

(ii) Provision of Medical Advice

36. Whereas the pensions doctors have always been readily available to conduct examinations of ex-servicemen in respect of treatment, responsibility for which is recognized by the payment of pension, it has become necessary in the view of the Board to provide a general medical advisory service to recuperating ex-servicemen regardless of whether pensions or treatment specified by the War Pensions Board is involved. In certain centres the Department has been able to enlist the honorary assistance of specialists, notably psychiatrists, but the general shortage of doctors, and hence the difficulty of procuring needed advice through the usual civilian channels, has suggested the desirability of a special medical advisory service. The Board accordingly has under action in connection with its proposed intermediate schemes, as well as the general question, negotiations for the appointment of a rehabilitation medical adviser in each of the main rehabilitation centres.

SECTION VI.—PENSIONS AND REHABILITATION ALLOWANCES

(i) Pensions

37. As intimated in the first report of the Board, the administration of the War Pensions Act and its amendments is a function of the War Pensions Branch of the Social Security Department.

38. The Board considers that as far as pension provisions and their administration affect the rehabilitation of the men who are its concern there is cause for satisfaction. The Rehabilitation Department has an arrangement with the War Pensions Branch in accordance with which Rehabilitation Officers refer to the appropriate Registrar of War Pensions any cases where difficulty in connection with pension applications, awards, payments, reinstatements, and appeals come under their notice. The result has been an adequate safeguarding of the pensions aspect.

(ii) Rehabilitation Allowances

39. As agent to the Board (in this field only) the War Pensions Branch has with one important qualification continued to administer the rehabilitation allowance procedure as defined by the Board. The qualification in question relates to cases where there is doubt in the mind of either the Rehabilitation Officer or the Registrar for War Pensions whether an allowance should be granted or terminated. In such cases the decision of the local Rehabilitation Committee or the Rehabilitation Board now prevails.

40. Table VIII of Appendix II gives particulars of rehabilitation allowances disbursed during the year under review and to date.

SECTION VII.—PROVISION FOR THE DISABLED

(i) Administration

41. The last twelve months have not seen any important changes in the administrative machinery established to provide for this aspect of rehabilitation. The Disabled Servicemen's Re-establishment League remains the agent of the Board in performing the bulk of the field-work undertaken on behalf of the disabled.

42. The Disabled Servicemen's League, although an agent of the Board in respect of disabled men from the present war, is an incorporated society which came into existence some years ago to provide for the needs of disabled veterans of the Great War. The League's constitution also empowers it to undertake the training and employment of disabled civilians, although this aspect is not reckoned a primary responsibility. For these reasons the League each year reports separately on its activities, including some that are not the concern of the Board.

43. This section of the report, since it deals with all phases of the disabled ex-serviceman problem, covers the activities of the League to the extent that they are undertaken by the League as an agent of the Board. It also deals with the work of the Rehabilitation and other Departments in this field, and hence the subject is treated as a whole, with appropriate references to the League and any other organizations or Departments concerned.

44. It was stated in the last annual report that all ex-servicemen who by reason of disability presented a readjustment or placement problem were regarded as "disability cases," and were assisted in special ways, not necessary in the normal run of ex-servicemen's cases, to re-establish themselves permanently and happily. This practice has been continued during the year under review, although the former practice of "labelling" or recording disability cases, as such, has been discontinued. Under this procedure all labelled cases were followed up and the stages in their rehabilitation were recorded until it could be reported that the men in question were satisfactorily established. This procedure was followed with reasonable success when the number of cases affected was relatively small, but with the growing numbers and the increasing difficulty of deciding whether or not cases should be "labelled" as disability ones it has been abandoned in favour of recording only those cases assisted in one or more specific ways. This, combined with the general after-care contact procedure, ensures that all disabled men will be assisted for as long as they need to be, while the record of cases assisted in specific ways measures fairly completely the extent of the disabled problem and the degree of success obtained in the attempt at its solution.

(ii) The Problem analysed

45. Every disabled man, whether seriously or only slightly disabled, is faced in greater or less degree with readjustment and or employment difficulties. These difficulties for the most part spring from his disability or disabilities, and in all cases the problem is to find the means of overcoming them and thereby ensuring his permanent happy economic and social re-establishment. This re-establishment must be permanent if the man is not to be harassed by fear of becoming economically, and therefore socially, redundant; and it must certainly be happy unless the man is to suffer the frustration begotten of the belief that he has as a charitable gesture been placed in some more or less uninteresting and trivial employment.