

districts amount to no mean sum. One is particularly reluctant to comment on the travelling-expenses of ratepayers who give their time to public work, nevertheless there should be a limit. In very few districts, I am glad to say, do the members vote themselves £2 a day at the public expense when attending meetings of the Board. These are scarcely "reasonable expenses" according to the statute. But against this I would like to record what the Dominion owes to the majority of Board members who do give their time at "reasonable expenses" for the public weal, but to the detriment, I fear, in many cases of their own interests. To these men all honour.

The cost under this item, however, will not diminish. The additional responsibilities devolving on Boards—public health, district nursing, &c.—necessitate a larger executive staff, or an increase in pay to those officers who have had to assume additional responsibilities. Speaking generally, our Hospital Secretaries are not paid in proportion to their responsibilities—a fact which I have referred to in previous reports as one of the worst forms of hospital economy.

So far, there is every reason to believe that the new Act is working well and meeting the difficulties that brought it into being; and it was gratifying to notice in the remits that were forwarded to, and in the discussion that took place at, the Hospitals Conference last June there were no serious alterations of the law suggested.

The troubles that have arisen have been largely administrative. That the Boards are too large is generally admitted; but, nevertheless, the Boards have not taken sufficient advantage of their powers to form committees, and when they have done so trouble has occasionally arisen between the Chairman of the Board and the chairmen of the principal committees, and in some instances an antagonism has sprung up between the committees and the Board, which has brought about that very state of affairs that it was hoped would be obviated by the new Act.

When once a Board has elected a committee—presumably of competent men—to conduct the affairs of an institution, or to administer charitable aid or public health, considerable latitude should be allowed the committee by the central Board. It is irritating to the members of a committee, who have spent perhaps hours in discussing a subject, to find their recommendations animadverted upon by members of the Board, who have not given the time to the subject that the members of the committee have been able to give. In nine cases out of ten the committee is right. The Department naturally does not wish to see any committee dominating the Board, which is the body directly responsible to the ratepayers; but a great deal of time, irritation, and expense would be saved, and the work better done, if the reports of the committee were adopted after the chairman of the committee presenting the report had answered a few questions pertinent thereto when brought up at the Board for confirmation.

It is undoubtedly the duty of the Chairman of the Board to keep in touch with the various committees, and to have a seat on them, and generally to know what is going on; but he should interfere as little as possible with the chairman of the committee, and not go behind the latter in little details of administration, which are essentially the work of the chairman of the special committee. It is the personal question over again—Boards and committees change, but human nature never.

Charitable Aid.

	1909-10.	1910-11.
	£	£
Charitable aid—indoor	64,336*	62,848
„ outdoor	38,988	33,051

A further reduction in the cost of outdoor relief may be confidently looked for now that the Boards have provided officers for inquiring into the circumstances of those applying for or in receipt of charitable aid. For the most part these reports are furnished by the Board's Sanitary Inspectors, who, in addition to their public-health duties, undertake those of relieving officers. In one district the report of the Sanitary Inspector resulted in the Board cutting down outside relief at the rate of £50 per month without in any way inflicting hardship on the deserving, or, for that matter, the undeserving, poor. On similar experience other Hospital Boards have reported the value of the work done by these officers.

In connection with the cost of indoor relief I may point out that about one-fourth of the total expenditure thereon is met by contributions from charitable-aid recipients, chiefly old-age pensioners resident in our old people's homes.

Subsidies.

The total estimated expenditure of Hospital and Charitable Aid Boards for 1911-12 amounts to £336,553, or 6s. 7½d. per head of the population; the net estimated expenditure (*i.e.*, after balances in hand, estimated patients' payments, &c., have been deducted) amounts to £233,821, or 4s. 7d. per head of the population. The amount of this to be raised by levy on contributory local authorities is £116,901, or 2s. 3d. per head of the population. The rateable capital value of the Dominion is £255 per head of the population. Reference to the table in the Fourth Schedule of the Act, from which the rate of subsidy is arrived, shows that the rateable capital value per head of the population is "Under £300 but not under £250," and the rate of levy "Under 2s. 6d. but not under 2s." The average rate of subsidy therefore works out for the whole Dominion at £1 for £1 on the amount levied, as against £1 0s. 5d. for 1910-11, the slight decrease in subsidy being due to the fact that the estimated expenditure of Boards in 1911-12 is £15,115 more than in 1910-11, and the population and rateable capital value have not altered in the same proportion.

That the rate of subsidy for the whole Dominion remains at about £1 shows that the new system of apportioning the subsidy under the Act of 1909 is a satisfactory and reliable one. Table XI shows the details for the various Boards, the subsidy ranging from 12s. 3d. for Waiapu to £1 4s. 3d. for Bay of Islands. The low rate of subsidy for Waiapu is no great hardship on

* Including £10,506 capital expenditure.