

In connection with this matter one officer states: "Out of sixty candidates ten had, at one time or another, what might be called one of the more serious diseases—*i.e.*, appendicitis, typhoid, dysentery, pleurisy, septic glands, joint trouble, gastric ulcer, and pneumonia. The picture of universal dental decay—in some cases most extensive—is only what might be expected from the state of the teeth of the children in the primary schools. It is to be regretted that few of the candidates seemed to have any realization of the cause or need for prevention of this condition." This officer's findings may in some respects be exceptional, but it can certainly be said that in many of the cases the candidates' teeth have received satisfactory attention in the way of dental treatment. It should be mentioned, however, that many admitted only having recently obtained treatment in view of their candidature. It is indeed a matter for surprise that any candidate should think of coming up for examination with untreated dental caries.

The prevalence and extent of decay of the teeth in these candidates deserves further comment in view of the undoubted bearing which it has upon the health of the community in general; if such important organs as the teeth are deteriorating it cannot be otherwise but that, in some respects at any rate, the general health is deteriorating also. For instance, of seventy candidates examined in one centre and sixty in another not one had a complete naturally sound set of teeth. Estimating the total number of teeth which had been filled, extracted, or were actually carious, it was found that on an average there were eleven teeth in each mouth which showed evidence of past or present decay—that is 38 per cent.—well over one-third of the teeth in each mouth. This figure is necessarily an underestimation, as the examination is a rough one without the aid of a dental probe and mirror. The young men and women to whom these figures relate can, I think, be taken as at any rate not below the average standard of the masses of young people in the Dominion of the same age; they may, indeed, be above the average. Previous records of the extent of dental decay in primary-school children of all ages have shown that, omitting decay of the first set, there were on an average three decayed teeth of the second set in each mouth. By the age of eighteen years—the average age of the above candidates—this number had increased to eleven. The rapidly progressive nature of dental disease is thus graphically illustrated.

It should be added that this figure of eleven decayed teeth in each mouth at the age of eighteen years does not represent the whole of the decay which these individuals have suffered from since birth. Each child makes a fresh start from the dental point of view during the school-going period owing to the replacement of the first by the second set of teeth. In the majority extensive decay has taken place in the first set also.

An extremely important conclusion to be drawn from these facts is this: that if the same habits of living which have given rise in the case of these teachers to fairly extensive decay of nearly 40 per cent. of their teeth are to continue in the younger generations, there is no reasonable hope of ever being able to cope with the dental problem in this country. We are not keeping pace with it at present, and there is ample evidence that the prevalence of dental disease is increasing. Is it likely that this extensive disease of the teeth and the conditions causing it have not a serious influence upon the general health, and especially upon the future health, of the people? Can there be any more definite "writing on the wall" warning us to look to our diet and general habits of life?

E. H. WILKINS,
Director, Division of School Hygiene.

PART VII.—DENTAL HYGIENE.

In connection with the work of my division I beg to submit a report for the year ending 31st March, 1922.

SECTION I.—STAFF, ACCOMMODATION, AND EQUIPMENT.

STAFF.

There are eight officers, allocated as follows: Mr. Dunn, supervising the training of the dental nurses; Mr. Peacock, assisting the Supervisor, and also doing the school-clinic work for Wellington District, assisted by the nurse trainees; two officers in the Auckland District; one officer at Nelson; one officer at Christchurch; one officer at Timaru; one officer at Dunedin.

I am pleased to be able to report favourably on the staff as a whole. I would particularly emphasize the valuable service rendered by Mr. Dunn and his assistant (Mr. Peacock) in the training of the dental nurses.

The following is a summary of the operations performed and treatment carried out from the 31st March, 1921, to the 31st March, 1922: Fillings, 13,047; extractions, 14,939; other operations, 8,623: total, 36,609.

Besides the above, many children have been examined and teeth charted, duplicate charts being sent to parents, resulting in the treatment of many cases by private practitioners or at hospitals.

ACCOMMODATION.

Besides our present accommodation at the different clinics we have everything ready to start a clinic at Wanganui, and have been promised a room at Napier by the Education Board.