

he had observed from the administration of intestinal antiseptics, notably the liq. hydrarg. perchlorid. (B.P.), and quoted various cases illustrative of this. He also suggested that in many cases various delusions and hallucinations met with in mental cases would be found on close examination to have a physical basis instancing the delusion of having gone long walks in cases of peripheral neuritis, and of rats in the stomach in cases of chronic irritative dyspepsia.

In epilepsy, Dr. Hughlings Jackson long since pointed out the benefit that resulted from a salt-free diet. In a few cases it was found that a daily dose of 3ii of salt notably increased the number of fits, and in some cases marked diuresis supervened, up to 130 oz. of urine being passed in twenty-four hours. It had been stated that where ingestion of salt was accompanied by marked diuresis which was not compensated by drinking water a rise in protein metabolism occurred.

In Dr. Eustace's paper, read at the Summer Meeting of the Irish Division, 1914, it was pointed out that auto-intoxication might occur in various ways: (a) histogenic, (b) organopathic, (c) gastro-intestinal; and that under certain circumstances toxins developed by microbes become excessive and get into the blood-tract. Putrefaction of proteid gives rise to various organic poisons—indol, phenol, and skatol—that the liver has a great destroying power, using up ammonia and amino-acids forming urea, and transforms offensive aromatic products into less offensive material.

The influence of various physical disorders on the course of a mental attack was also dealt with, and cases were quoted showing the effect of the incidence of tubercle, pneumonia, and sharp febrile attacks generally.

Attention was drawn to a recent paper by Drs. Orr, Rows, and Stephenson, on "The Spread of Infection by ascending Lymph Stream of Nerves from the Peripheral Inflammatory Foci to the Central Nervous System," in which it was stated that experiments had shown that the infection of the lymph system of the peripheral nerves caused an ascending neuritis which spread upwards to pass over the posterior root ganglia and along the spinal roots to the cord.

In conclusion, Dr. Rainsford apologised for the very scrappy nature of his remarks, but expressed a hope that succeeding speakers would find in them something which, from their wide experience and knowledge, would suggest to them thoughts which would illumine the discussion, and diffuse more information on the subject.

The CHAIRMAN said they all owed a great debt of gratitude to Dr. Rainsford for the able way in which he had introduced the subject under discussion, which had elicited some valuable comments from the members.

Dr. J. O'C. DONELAN mentioned the marked beneficial results to patients by treatment with naphthaline. This substance acted as a powerful intestinal antiseptic, and he had found it very useful in cases where there was intestinal stasis and evidence of toxæmia in mental states.

Other members spoke in similar terms of the value of purgation and a course of intestinal and antiseptic treatment, saline injections, and other means of dealing with cases of insanity whose condition depended upon morbid states of their alimentary system.

It was proposed by Dr. RAINSFORD, and seconded by Dr. DONELAN, that the best thanks of the Irish Division be tendered to the President and Fellows of the Royal College of Physicians for their kindness in allowing the Division to meet in the College, which was passed unanimously.

CORRESPONDENCE.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS,
EDINBURGH;

December 17th, 1917.

SIR,—We have the honour to transmit to you a Statement adopted by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh dealing with the question of the establishment of a Ministry of Health.

The College was led to take up the consideration of this matter by the attention

which has been recently given to it, and by the general interest aroused by its discussion in the public press.

The opening paragraphs of the Statement explain the position the College occupies under Royal Charter, and we would emphasise the fact that under the privileges conferred by the Charter it is the duty of the College to consider "any matters affecting the general interests of the medical profession and the public."

Acting on this privilege the College has considered the question of the establishment of a Ministry of Health, and has accepted the general proposition that it would be to the advantage of the public health were the various existing health agencies co-ordinated and brought under the supervision, control, and initiative of a Board of Health, constituted on the lines suggested in the Statement, and presided over by a Minister of State.

The only aspect of the question which leads to a divergence of view is as to the desirability of proceeding with a scheme of such magnitude at this strenuous and anxious time in the nation's history, when the medical forces of the country are largely disorganised. In the circumstances the prevailing opinion of the College is that the establishment of a Ministry of Health ought to be postponed until after the war.

We have the honour to be

Your most obedient Servants,

WILLIAM RUSSELL, M.D.,

President.

A. DINGWALL-FORDYCE, M.D.,

Secretary.

STATEMENT by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh regarding the Proposal to Institute a Ministry of Health.

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh was erected by Royal Charter granted by His Majesty King Charles the Second, 29th November, 1681, and incorporated anew by Royal Charter granted by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, 16th August, 1861.

The Royal College has been, and continues to be largely concerned with matters affecting the Health of the nation. It has taken considerable part in developing medical science and practice. It is therefore particularly interested in all proposals which have for their aim the erection of a State Department of Health.

The Fellows of the College have given careful consideration to the subject. The statement which follows is the outcome of deliberations, which had regard to the great questions of Health and the urgent need of their recognition and effective handling by the State. The standpoint of the College, is frankly medical, not political or departmental.

The administration of Health measures has in the past been developed in connection with a number of Government Departments, such as the Local Government Board, Home Office, Board of Education, Insurance Commission.

Each of the several Departments has worked within the limits of certain Acts of the Legislature dealing with definite subjects and conferring definite powers.

The Health of the Community has received benefit from the work of the Departments; but the operations of the Departments have not attained that comprehensive measure of success which the extent and gravity of the Health problem demand.

As regards Health questions, the sphere of the several Departments is limited, and, with increasing legislation, the overlapping which inevitably follows from their separation becomes steadily aggravated.

A fundamental weakness lies in the fact that in none of the Departments concerned is the control vested in a Minister appointed primarily to deal with Health problems.

From this division of interest and responsibility departmental difficulties are apt to arise: policy in regard to matters pertaining to Health tends to become subject to considerations of departmental jurisdiction: and the essential interest of Health questions is liable to be obscured.

Under the restrictions of the present system it has been impossible to evolve concerted means for dealing with the complex and ever-widening problems of National Health. Not until these restrictions are removed will it be possible to attain effective and adequate machinery.

What is required is the creation of a Ministry which shall concern itself with Health matters pure and simple, and to whose jurisdiction shall be transferred from other Departments the operations of all existing enactments in so far as they deal with Health.

This opens up another aspect of the question, namely, the immense extent of the issues involved.

Existing Acts deal only with sections and fragments of the subject. A multitude of conditions affecting Health are not included in the purview of the Acts, and have hitherto been left untouched.

The Minister of Health must handle the whole problem. He must be concerned not only with questions already dealt with by the Legislature, such as infectious Diseases, Infant Welfare, etc., but also with fresh questions arising from time to time, e.g., conditions causing or affecting forms of sickness and disease not yet included within the operation of Health Acts.

Such matters are frequently brought to light in the work of the medical profession. Beyond the treatment of individual cases by medical practitioners there are large questions concerning conditions to which sickness is due. These are certainly matters for a Ministry of Health.

To enable the Ministry to carry out its wide and highly complex functions, a Board of Health should be constituted, and its members selected in such a way as to ensure that the attention of the Ministry of Health would be directed to all matters affecting Health.

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh is, therefore, of opinion that it is essential, in the public interest, that a Government Department should be erected to deal exclusively with Health.

The Royal College suggests:

- I. That the Department should consist of the Minister and a Board of Health, of which the Minister should be Chairman and whose Members should be elected on the ground of experience and interest in matters pertaining to Health.
- II. That the Purposes of the Department should be:
 1. To administer the Health Acts.
 2. To devise executive measures for dealing with Health problems not hitherto defined by legislative measures.
 3. To institute inquiries with a view to introduce measures for improving conditions affecting Health.
 4. To develop facilities for investigation of problems in Health and Disease as they may arise.
- III. That the Board should include three Groups of Members:
 1. Administrative officials.
 2. Laymen with wide experience of Health problems, or in the administration of hospitals and other health agencies, official or voluntary.
 3. Medical members who have had experience in:
 - (a) Public Health Service.
 - (b) General Practice.
 - (c) Special Clinical Departments, including Industrial Medicine.
 - (d) Medical Research.
 - (e) Medical Statistics.

In name and by Authority of the College,

WILLIAM RUSSELL, M.D.,
President.

A. DINGWALL-FORDYCE, M.D.,
Secretary.

EDINBURGH:
6th December, 1917.