PROCEEDINGS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIAL MEDICAL OFFICERS

THIRTY-SEVENTH MEETING

The annual general meeting was held on October 14, 1944, at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Dr. J. C. Bridge in the chair. Following the private business (reported below), Professor J. A. Ryle (Oxford) read a paper on social medicine and industry.

Office Bearers, 1944-45

Dr. J. C. Bridge (London) remains as Chairman until October, 1945.

Dr. W. Blood (London) was re-elected Honorary Secretary.

Dr. P. Pringle (London) was elected Honorary Treasurer.

Drs. W. E. Chiesman (Liverpool), M. W. Goldblatt (Manchester), ex officio, T. A. Lloyd Davies (Nottingham), D. C. Norris (London), Patricia Shaw (London), and Donald Stewart (Birmingham) were elected as the Executive Committee, together with the officers of the Association.

Representatives on Outside Bodies. Dr. W. J. Lloyd (Birmingham) was elected to represent the Association for the next 3 years, as from February, 1945, on the Board of Management of the Birmingham Accident Hospital.

Dr. G. F. Keatinge (Derby) was elected to represent the Association on a sub-committee of the British Standards Institution dealing with welders' goggles.

Dr. T. A. Lloyd Davies (Nottingham) was elected to represent the Association on a committee of the Empire Rheumatism Council.

Finance. The Honorary Treasurer presented the financial statement for 1943-44, which was unanimously approved and adopted. The annual subscription remains at £1 1s. 4d. for Ordinary Members, and 10s. 6d. for Associate Members. A further donation of £10 10s. was granted to the Association's Prize Fund held by the Public Health Department of the London School of Hygiene for proficiency in industrial medicine and hygiene.

Honorary Membership. Professor J. M. Mackintosh, Dean of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was unanimously elected an Honorary Member of the Association.

Education Committee. Dr. W. E. Chiesman reported on progress. Five meetings had been held and much of the spade work accomplished. Reports on various aspects of the problem had been received from a large number of different persons and experts in this field. It would be possible to issue a report in a few months time.

British Journal of Industrial Medicine. Dr. Donald Stewart made a statement on the supply position. He regretted that some members had had difficulty in obtaining a copy, but this had been due to shortage of paper. Representations had successfully been made to the appropriate government department and more paper would be forthcoming to meet the demand, starting with the October number, 1944.

Future Development of Industrial Medicine. Copies of two documents had been circulated. The first was a revised version of the original memorandum on the future of industrial medical service submitted to the British Medical Association; this embodied most of the subject-matter but was presented in a somewhat different form. The second was a statement from the Chairman setting out the reasons why it had been considered advisable to amend the original document. The Executive Committee was responsible for the proposed revisions and amendments. Following a long discussion in which several amendments were proposed, final agreement was reached. The Honorary Secretary was instructed to send a copy of the revised memorandum to all members and to such other bodies or persons as the Executive Committee might think advisable.

The amended memorandum is dated October, 1944. It briefly describes that the Association of Industrial Medical Officers, formed in 1935, now comprises some 400 members engaged in the different branches of industrial medicine. The Association is in agreement with the remarks on industrial medical service on pp. 66 and 67 of the white paper, 'A National Health Service, 1944' (Cmd. 6502), but it cannot subscribe to the inference on p. 67 that medical service can be separated from a national health service. There are certain apparent defects in the present system. Arrangements provide a service for not more than 25 per cent. of persons employed. The service so provided is not always adequate. Training of medical and nursing personnel for industry is quite inadequate. There is administrative overlap in that a number of government departments have their own separate medical service, e.g. Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Fuel and Power, Ministry of War Transport. Industry essentially includes more than factories and integration of the health services of all occupational groups is vital. Facilities for industrial health research are not adequate. The suggestion that the industrial medical officer may be professionally subservient to the employer who pays him is not a valid criticism. But of more importance is the fact that the financial position of the employer, or his personal inclination, may affect the quality or lead to the termination of the service, without regard to the needs of the worker. The problem has many aspects—not the least important of which is the future structure of industry itself. The final recommendation of the Association is that:

'a Committee of Enquiry should be set up by the Government to consider the matter in all its aspects.'

BIRMINGHAM GROUP

A meeting was held on Friday, September 22, in the Physiology Department of the University, with Prof. H. P. Gilding in the chair. The subject for discussion was

The Health of the Adolescent Boy

introduced by Mr. Ernest Booth who outlined the history of the medical care by the state of the adolescent boy in industry. His experience was that of welfare manager at a large firm in Birmingham. Medical examination by Examining Surgeons had in the past been hurried, and, from the point of view of good employers, most unsatisfactory. There was inadequate follow-up, and little advice given to employers. He had, also, certain criticisms of the school medical service; there was lack of opportunity for collaboration and useful information was rarely passed to the factory. It was his view that the health history was of great importance and there must be continuity of information.

Dr. R. E. Smith, medical officer to Rugby School, said that in the past one of the main ways of maintaining health among juveniles had been routine examinations. The long list of abnormalities found apparently justified this, but many of these abnormalities occurred so that the numbers were exaggerated, as was the value of such examinations. Among boys at secondary schools
examined over ten years he found approximately that 25 per cent. had curious teeth, 10 per cent. refractive errors of eyesight, and 5 per cent. orthopaedic deformities—almost exclusively flat feet. The total of other abnormalities was only 7 per cent. He was convinced that if these abnormalities throughout were treated adequately there would be little need for routine examinations after the age of six. Hence, and that the new teacher chief duty should be to see that those returning to work after illness had completely recovered. In addition, the adolescent boy should receive instruction on how to keep healthy, with special reference to the teeth and to the respiratory system. The part nutrition has played was illustrated by the fact that recruits now entering the Post Office service weigh, on an average, 21 lb. more than those engaged fifty years ago. The health record of the child should be consulted at all three medical centres concerned in his health, and the school record should be at the disposal of both the factory doctor and the panel doctor. There was need for purpose in every boy’s work, and planning to this end was essential. The Association of Boys’ Clubs, to which he was medical adviser, was particularly anxious, on the other hand, that leisure should be available in the true sense of the word.

Mr. J. M. Hogan, Warden at the Outward-Bound Sea School for boys, Aberdovey, Wales, next gave the story of a fascinating experiment. This school was founded in 1941 by the then President of the Boy Scouts of Wales. The boys and girls of all ages and classes from the school of Aberdovey, and from any other school in the Principality, had the privilege of spending a week a year in the school, the object being to train deck-hand boys and apprentices in seamanship and the handling of small boats. The founders of the school, the Blue Funnel Line of Liverpool, had found by bitter experience that the loss of life at sea was as much due to lack of seamanship after taking to the boats as it was to the actual explosion of torpedo or mine. The Government Departments concerned with the sea were asked to form such a school, but the suggestion was rejected. The initiative and the means were, however, ascribed to the Merchant Service, and the school is now training boys through the sea, as well as for it. The idea has extended beyond its original purpose and is likely to spread further. The school is housed in three medium-sized residential properties which look out across the Dovey estuary and accommodates 100 boys; it is staffed by some ten young officers of the Merchant Marine (many of them undergoing rehabilitation following injuries or exposure at sea), each of whom for a period of a few months serves at the school as tutor, guide, philosopher and friend to the boys. Apart from the Warden, the Chief Officer, a lad's afloat mate, an instructor in the gym, and a physical instructor, and none of the staff are permanently appointed nor are they teachers by profession. The boys come from every walk of life, from ocean-going ships, from industrial and commercial apprenticeship schemes, from public and secondary schools, from established sea schools such as H.M.S. Conway, and from sea-cadet and other organizations throughout the country. There are no class or professional distinctions; each boy comes for one term of four weeks only; the inclusive fee for the term is £12.

The school aims to be self-supporting and, being eleven terms in the year, with the remaining eight weeks set aside for rest for the staff, the school can handle with its very limited premises and its small staff more than 1,100 boys each year.

The training given is intense, but it is varied. The boy can give his whole mind to it because for the four weeks he has no responsibility to factory, home or classroom pursuits. There is less spare time than at most schools. Discipline is that of the Merchant Navy: ceremonial is cut to a minimum—there is no general saluting but respect for officers is marked; there are few formalities but the word of an officer is obeyed. The boys are grouped into ‘watch’ of 12, each watch having the opportunity to select its own watch-captain and vice-captain, whose duty it is to maintain a high standard of service and discipline. As a result more training becomes education for citizenship. During their four weeks at Aberdovey boys are asked to maintain first of all a high standard of physical fitness and self-discipline; smoking, for instance, is not allowed; instruction is given in walking, running and other athletic attainments, in swimming, in boatmanship, and in seamanship. The standard of fitness reached in three or four weeks is astonishing: in fact many of the boys become conscious for the first time of their own physical powers. They now live in an atmosphere where physical fitness is regarded as necessary and not as the whim of the officer’s chief duty. The physical training is, however, anxious, because for the experiment; others have been enabled to make up their mind that they are mentally or constitutionally unsuited for a life at sea and have returned to factory or school. For all, the experiment training has been an adventure and an education; the open-air life will not be forgotten, nor will the fellowship with others and the efforts made and the dangers shared. The boys come away richer in experience and understanding, more practical; those who serve the school as officers and temporary school-masters, go back to their jobs at sea with a fuller consciousness of the problems facing the growing boy. Results have been outstanding. The boys are unique and outside the reach of orthodox methods. There are many who advocate for every boy a six or twelve months’ period of national service, under conditions such as those at Aberdovey. The short-term schools could be linked with many phases of the national life, at home and abroad, including air and sea training; training for civilian services (Fire, Police); and for industry—forestry, agriculture, fishing, mining, quarrying, and factory work. The number and variety of these short-term schools might be considerable; if a boy has three four-week periods to spend between 16 and 19, each period could be spent at a different school, learning to understand and do a different job of work.

Further experiments for both boys and girls are necessary. Already the short-term school for boys—combined with part-time release from industry and schools—gives new scope and awareness, with relatively little paraphernalia and staff. Buildings and equipment accommodate 100 boys at a time, 1,100 boys per year, probably the maximum number socially and administratively practical for a four-weeks’ course: capital cost and running cost are modest per boy accommodated. In contrast, a large public school, with substantial outlay of capital and resources, may accommodate 1,000 boys for five years, or 200 boys per year. It is not suggested that the short-term school should replace the boarding-school, but, linked with the boarding schools, the technical colleges and industry, it can give at 16 a wider understanding and a broader basis for citizenship at low cost and without laying a further burden on the teaching profession.