

Medical Notes in Parliament

[FROM OUR PARLIAMENTARY CORRESPONDENT]

The House of Commons went into Committee this week on the Finance Bill and also carried a resolution authorizing taxation of reserves of co-operative and certain other mutual societies. Foreign affairs were also down for discussion.

The Metropolitan Police Bill was read a second time. This Bill, among other objects, deals with the age of compulsory retirement and membership of the Police Federation. Constables may be appointed for a fixed period of service, and will be insured under the national health insurance scheme and under the Widows, Orphans, and Old Age Contributory Pensions Act.

In the House of Lords on May 18th the Cancer Hospital (Free) Bill was, on the motion of the Earl of Onslow, Chairman of Committees, read a second time. There was no discussion on the Bill.

The Royal Assent was given to the Protection of Animals Bill on May 18th. This Act authorizes magistrates to forbid the holding of dog licences by persons convicted of cruelty to dogs.

The Gas Light and Coke Company Bill was read a third time by the House of Commons on May 18th. After a debate, to which Dr. O'DONOVAN contributed, Dr. BURGIN, on behalf of the Board of Trade, said it was time the House said clearly that local authorities should not be allowed powers arbitrarily to cut off pipes and prevent their tenants having the alternative use of gas.

The Road Accidents Parliamentary Group met on May 23rd to consider the Road and Rail Bill. Sir E. GRAHAM-LITTLE presided. The meeting welcomed the proposals for the maintenance of vehicles in a serviceable condition and for the stricter supervision of hours of labour of drivers and the loading of vehicles. It was agreed that amendments and conditions should be moved in committee to strengthen the public safety provisions of the Bill.

Industrial Pulmonary Disease

On May 16th Mr. E. BROWN, replying to Sir W. Jenkins, said that research into industrial pulmonary diseases was directed by a Committee under the Medical Research Council, and an account of the work was included in the annual reports of the Council. No fresh findings or mining diseases had as yet been reported by the Committee, but in the meantime increased attention was given by inspectors of mines to secure the effective use of dust preventive measures. Practical work for the improvement of such methods was the constant duty of a special inspector attached to the Mines Department. Mr. D. GRENFELL asked whether the Committee had recommended the use of appliances to prevent the inhalation of stone dust. Mr. BROWN said that the latest report (Command Paper 4248) showed that there were difficulties.

On May 16th Sir J. GILMOUR also informed Sir W. Jenkins that he could not state the number of persons in South Wales mines suffering from silicosis and anthracosis who had made claims for compensation, nor how many had succeeded. Anthracosis was not a disease for which compensation was provided under the Workmen's Compensation Act. He was advised that it had not yet been established that the condition of the lungs described as anthracosis gave rise to any disabling condition. The Miners' Federation had made representations to him regarding certain cases in which miners suffering from silicosis had not obtained compensation. Mr. GRENFELL asked whether the Home Secretary had a record of anthracosis cases as well as silicosis cases. Sir JOHN GILMOUR said he was advised that anthracosis did not come under the terms that they were discussing. Mr. GRENFELL asked if applicants or the dependants of persons who had died or had been disabled were handicapped because of the failure of the medical profession and the medical officers of

the Home Office to make a correct diagnosis between those two kinds of cases. Sir J. GILMOUR said that all those matters were being taken into consideration.

Superannuation of Medical Officers of Health.—The Parliamentary Medical Committee met on May 18th, Sir Francis Fremantle presiding. The committee received a deputation representing the National Association of Local Government Officers, the Mental Hospitals Association, the British Medical Association, and the Society of Medical Officers of Health concerning the effect on superannuation of the temporary abatements of salaries. It was agreed that the constituent bodies represented on the deputation should approach the associations of local government bodies to discuss possible agreement and joint action with a view to approaching the Government to secure reconsideration of present anomalies. A further object would be to suggest amendments in the Local Government Officers and Others Superannuation Bill which the Ministry of Health has under consideration.

Unemployment Benefit following Sickness.—Sir HILTON YOUNG told Mr. Buchanan on May 18th that he had now made arrangements whereby an unemployed insured person who was summoned for examination by a regional medical officer would be advised to see his own doctor on the morning following his examination. The doctor would then have received the report of the regional medical officer. If that officer was of opinion that the insured person was fit for work, and the doctor agreed, he would so inform the insured person, with the result that he would be able to attend at the Employment Exchange the same morning and claim unemployment benefit. As sickness benefit would be payable up to and including the date of examination by the regional medical officer there need no longer be any gap during which no benefit was payable provided that the claimant satisfied the usual conditions.

Physical Fitness for Driving Licence.—In reply to Sir N. Gratton-Doyle on May 17th Mr. STANLEY said he did not think it was necessary to amend the Road Traffic Act, 1930, so that when a person charged with driving a vehicle while under the influence of drink was found not guilty of this offence on grounds of suffering from a physical defect—which might make him incapable of having proper control of a motor vehicle and a danger to other users of the highway—the court could order such person to be disqualified from holding or obtaining a licence for a suitable period. Sub-section (4) of Section 5 empowered the licensing authority to revoke the licence in such a case if its attention was drawn to it either by the magistrates, the police, or anyone else. Answering Mr. Lovat Fraser on May 17th, Mr. Stanley referred to an estimate that 250,000 drivers of motor vehicles in England and Wales were incapable of knowing green lights from red. He said this was very exaggerated. The Departmental Committee on Traffic Signs heard evidence on this subject, and he would consider the matter in the light of a report which he hoped to receive shortly.

Inquests in Camera.—Replying to Mr. Cocks on May 18th, Sir HILTON YOUNG stated that he was unaware of any tendency among coroners, especially in cases of suicide, to hold inquests *in camera*. He had no authority to offer coroners advice on this matter, which was one for their own discretion, having regard to the circumstances of the particular case. He thought it undesirable that suicides should be announced in the Press in the sensational manner in which they were sometimes reported.

Deaths from Small-pox and Vaccinia.—Sir G. COLLINS told Mr. Groves on May 17th that the number of deaths from small-pox registered in Scotland during the period 1922 to 1932 inclusive was two, and from vaccinia and cow-pox during the same period thirteen.

Alleged Deaths from Inoculation in Italy.—On May 16th Mr. GROVES asked the Minister of Health if he had received information regarding the deaths of ten children and the serious injury to a number of others from inoculation against diphtheria in the provinces of Venezia and Rovigo in Italy. Sir HILTON YOUNG replied that so far he had no information beyond what had appeared in the public press, but steps were being taken to obtain an official report. He would consider publication when the information was available.