

XII.—PUBLIC HEALTH AND BENEVOLENCE.

Greatly increased attention has been devoted in Canada during recent years to public health and its related subjects, the work embracing, in addition to the supervision of the general health of the community, the maintenance of hospitals and institutions for the care of needy and indigent persons. In general, the administration of public health activities and the establishment and maintenance of such institutions is in the hands of the various Provincial Governments, under the powers given them in sec. 92 of the British North America Act, 1867. Under their control, municipalities, societies and individuals generally initiate charitable and humane efforts, depending on the Government to some extent for financial aid and for competent, uniform inspection of methods and standards. Exercising particular jurisdiction over some phases of the general health of the people of the Dominion is the Department of Health of the Dominion Government, while the Dominion Council of Health acts as a clearing-house on many important questions related to the health of the people.

Public Health.—Considerable diversity in methods of administration of public health activities exists among the provinces. Apart, however, from the actual organization of provincial Health Departments and of the administrative bodies charged with the management of hospitals and other such institutions, it will be observed, in the summaries of provincial activities which follow, that particular attention is given to the same branches of public health work in all the provinces. Perhaps the most important of all, and reflecting most clearly the benefits accruing from such work, are the provisions for medical inspection of school children. This is carried out in some cases by the district or sub-district medical health officers, and in others by public health nurses whose activities are confined to it alone. In addition to the continual supervision exercised over the health of the children, expert advice and assistance are supplied freely to children, teachers and parents. In many cases, dental inspection is provided for. While this work has been carried on upon a considerable scale for but a few years, great benefits have already been realized from it, notably general improvement in health and sanitary conditions both in schools and homes, and in the control and prevention of epidemics.

In other directions also, governmental activities through Departments of Health have produced numerous evidences of their value, which may be illustrated by an examination of the death rates from various communicable and other diseases, such as are shown in the Population section of the present volume under the heading of "Vital Statistics" In Ontario the rate of deaths from tuberculosis decreased from 85.6 to 59 per 100,000 between 1913 and 1925, and that from typhoid fever from 19.4 to 4.4 per 100,000. While some other rates have increased, it may be noted that increases are not general in the case of communicable diseases and that, in respect of tuberculosis especially, the cities of the province show the lowest mortality rates. The reason for this is the fact that public health work is more advanced there than in the towns and rural areas.

Institutions.—The most familiar of all public institutions established to administer and foster the general health of the community and in which charitable effort is manifested is the general hospital, common to all cities and towns of any considerable population, and found also in the more modern and prosperous rural districts. Such hospitals are generally erected and supported by the municipality,