his own or his parents' career which have no relation to health at all. The recital would be entirely humorous were it not tragic.

Now a word as to local authorities. I want to say at the outset that any changes in local administration should not be carried out until after a single central Ministry has been set up. Establish this body first, get it in working order, then see what local machinery you require. If you try to reform the local and central Government at the same time you will get into a mess. Now the general Health Authority for country and town alike, through the length and breadth of the land, is what is called the Local Sanitary Authority. This, in the town, is the Borough Council, and in the County is not the County Council but the smaller body, the District Council, Urban and Rural. It will probably prove to be the case that some adjustment is required in the functions of the local Authority. For instance, it is somewhat illogical that a small District Council in Wiltshire or Berkshire, with a sparse population and small financial possibilities, should have the same powers as great cities like Manchester or Liverpool. Probably some transfer to the County Council or some larger body is required; but I do not want to deal with this to-day. So much for the general health of the people.

The health of factory workers is dealt with almost entirely centrally. In the case of shops, however, the Local Authority administers the Shops Act, though it is a different Local Authority from the Local Sanitary Authority, for the County Council administers the Acts except in Urban Districts of 20,000 population and over. The Poor Law Service, as you very well know, is under the authority of the Board of Guardians, as to whom various changes have been suggested and are still in the air. School-children are under the Local Education Authority, and, leaving out ships, that are not important for our present purpose, the 14½ million insured persons are under the Local Insurance Committees. Munition workers are not under any local body.

Now I have run through those very briefly, not attempting to describe them. I merely want to make two points.

Local administration must be in the hands of the locally elected authorities. It is quite clear that no self-elected or co-opted body can do the work satisfactorily, or have that amount of popular support which local administration requires. The great difficulty which we have to face is the Insurance Act. With all its merits that Act cuts across Local Government. This was pointed out at the time and there is no good going back on the past, except to say that all the evils which I and others prophesied have resulted. You have alongside, the Local Government Authority, a vast net-

work of other authority—the Local Insurance Committees, who are not popularly elected. How shall these be combined with the Health Authority? They cannot, of course, be disregarded. There they are. They are administering benefits to 14½ million people, and they have to be brought in to any scheme.

That is my first point.

My second point is, do not let us bother about Local Government until we have the Central Government in order. Let us, first of all, form one central body to which all the local bodies are affiliated. We shall then take the first step towards preventing overlapping. The exact relations between the Insurance Committees and the Local Sanitary Authority are not easy to adjust, and I suggest that they should be left over in order that further experience, further discussion, and further investigation may do their work and show us the line of demarcation.

Now after this somewhat long preamble I want to come back to our main subject—a Ministry of Health. Four questions have to be answered:—

1. Is a Ministry of Health desirable?
2. Should it be a new Department or an existing one?
3. If an existing one, which?
4. What work should it do?

Is it desirable? I need waste no time over this. We are all agreed about that.

Should it be a new Government Department or an existing one, and if so, which? Now at first sight there are certain advantages in a new Department. It starts without traditions and unhampered by precedent. Its functions can be laid down without that compromise which must occur when you use existing machinery. On the other hand, a new Department should not be started unnecessarily. And since there are two Government Offices, either of which might be selected, it is obviously wrong to create an additional one. These Offices are the Local Government Board and the Insurance Commissions. I leave out the Home Office. That is concerned with the Factory Acts and the Shop Acts, both of which are well administered; but it is not the proper Office for a General Health Authority. Which shall we take—the Insurance Commission or the Local Government Board? Now these two Departments in a superficial way represent *prevention* and *cure*. The Local Government Board prevents, the Insurance Commission cures. These boundaries, however, are unstable and slipping away. The Insurance Commission has large preventive functions, and the Local Government Board is daily assuming more curative treatment. That distinction, therefore, will not help us. Take the Local Government Board first. It has numerous duties, we are told, and could not do the new work. It is concerned for Public Health, Poor Law, Old Age, Roads, Housing, Local Authorities, Loans and Valuations. All these are increasing duties. Again, there is the largely advertised objection of its connection with the Poor Law. But the Insurance Commissions, too, have obvious weaknesses. The structure of the National Commissions and Joint Committee would have to be altered. But the great objection is that you cannot hand over to a Department dealing only with insured persons the health of the whole community—the insured and uninsured alike.

On the whole, the Local Government Board comes out on top; but something must be said about its reorganisation. Public health, if anything at all, is a separate work. If it cannot have the whole of a Ministry it must have a quite distinct part. Therefore the Local Government Board must be divided into two, with a sharp and clear division—one half dealing with health, including its present health and housing work and its extended health function, and the second dealing with the rest of its activities, including the Poor Law.

One word about the reorganisation of the Insurance Commissions. At present there are four such for England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales respectively, and the National Health Insurance Joint Committee over the whole to bring them together. Now it is quite clear that Scotland and Ireland stand in a different position from England and Wales. The English and Welsh Commissions should be transferred to the Health Ministry, though a Health Office should be retained in Wales. The Scottish and Irish Commissions should be retained, but should be made responsible to the Secretary for Scotland and the Chief Secretary for Ireland respectively, and the National Health Insurance Joint Committee should be converted into a joint Board, consisting of the Health Minister as Chairman, the Secretary for Scotland and the Chief Secretary for Ireland.

I have run through that very quickly. You will see what it means. You keep up the structure of the Insurance Commissions, but you transfer their powers to the new Health Ministry, with proper safeguards.

Now what other Health functions is the new Ministry to have? Possibly this will be sufficient for the start. Ultimately, certainly, the mentally deficient and disabled soldiers should be treated by the Health Ministry and munition workers. Other functions should form the subject of discussion between the various Departments. Take the Board of Education. It would not be hard to come to an agreement whereby a division between the Board of Education and the new Public Health Authority could be formed. But for the rest I advise going slow. It is not heroic, but I believe it to be safe. We had better start the Central Department, see how it works, and then look round and discuss what further duty shall be given to it.

We must build now if the structure is to be ready for the new world after the war. Were we not to make things better than before for those that come back, our losses will have been in vain. But do not let us think that war will end when peace is declared. We shall still have to wage an unceasing conflict against ignorance and disease. Let us do it with united forces.

The great lesson we learn from Nature is that *nothing is lost*. In spite of all we have gone through, and all the young lives that

have perished, we can if we will recreate a race as strong and as healthy as before. Young lives are continually being born, and die through our folly. There are plenty of them did we not waste them as though they were valueless. Sometimes when I have been in one of our great industrial districts, after I have admired, as all must admire, the energy which built up these vast undertakings, it may have happened to me to come upon a stretch of water which once was a noble river. Now it has been stained and polluted beyond recognition. It flows past dreary banks, dark and evil smelling, shunned by all living things. And perhaps I have thought that we are paying a big price for our industrial success. But then again it may be that I have afterwards been to the upper waters of the same river and found it flowing clear and sweet, with flowers on its banks, and haunted by birds. Then I have realised that the two rivers are the same: that if men's pollutions and foulings could be stopped for forty-eight hours the pure water welling up from numberless springs would sweep away the foul, and the river would run clear from source to sea. No doubt it would take longer to cleanse the bed and bank of the accumulation of years, but let Nature do her work and a few winter floods will wash it clean. All that is required is a little thing—just the prevention of the pollution of our river. And so it is with the stream of life. We have done little to encourage it and much to check it: but it is still there, welling up every day, and bearing the potentialities of a noble and a glorious race. We have the chance now to remove some of the impediments which men have laid on it. Do not let us lose it.

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