

Though children who do work before and after school-hours do not compare unfavourably in development with others, their nervous system would not appear to be in as good a state, for retardation in school-work is more pronounced, and a common remark of teachers is that such children show signs of fatigue in school—indeed, in some cases actually fall asleep.

A series of letters which appeared in the correspondence column of an Auckland newspaper sheds some light on the lives of some children on farms. Thus a mother on the farm, writing in reference to the Summer Time Bill, says, "Children on dairy farms often only get a quickly gulped cup of tea and some bread in their hands as they bolt off to school. More fortunately situated children have their home-work done before these have finished milking, and are evidently at the pictures before the farmer's children sit down to their late tea." Another correspondent wrote as follows: "If the boy was helping he had to rise before 5 o'clock and work till school-time. Milking at night was started at about 4 o'clock, and was not completed until 7 o'clock." This gives the average boy five or six hours' work on the farm, in addition to which he has to ride or walk to school any distance up to five miles. He does this on a breakfast which, according to the farmer's wife, may be a hastily gulped cup of tea and some bread. He has his main meal after 7 p.m., often much later.

Diet.—On the whole, the constituents of a sound diet were present in the daily rations of all the groups.

Butter: The daily consumption of butter in quantity was universal, except in some backblock families. New Zealand children as a rule consume great quantities of butter.

Meat: Less than 5 per cent. never partook of butchers' meat.

Bread: Brown or whole-meal bread entered into the daily diet of nearly 50 per cent.

Porridge: Over 45 per cent. had porridge daily. Prepared meal was used rather more frequently than pure oatmeal.

Green vegetables: It was in regard to the use of green vegetables and of milk that the most apparent deficiency in diet was evident. Only about 35 per cent. had green vegetables daily; in many cases this would mean only when in season. In group B (bush-mill workers), only 20 per cent. had them daily. From what has been said of the townships' situation and climate, &c., it will be easily seen that the only way to obtain a constant supply would be by purchase, which in most cases would be too expensive. In most districts, however, the cultivation of green vegetables could be greatly increased, to the benefit of the households. Twenty-one per cent. of all the groups had no vegetable-garden at all.

Fruit: Fresh or bottled was in common use in the first three groups: about 50 per cent. would have it daily. Children of the last two groups saw it less often, especially share milkers (40 per cent.).

Tinned food: Fruit, fish, &c., was much less used than one expected. The bush timber-mill group (46 per cent.) were the largest users of this as an article of routine diet. Ninety-five per cent. of coal-mining group never had used it, or only on a special occasion, as at Christmas.

Sweets or lollies: Ten per cent. never had them at all. Less than 5 per cent. acknowledged to having them more than once a week.

Beverages: After water, cocoa was the favourite daily drink, tea coming a good second, and coffee hardly visible except among bush workers. Twenty-one per cent. never drank tea; 17 per cent. drank tea oftener than once a day.

Milk: Fresh milk was obtainable as a rule. Condensed milk was used occasionally in coal-mining and timber-mill groups. The amount of milk consumed daily was roughly estimated thus: If a child drank milk as a beverage as well as having it with puddings and porridge, it was credited with 1 pint per day. Thirty-two per cent. had 1 pint daily; 48 per cent. had less than 1 pint; very few indeed had more than 1 pint; 10 per cent. of share-milkers group never took milk as a beverage. Milk also entered into the diet in milk-puddings. The first three groups had these practically every day; about 50 per cent. only of the last two groups had them less frequently.

Meal-hours in farming-areas: Many of the children rise with the rest of the family at an early hour, swallow a cup of tea and a scone or bread and butter, do their bit in the cow-shed or otherwise, and have a hurried breakfast at 8 to 8.30 a.m. The result of a scanty breakfast is an inroad on their lunch-packet in the middle of the morning. At 12.30 or so follows the rest of the lunch. They are hungry on reaching home after school, and get a snack of bread and tea before again helping in the yard. When all is finished outside, the main meal follows, and promptly after washing up the child goes to bed. This is the meal routine for many a country child. While these conditions hold it is a preaching of perfection to abolish the "play lunch" entirely, or to have much hope that three meals a day can become an established custom.

One has the greatest of sympathy with the farmer, and especially with the farmer's wife, in present conditions. As already pointed out, in many instances the wife takes her turn at outdoor work, and must be very hard pressed to maintain a high domestic standard.

School lunches: There was a marked improvement in the nature of the lunches brought to school by the children. Chunks of cake, and currant-scones, and jam-sandwiches were much less prominent. Instead many children brought bread-and-butter sandwiches in which were a variety of edibles, such as lettuce, tomato, banana, cheese, egg, meat, &c. Apples frequently formed part of the lunch. By far the greater part of all farming groups brought lunch to school.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Much good could be done by systematic supervision of the school lunch. It should be part of the daily school programme that a period of twenty minutes in the middle of the day be devoted to lunch and rest. This supervised lunch has been so often stressed by our service that there is no need to enlarge on it, except to say that it should be made compulsory. By so doing, and by providing hot drinks in cold weather, the tendency to eat at other times would receive a check and good habits