

APPENDIX.

REPORT OF MEDICAL OFFICER OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE.

The Public Service Commissioner.

ALTHOUGH for several years it had been customary to utilize the services of a woman doctor in general practice in connection with the female staff of the Public Service of New Zealand, it was not until 1915 that one was definitely appointed to work exclusively in that direction. This was the second year of the war, and already women were entering the Service in increasing numbers, partly to take the places of men who left for active service, and partly to staff the new and large Departments necessitated by the war. The work began in a small way, and has gradually grown as Heads of Departments and members of the staff both came to realize its value, and the duties have extended until now they cover a fairly wide field.

Candidates for the Public Service are medically examined, special attention being paid to those details, often overlooked, which form the foundation of good general health—as, for instance, the state and care of the teeth, diet, fresh air, exercise, habits of life, &c. Advice is given wherever necessary. As regards the teeth, their great importance is not yet fully realized. In the past no official attention was given to their condition, and the consequence is that many adults in the Service are suffering from ailments which, however apparently remote, are now known to have an intimate connection with the neglected teeth of childhood and adolescence. Chronic indigestion, gastritis, anæmia with its languor and debility, lack of development, nasal troubles, neuralgia, and “nerves”—even rheumatism—these are some of a long list of symptoms giving rise to physical unfitness and consequent loss of efficiency which are now known to owe a great part of their causation to decayed teeth and unhealthy gums. Girls of from fourteen to sixteen years of age, having just left school, are frequently found to have lost the most useful of their permanent teeth, and in some cases to require complete upper and lower dentures. Of a group of twenty-six girls of these ages, only one had a complete set of good teeth, nine had received proper attention, and sixteen were in urgent need of it.

It has not always been easy to make candidates realize the necessity for dental treatment, and at times they, and even their parents, have protested strongly against it on various grounds. That of expense is removed in Wellington by the excellent Dental Department at the General Hospital, which has been freely used. Gradually, however, opposition has been overcome, and it is now rare to find any one who objects to treatment.

It is an unwritten law that candidates for the Public Service shall have their teeth in good order; and in the new medical sheets issued by the Post and Telegraph Department to its medical examiners special attention is drawn to this matter. Needless to say, care of the teeth should be continuous in order to be effective, and for this reason it would be advisable to have systematic medical inspection of the whole staff at regular intervals—say, twice yearly. The need for such inspection is further evidenced by the extraordinary amount of sick-leave granted annually, which, in my opinion, should not be necessary in a medically selected staff working under good conditions, and with frequent holidays and regular annual leave. In this connection it is interesting to note that the special examination of a group of 128 officers working under the best conditions showed that 75 suffered from minor ailments, several having more than one. The list is as follows: Defective teeth, 40; catarrh of throat, 11; digestive disturbances, 10; enlarged tonsils, 7; nasal catarrh, 4; neurasthenia (nerves), 2; goitre (simple), 2; chilblains (severe), 1; rheumatism, 1; elongated uvula causing cough, 1; bronchitis (chronic), 1.

Members of the staff may consult the Medical Officer daily. This opportunity is freely availed of, and advice is given on matters of general health and welfare. This must eventually have a beneficial effect from the point of view of both the individuals and the Departments, for advice in the early stages of ill health may prevent serious illness later on.

The question of accommodation became a vital and difficult one as the numbers of women and girls increased, and at the request of the Public Service Commissioner frequent inspections were made and reports written on various rooms and buildings, with recommendations regarding overcrowding, ventilation, cloak and toilet rooms, rest-rooms, &c. With regard to the accommodation provided for women, a very marked advance has been made in all Government Departments, the arrangements in some of the larger—notably the Post and Telegraph and the Public Trust Office—being models of thoughtful consideration for the comfort and welfare of the staffs. They include restaurants under competent women superintendents, cloak and toilet rooms, and comfortable rest-rooms for the use of those who are indisposed, and for those who remain in the building for lunch. All Departments are not so fully equipped in this respect, but some have been hampered by lack of space—as, for instance, the Base Records and War Expenses, where very large staffs have been employed; but here the best possible under the circumstances has been done by the officials. There are still Departments where more might be done, and from whose staffs are heard expressions of envy of their better-provided-for sisters; but gradually improvements are being everywhere effected. The grounds around Government Buildings might well be utilized for the benefit of the staffs, and seats placed here would afford a welcome relief to the city streets in warm weather. The flat roof of the Government Printing Office was specially provided for recreation purposes, but it is so nearly inaccessible as to be useless. A connecting covered passage between it and the main building, where women are employed, would bring it within easy reach, and with a few seats it would provide a much-needed outdoor resting-place.