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MEDICAL RESEARCH
COUNCIL

CHRONIC PULMONARY DISEASE IN
SOUTH WALES COALMINERS

I.—MEDICAL STUDIES.

A.—REPORT BY THE COMMITTEE ON INDUS-
TRIAL PULMONARY DISEASE.

B.—MEDICAL SURVEY, by P. D'Arcy Hart and E. A.
Aslett, with contributions by D. Hicks and R. Yates.

C.—PATHOLOGICAL REPORT, by T. H. Belt with
assistance from A. A. Ferris.



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PREFACE

In 1936 the Medical Research Council were asked by the Home Office and the Mines Department to investigate the problem of chronic pulmonary disease among coalminers, with particular reference to conditions in the South Wales coalfield. The Council undertook to do this, and referred the matter to the Committee on Industrial Pulmonary Disease which they had appointed some years earlier to advise and assist them in all research work under that general heading. The Committee drew up a programme, and after this had been modified in some respects in subsequent discussion it was accepted by the Council, who agreed to provide the necessary personnel and expenses. Various preliminary inquiries and arrangements had then to be made, and the actual field investigations began in December, 1937. In planning and carrying out the work much valuable help was given by the Mines Department and its officers; a contribution to the cost was also made from the Miners' Welfare Fund.

It was obvious that no advance could be made in the understanding of so difficult and complicated a problem, on which much work had already been done, except by a comprehensive study from all angles; and as this could be made only step by step it would necessarily last for a considerable period. The work was accordingly still in progress on the outbreak of war in 1939, but the Council decided to make every effort to carry it through to the stage of completing the original programme. This took longer than had been expected, partly because research of this kind naturally raises new issues as it proceeds, and partly because of delays directly or indirectly due to war conditions. The main field investigations were, however, completed early in 1941. Thereafter some further time was required in which to collate and assess the large amount of evidence obtained.

The problem was two-fold. Firstly, there was the question as to the nature of the pulmonary diseases and their occupational and geographical distribution in the South Wales coalfield; this involved elucidation of the form of disabling chronic pulmonary disease which was believed to exist amongst these miners but which, not coming within the accepted definition of silicosis, did not qualify for compensation. Secondly, there was the question as to the environmental conditions concerned in the causation of the disease, and as to whether improved preventive measures might be made possible by better knowledge of these conditions. Thus the first part of the problem was largely medical, while the second part called for a study of various factors in the occupational environment.

For the medical work, the Council appointed Dr. P. D'Arcy Hart to their scientific staff and also obtained a loan of the services of Dr. E. A. Aslett from the Welsh National Memorial Association. An account of the findings of these investigators and their collaborators, together with the results of pathological work by Dr. T. H. Belt, assisted by Dr. A. A. Ferris, forms the bulk of the present volume. On the basis of the evidence thus presented, the Committee on Industrial Pulmonary Disease have prepared a covering report giving their conclusions and recommendations.

It is intended to issue a second volume, reporting on the environmental investigations, within a few months. It is also hoped later to institute further investigations, of a limited but intensive kind, into certain specific questions which have been indicated as a result of the work already done.

The Council gratefully acknowledge the co-operation which they have received during the investigation from the Mines Department, from the colliery owners, from the trade union representatives and from the coalminers concerned. They also wish to express their appreciation of the services of the Committee and of all those who took part in the scientific work, a list of whom is given on a later page.

MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL,
c/o London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine,
Keppel Street, London, W.C.1.

28th February, 1942.

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