

Unfortunately we have no very definite legislation to enable us to check this condition. In the Public Health Act it is true we have included under the list of nuisances a dwelling or part of a dwelling so overcrowded as to be injurious to the health of the inmates; but this leaves the onus on the District Health Officer of proving that in each individual case the condition was injurious to health—not always an easy matter when there are perhaps half a dozen other possible causes of ill health to be found which may be equally responsible. What is required is a definite pronouncement by the Department as to what shall be regarded as the minimum amount of air-space per occupant for bedrooms and living-rooms; and in so doing due care must be taken to avoid causing the wholesale eviction in a place like Wellington of the many hundreds of dwellers in rooms which only border on the distinctly insanitary. In a report dated the 4th October, prepared in response to a circular from Dr. Valintine on this subject, I suggested 420 cubic feet as the minimum for adults; but it is evident that due consideration should also be given to securing adequate floor-space, as the necessary cubic space might be obtained chiefly in a vertical direction, thus permitting serious overcrowding in a very high room. My proposal was to take advantage of clause 101 of the Public Health Act, and gazette a regulation as follows:—

“In pursuance of section seventy-two, subsection four, it is hereby enacted that any house or part of a house shall be deemed to be overcrowded so as to be injurious to the health of the inmates where any room used as a sleeping-room shall have a mean height less than seven feet from floor to ceiling, or where in any such room there shall be floor-space of a less area than sixty square feet for each and every bed situated in that room.”

This would apply to houses in existence; but to prevent having in the future to permit so low a minimum as this, a further regulation might be passed which would apply to buildings “hereafter erected,” by which a minimum mean height of 8 ft. from floor to ceiling might be fixed for any room intended for use as a sleeping-room, together with 60 ft. of floor-space for occupied beds, and 550 cubic feet for every occupant. It does not avail the health of the factory-worker much if, while we carefully prescribe a minimum of air-space for him while at work, we permit him to spend one-third of the twenty-four hours under conditions to which the traditional barrel of herrings forms the only suitable comparison.

INSPECTION OF FOOD.

Under this heading there is as usual but little to report—an occasional seizure of unsound food when it happened to come under the notice of the officers of this Department, with perhaps a prosecution or two as a result; a few instances of co-operation with the Inspector of Factories in obtaining some improvement in the sanitation of places where food is prepared or sold; and the formal reference to the Stock Department of certain dairies more than usually filthy in their surroundings: this represents the efforts of the Department towards securing sound food.

There is no possibility yet of systematic inspection either of the foodstuffs themselves or of the conditions under which they are carried, prepared, and sold. The division of this work between the Labour, the Stock, and the Health Departments, and the vague position occupied by the local authority, are against any satisfactory control. The various officers concerned should be under one head. The condition of the milk-supply continues to form a lamentable example of how good broth may be spoiled when there are too many cooks. It has already been dealt with in previous reports.

Some little attention has been given this year to the carriage of fish, meat, and milk on the railways, and the observations made show how great is the need for special vans being set apart for this purpose. Milk cannot be expected to arrive in a first-class condition after being carried for many miles in a hot van, with perhaps a few semi-decomposed sheep-skins hung over the cans; nor can fish be regarded as appetising when one knows it has travelled for half a day in a dirty sack lying on the floor of a van amongst, let us say, sacks of blood and bone manure, and trampled on by a heavy but energetic porter. The difficulty of the railway authorities is that in most cases these commodities are sent in lots too small to warrant having a whole van to themselves. It would seem necessary that special trains should be fixed and special days set aside for the shipment of such things as fish and meat. For milk, of course, a daily train must be provided.

Legal opinion was obtained as to our powers to compel consignors to pack their goods in a satisfactory manner. The reply unfortunately showed that our position was very weak in this respect.

The following represents the work done during the year:—

Food condemned: Shipment of bananas, 20 tons; potatoes, 17 sacks; hams, 66; eggs, 4 cases; fish, 2 cases, a few small amounts of vegetables and fruit in retail shops.

At the instance of the Department one dairy was closed, and the herd removed from another where typhoid infection was suspected.

In connection with the supervision of foods, the sanitary condition of 2,042 food-shops—such as butcher's, bakers, &c.—has been inspected, and in 589 cases improvements have been requisitioned.

Prosecutions under the Public Health Act, Wellington District, during the Year ending the 31st March, 1906.

No. 1. 7th February, 1906. Carrying on offensive trades without D.H.O.'s permit. Fined 5s., and costs 9s.

No. 2. 7th February, 1906. Carrying on offensive trades without D.H.O.'s permit. Fined 5s., and costs 9s.

No. 3. 13th March, 1906. Exposing unsound fruit for sale. Fined 20s., and costs 86s. 6d.

No. 4. 13th March, 1906. Exposing unsound fruit for sale. Fined 20s., and costs 86s. 6d.