

balance in food values and giving rise to indigestion and other evils. The prevention of dental disease depends largely upon popular education, firstly with regard to diet, and secondly with regard to value of conservative dentistry in the early stages of decay.

Nutrition.—Much that has been said in previous years is again applicable. As correct nurture is the basis of sound public health, the rearing of a vigorous population necessarily depends upon a widespread knowledge of the laws of hygiene. There is no doubt that in freedom from defect and in physique New Zealand children compare favourably with those in other countries. Nevertheless, nutrition is unsatisfactory in 9 per cent.; faulty posture occurs in 18 per cent. of the children entering school for the first time. These conditions are interrelated, and arise from a lack of observation of the simple rules of health. Hence for the most part they are preventable. There is probably no country in the world to-day where the fundamentals of healthy growth, fresh air, sunlight, food of the right type and amount, adequate sleep and rest, wholesome exercise, are more readily available than in New Zealand, but it is certain that these benefits should be more fully utilized. School Medical Officers report that tea, white bread, and meat play the chief part in the dietary of many homes. In New Zealand eggs, milk, cheese, butter, and fresh fruit and vegetables should be available in such abundance and at low enough prices to take the place of excessive use of meat in many households.

It is popularly assumed that country children have of necessity advantages over town children. It is true that in a well-to-do farming district good nutrition and physical development are the rule, but the struggle of life in the backblocks often tells hardly upon the children. Houses are cramped and inconvenient; food wrongly balanced, monotonous, and hastily prepared; rest is inadequate, and work often excessive. The following is an extract from a School Medical Officer's report:—

"With regard to the country schools, the children are for the most part very satisfactory, but in a few of the more isolated little schools, where the pupils are mostly children of farm labourers, they are poor physically and slow mentally for want of social stimulation. Take X, for instance: Out of twenty-six pupils, thirteen have never been on a train, though all but four have seen a train at least once. They were on the eve of a school excursion, and the part that most of the children were looking forward to most eagerly was not the day on the beach, but the ride in the train. It is very difficult to realize how much of ordinary social stimulus is wanting in the mental and physical development of children so situated, and I am sure that this lack of psychological stimulus often reacts physically, so that the children are either under-developed physically or mentally stolid and heavy."

Another School Medical Officer writes:—

"Child Labour: As usual, many cases were met with where the brightness which we feel ought to be associated with a school-child's life was overshadowed by overwork in the home. Selling of newspapers at night, and more frequently undue attendance in the milk-shed, were chiefly met with. I quote a letter by a girl's parent, not as a typical case, but as an instance of what does from time to time occur: 'Mary has not done her home-work last night. It is impossible for her to do home-work at night. She is up at 4 o'clock in the morning, and does not go to bed until after 9 at night. She puts seven hours in the cow-shed, besides going to school. Please do not keep her in after school-hours—she has to go straight into the cow-shed when she comes home.'"

As an example of overwork in a city child, take the case of a newsboy, eleven years old. This boy begins work after school, selling papers; between 6 and 7 he leaves off for his tea, and continues for a varying time each night. On Saturday night he finishes work at 10 p.m., and on Friday nights it is 11 p.m. This boy is anæmic, and suffers from nervous twitching of the face and tendency to stutter. It is interesting to note that he makes the sum of £2 10s. weekly.

Many similar instances might be quoted from reports of School Medical Officers. In many cases poverty is the cause, but in some instances parents allow excessive labour without realization of the penalty thus imposed on their children.

The moral tone of our schools is, on the whole, excellent, but in the few cases where this is not so it is necessary to consider comprehensively the lives of the people. One school Medical Officer, called in to deal with instances of immorality in a country school, describes graphically the utter dullness of the children's lives. They came to school by long mud roads through the bush, and returned to poor homes at night. Mental interest there was none. There did not seem to be a dozen books in the place; monotony was the rule, and the small happenings in the immediate neighbourhood the sole topic of conversation. The real need was for some healthy intellectual stimulation and a wider outlook. Childish minds need wholesome interests, as their bodies require sunlight and fresh air. A good school library is an essential in isolated schools, so that youthful interest may be directed into wholesome channels. Where the population makes their establishment practicable, organizations such as the Girl Guides and the Boy Scouts do valuable work in promoting a spirit of comradeship and in inculcating wholesome ideals of service and of conduct.

SECTION 3.—PREVENTIVE MEASURES.

Health Camps.—We have seen that the secret of healthy growth is good nurture, and the object of all health education is to teach the fullest utilization of natural resources. A simple routine permitting of plentiful sunlight and fresh air, suitable food, exercise, work, and adequate rest, works like a charm in converting under-nourished, listless, irritable children into robust, happy, and alert individuals. Herein lies the reason why nutrition classes and health camps succeed. Not only children from poor homes respond to the simple plenty and natural life found in health camps, but also the spoiled children of the well-to-do, whose daily dietary and programme expresses largely their own whims. The overstimulated, underrested, talented child of adoring parents loses his idiosyncrasies as to articles of food in a surprisingly short time. Children are like their elders in that they conform readily to fashion. When whims cease to provoke interest or concern they are soon discarded.