

SECTION 9.—MENTAL DEFICIENCY: SEX EDUCATION

MENTAL DEFICIENCY.

The inadequate provision for feeble-minded children continues to be a blot on our social scheme. Year by year the problem increases in urgency and magnitude. I referred to this subject in my last report, and I again quote Dr. Baker's contention that "With a population of a million the problem could, I think, be faced squarely and dealt with, but as the population increases it will get out of hand." The problem is steadily getting out of hand.

SEX EDUCATION.

The report of the Venereal Disease Committee clearly gives expression to the opinion that sound and wholesome training in childhood should be regarded as a fundamental in dealing with those evils of which venereal disease is merely a concomitant. At the request of the Education Department, two articles were prepared during the year for the *Education Gazette* outlining the principles and scope of the subject. Educational authorities are agreed that even without giving any specifically sexual instruction—which is essentially the function of parents—the school can do much to create a more natural and wholesome attitude to sex matters in general. A problem of this kind, however, related as it is to some of the most fundamental problems of human life, is not one which should be entered upon without the most careful planning.

SECTION 10.—MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION.

This is a recent and important addition to the school medical officer's work, and, as a general scheme, was carried out last year for the first time. The results of the examination of these teachers when correlated with the findings of the medical inspection of school-children are of very great value in affording a more extended view of the health of the rising generation.

The conclusions I drew in my last report regarding the extent of dental decay in these candidates have been amply confirmed by a more extensive survey this year. Records were kept of the teeth of 344 candidates between sixteen and twenty-two years of age, and the total number of teeth was estimated at thirty for each individual:—

Total number of teeth, 10,320. Number carious, 431; number filled, 1,944; number extracted, 1,453: total number of teeth which had suffered decay, 3,828—i.e., 37 per cent.

Well over a third of the second set of teeth have therefore decayed before adult age is reached. One only of the 344 candidates presented a complete naturally sound set of teeth. I should emphasize that, as these examinations are made without the aid of dental probe and mirror, fairly obvious decay only is recorded.

Of the 344 candidates 10 per cent. were found to have suffered from major illnesses, including pneumonia, pleurisy, and empyema, typhoid, infantile paralysis, rheumatic fever, sarcoma, appendicitis, &c. Between three and four out of every hundred had suffered from appendicitis. This high incidence of appendicitis considered along with the extensive dental decay already referred to is at least suggestive that a general underlying cause is at work. Dental disease, appendicitis, poor chest-development, anæmia, &c., should, I believe, be regarded not so much as isolated diseases or defects, but as symptoms of damaged health resulting from neglect of the primary essentials of healthy living. One thing is clear: that, apart from mortality, an enormous amount of avoidable wastage of health and efficiency is taking place during the first couple of decades of life. How very far we fall short of the ancient ideal, "*Mens sana in corpore sano.*" It is not by medical treatment that this wastage of health is to be prevented—but by education. Progress in preventive medicine lies largely in the direction of attending to the common things of daily life, the rationale of personal habits. Yet in our educational scheme we have as yet little realized the enormous possibilities in the teaching of the fundamentals of the art of living.

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

PART VI.—DENTAL HYGIENE.

In connection with the work of my division I beg to submit a report for the year ending 31st March, 1923.

SECTION 1.—STAFF, ACCOMMODATION, EQUIPMENT.

STAFF.

There are eight officers, allocated as follows: Mr. Dunn, supervising the training of the dental nurses; Mr. Elliott is carrying out the treatment for patients at King George V. Hospital, Rotorua, Pukeora, and Hanmer Sanatoria; two officers conducting clinics in the Auckland District; one officer at Wanganui; one officer at Nelson; one officer at Dunedin; one officer at Christchurch; and one at Timaru General Hospital.

I regret to have to report the resignation of Mr. Peacock, Assistant Supervisor, who has rendered able assistance in the training of the nurses. Mr. Peacock is taking up general practice, and in this connection I would emphasize the difficulty the Department will have in obtaining and keeping in the service professional men with suitable qualifications for responsible positions unless a salary is given something approaching that which can be earned in private practice.

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