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## PART I.—GENERAL SURVEY.

### SECTION I.—GENERAL ADMINISTRATION.

I HAVE the honour to submit the annual report of the Department for the year 1920-21.

This report is intended mainly to stress and simplify certain matters duly set forth in the valuable surveys by the Divisional Directors.

The past year has been an anxious one, principally on account of the financial stringency and all that it involves, if only regarded from a departmental point of view. Under such circumstances, therefore, the taking-over of the military hospitals and sanatoria from the Defence Department, and the outbreak of bubonic plague in Australia, have by no means lightened our responsibilities, especially when such may have to be shouldered by a very much reduced staff. However, owing to the loyalty and devotion of the executive officers and staff, and the co-operation between the various divisions, I can with satisfaction view the results of the year's work and look forward not unhopefully to the future.

### PUBLIC HEALTH.

The public health for the past year, as shown in the lowered death-rate, may on the whole be considered satisfactory, and especially so as regards the incidence of certain of the notifiable diseases.

Since the Department was established in 1900 the crude death-rate for the Dominion has fallen from 10.5 to 8.73 per thousand, while the standardized death-rate, recognized as the international index of mortality, fell to 10.93, the lowest for the last decade, and also, I believe, of any country in the world. Moreover, the infant-mortality rate has fallen from 74.9 in 1900 to 47.8 per thousand births, with a corresponding decrease over the same period for the chief centres.

The instructive report of Dr. Truby King, the Director, Division of Child Welfare, will raise hopes that, under his experienced direction, we may look for a still further decline in the rate of infantile mortality in this country.

Reference is made in this report to the increase of still-births in New Zealand. The position is far from consolatory. There is an indication, however, for investigation as to the causes, and, if possible, the application of remedial measures, otherwise we fall short in the objective of a reduction of the ante-natal and neo-natal death-rate. This problem, as well as that of the lowered birth-rate, presents, it appears, other aspects than that embraced by preventive and curative medicine. Even the most perfect public-health administration is but a secondary means to an end, for, as Sir George Newman, the Principal Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, has pointed out, "Only a people clean in mind and body, within and without, can stand 'the pestilence which walketh in darkness,' and thus the social and moral standards of a people, its national character, bear relation to its health, and that, and not the medical issue alone, is the decisive factor."

*Notifiable Diseases.*—As regards certain notifiable diseases we find that scarlet fever was prevalent to a greater extent than in the immediately preceding years, but fortunately it was of a mild type ; while diphtheria has shown a marked decline since 1917, but with a slight increase for the year past. In reference to this disease it is encouraging to read the comments of the Director, Division of Public Hygiene, on the Schick test.

The death-rate from enteric fever still shows a steady decline, a matter for congratulation, as its prevalence, and that of allied diseases, is recognized as one of the most reliable and accepted indications as to the sanitary condition of a country. In comparison with the neighbouring Australian States our death-rate for this disease is strikingly low. However, among our Maori population occasional outbreaks occur of more or less severity, and the Department experienced recently some anxiety in regard to one of such in the Ohau district. It is reasonable to expect that with the increasing preventive and prophylactic measures in the form of anti-typhoid inoculation and higher standard of sanitation now being enforced by the Maori Councils and Village Committees, we should,