

approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 second—a time which has proved satisfactory in most types of apparatus used for tomography. At 100 mA. the kVp. is about 10 volts more than for the ordinary X-ray exposure at the same distance. The merit of this machine lies in its originality of design rather than its low cost, for it is difficult to believe that such an apparatus could be manufactured commercially for Rs. 50. The tomograms published show clearly that reasonably good sections of the chest can be taken with the apparatus. That tomography has spread to India is perhaps the greatest achievement of all.

SHORT STEPS TO A LIFE TABLE

THE number of those who will survive to a given age, the probability of a person dying between one age and another, and the average length of life in a community are all clear and useful modes of expression of mortality-rates. They enable the public-health worker to make striking comparisons between the mortality experiences of different epochs and different places. Any quick but accurate method of constructing those features of a life table is therefore welcome. One such method was put forward by E. C. Snow in 1920¹ and has been shown to give satisfactory results with more recent death-rates.² Another means is developed and illustrated in a recent paper by Lowell J. Reed and Margaret Merrell.³ Using American mortality figures they have constructed equations by which the required probabilities of dying—the basic element of the life table—can be calculated directly from the known mortality-rates for different age-groups. But to ease still further the path of the medical officer they have constructed simple tables which enable him to dispense altogether with forbidding-looking equations. Knowing his death-rate at, say, the ages 20–24, he can read off the probability of survivors at age 20 dying before age 25. A second table enables him to deal similarly with death-rates for ten-yearly intervals of life, and others with the rates prevailing in infancy and the early years of childhood. The authors wisely give a completely worked example, based upon the mortality of white males in Connecticut in 1929–31, which those whose arithmetical equipment is stronger than their algebraical should have no difficulty in following. Comparison of the results given by this short method with those derived by the complete but long process gives an excellent agreement. A similar comparison based upon English mortality-rates would be of interest and an instructive task for those who are moved to adopt this method for the construction of life tables for the area in which they work.

HOUSING POLICY

No single social problem has occupied the public mind so extensively and so continuously during the last twenty years as housing has done. After the end of the last great war public opinion became aware that the conditions under which the working classes were, in the main, compelled to live were intolerably bad. By degrees this state of affairs came to be recognised not only as a danger to health and to security but also as a matter affecting the public conscience. It is a rather pitiful coincidence that the publication of a conspectus⁴ of the housing effort of eight European countries, the United States of America and Canada should synchronise with the

outbreak of a new European war. This study, the largest individual section of which is devoted to the United Kingdom, is admirably compiled by Mr. M. B. Helger, of the Swedish Social Board. Although highly condensed the matter is clear and such statistics as are given are set out in a readable way. In an introductory chapter Mr. Helger deals with the development of the housing problem, the shortage of housing, questions connected with standards of housing and housing finance; the sections which follow deal with each country individually. All the familiar factors and difficulties are discussed and there is much useful information on slum clearance, overcrowding, house-building private and municipal, rates of interest, cost of construction and rent restriction. In the chapter on the United Kingdom the sequence of acts of Parliament is brought under review and the varying provisions of each in relation to subsidy, powers of local authorities, compensation, compulsory purchase and clearance are described in a way which is of value for reference. Comparison of individual countries shows many factors of the problem to be common to all—e.g., the number of households increasing more rapidly than the populations, the failure of policy based on hopes of “filtering up,” reluctance of families to leave slum conditions even when better accommodation is available within their means, and the fundamental difficulty of providing housing of a proper standard at a rent adapted to the income of the average workman. Rural housing has a section to itself in each chapter. It emerges clearly that cheap money is one of the conditions essential to a successful working-class housing policy; even in times of cheap money both public ownership and some degree of subsidisation will continue to be necessary unless some way can be devised to secure that the houses can be usefully placed where site value is reasonably low.

WATCH YOUR PRESCRIBING

AFTER three months of war it is not surprising that some of the commonly prescribed drugs have become scarce. Among these are ergot of rye and belladonna root, and it is difficult to see how the shortage of these can be relieved. Poland is no longer an available source of ergot, Russia is conserving her production for her own use, and Spain seems to have no stocks for export. The only other producing country of any importance is Portugal and there this year's crop was a failure and little remains over from the previous seasons. The consequence is that the price of ergot in the London market is four times the already high figure quoted at the outbreak of war and about eight times what was regarded as normal in quite recent years. Belladonna root has almost disappeared from the drug market for the time being; the chief source of supply was those parts of Central Europe which are under German influence. Stocks of most vegetable drugs are low and the cost of some of them is extremely high, but in few cases has the stage been reached at which it is desirable to prescribe substitutes. Among synthetic products phenazone, barbitone and phenobarbitone should be used as sparingly as possible, since supplies are quite inadequate to satisfy the pre-war demand.

Sir JAMES WALTON will deliver the Bradshaw lecture to the Royal College of Surgeons of England on Thursday, Dec. 14, at 3.30 P.M. He will speak on the surgery of the common bile-duct.

We deeply regret to record the death on Nov. 25 of Mr. WILFRED TROTTER, F.R.S., surgeon and philosopher.

1. The Registrar-General's Decennial Supplement, England and Wales, 1931. Part I.

2. *Lancet*, 1939, 1, 225.

3. Reed, L. J., and Merrell, M., *Amer. J. Hyg.* Sept. 1939, p. 33.

4. Urban and Rural Housing. Economic Intelligence Service, League of Nations. London: Allen and Unwin. Pp. 159. 3s. 6d.