THE MUNICIPALIZATION OF HOSPITALS.

THE BRADFORD EXPERIMENT.

BY

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I.

It may not be widely known that Bradford now possesses a municipal hospital. While academic discussion has been taking place on the Dawson report and the future of health services, the City Fathers of Bradford have been engaged in instituting a health centre of their own. A visit to the city has led to the conviction that a study by the medical profession of the methods by which this institution has been brought into existence, and of the proposals for its management in the future, is of the utmost importance. Already, it is believed, other industrial towns are watching developments with interest, and if success is achieved at Bradford, there can be no doubt that there will be a large extension of what is in some ways a revolution in hospital organization and management in this country.

Bradford is a city of some 300,000 inhabitants, engaged chiefly in the wool trade. It is only twelve miles from Leeds, and for a long time there were no medical men in the city who confined themselves to purely consulting and specialist work. The institutional treatment was provided by the Royal Infirmary, the Children's Hospital, the Eye and Ear Hospital, and a Poor Law infirmary. More than ten years ago it was recognized that the buildings of the Royal Infirmary were out of date, and provided insufficient accommodation. Accordingly another site for the infirmary was acquired, and plans were got out for a new building. But the £200,000 then thought necessary was never collected; the war, though adding much to the wealth of Bradford, interfered with the proposals for building, and the site remains as it was ten years ago.

In the meantime Bradford, which has always prided itself on its municipal efforts, has become more socialistic; it now has a city council in which there is a majority of Labour representatives. Every new State proposal for health services has been anticipated or adopted by the council, until at the present time there are said to be twenty-seven full-time medical officers engaged in municipal health work. After the war the City Council was seized with a desire to crown its health activities by possessing a hospital of its own, and on April 1st of this year it entered into an arrangement with the Poor Law guardians by which the old Poor Law infirmary, which had been used as a war hospital, should be leased to the council for five years. Under this agreement the council takes over the care of all Poor Law patients, except the aged and imbecile, who had been housed elsewhere during the war; the guardians retain the right to visit the hospital, and the cost of maintenance is divided between the council and the guardians according to the number of days beds are occupied by the patients of the respective bodies. The superintendent of the Poor Law infirmary becomes a whole-time officer of the municipal hospital under the M.O.H. This arrangement appears to have been provisionally approved by the Minister of Health, but the details of the scheme are to be submitted for his approval this month. It appears probable also that Clause 11 of the Ministry of Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill—a bill which ranges from houses to clinical thermometers—is designed to legitimize such projects as the Bradford Municipal Hospital.

The City Council proposes that its new hospital shall be completely up to date, with a first-class staff and first-class equipment, and shall provide the best possible treatment. But it does not appear that in designing the scheme the council has taken into consideration the existence of the Royal Infirmary and of the other voluntary hospitals, nor has any communication been addressed to the medical profession of Bradford. It is curious that a council of representatives largely drawn from the Labour party, which protests so strongly against "secret diplomacy," should elaborate its schemes with so little contact with the outside world. From what has been said about the Royal Infirmary it is plain that the new municipal hospital will be a serious rival to the old voluntary hospitals; and one of the aldermen boldly asserted that voluntarism is absolutely dead in Bradford.

Recently the City Council held a meeting to consider proposals made by one of its committees with regard to a war memorial for Bradford. One proposition was that the war memorial should take the form of a new general hospital. Though the matter of the memorial was ultimately referred back to the committee, the Labour members succeeded by a small majority in defeating the proposal for such a hospital. In the course of the debate the following expression was used: "If they were to have a new hospital let it be provided out of the rates, so that every man could regard it as his right and not as a charity." While active hostility to the Royal Infirmary was kept in the background, it was plain that the Labour members did not intend to tolerate any rival to the scheme they have in hand.

It seems clear that for a long time past a contest has been going on in Bradford between the voluntary system and the system of municipal control and support. On the voluntary side attempts have been made to unite the three voluntary hospitals, and to collect subscriptions for the building of a large new hospital on the site acquired by the Royal Infirmary and to make this hospital the war memorial for Bradford. These attempts have failed, and the apparent approach of a period of bad trade in Bradford has made the failure more complete. In the meantime the Labour members on the City Council seem desirous of giving the *coup de grâce* to the voluntary system, and by their refusal to adopt the proposal of a new general hospital as a suitable war memorial will leave the way open to the full development of their municipal hospital. Finally, the Royal Infirmary is handicapped by the fact that there is no university at Bradford such as exists at Leeds; and the lack of the prestige attaching to the medical school of a university increases the difficulty of those who desire to retain voluntary hospitals in the city of Bradford.

In the next article it is proposed to deal with the details of the municipal hospital scheme, and to show the effect that they will have on the consultants, the general practitioners, and the community.

(To be concluded.)

Ireland.

IRISH PUBLIC HEALTH COUNCIL.

Withdrawal of State Grants for Irish Health Services.

THE Irish daily press contains reports of a meeting of the Irish Public Health Council held on September 21st, at the offices of the Minister of Health for Ireland, when Dr. E. Coey Bigger was in the chair, and the members present were Sir John W. Moore, Sir Joseph A. Glynn, Dr. Maguire, Dr. Alice Barry, Mr. E. Bourke, C.B., Rev. P. Kerlin, C.C., Mrs. McMordie, Mr. E. F. Stephenson and Mr. J. E. Johnston, M.B.E. The Council went carefully into the question of the stoppage of grants for the health services in Ireland, and, it appears, was unanimously of opinion that all grants for such services should be made available without any conditions being imposed of a political character. In the afternoon the Council waited on the Chief Secretary, who is also the Minister of Health for Ireland, and having discussed several urgent health problems relating to Ireland, placed before him the serious consequences to the health of the community that would be entailed if the Government grants for health services in this country were withheld. The Chief Secretary was also reminded that a considerable portion of the salaries of Irish Poor Law medical officers was paid out of these grants, and that it would be penalizing these already underpaid officers if the grants from public funds were stopped as the result of making their payment contingent on boards of guardians and district councils giving certain undertakings of a political nature. The Council also laid particular stress on the necessity for continuing the grants for child welfare, tuberculosis, and other special diseases. The Chief Secretary, having discussed the question fully in all its bearings, promised that the Council's recommendations would be carefully considered by the Government.

Grants for Voluntary Hospitals.

The Council had under consideration the question of voluntary hospitals in the larger cities in Ireland. It being