Sale of Food and Drugs Act.

The administration of this Act and its regulations is proceeding smoothly, and a wide range of samples has received attention.

The number of samples taken during the year is shown in the tables. Although, as usual, the greater proportion consists of milk-samples, which are taken regularly, other samples of food and drink examined at the Dominion Laboratory and its branches included apricots, bacon, baking-powder, beer, blanc-mange powder, bread, bread-improvers, cake, cheese, chocolate, coconut, corned meat, coffee, coffee and chicory essence, cream, cream of tartar substitutes, ice-cream, icing sugar, iodized salt, olive-oil, split peas, pepper, potatoes, rennet, teas, tinned fish, tripe, and vinegar. The drugs examined included extract of cascara, talcum powders, camphorated oil, ointments, tinctures, oil of turpentine, aspirin tablets, castor-oil, fruit saline, lime-water, liquid paraffin, lysol, olive-oil, corn cure, and dextrose. They were found, with few exceptions, to be of satisfactory quality.

It is hoped during the forthcoming year to revise and consolidate the regulations, as it is now twelve years since this was done in a comprehensive way, and a number of question require attention.

The value of a fairly complete set of statutory standards for foodstuffs, such as we have, is frequently apparent, and is a point on which certain overseas countries, including Great Britain, suffer by comparison. Medical Officers of Health in England from time to time write of this lack, particularly in the direction of controlling misleading labelling, and also what has been termed "collateral advertisement," which may be in the form of a newspaper advertisement, a handbill, an advertisement on the label of another product of the same manufacturer, or a radio broadcast. The advertisement question was taken up in an amendment of the Sale of Food and Drugs Act, 1924, and a useful provision enacted, but the advent of radio broadcast advertising was not foreseen, and some wider powers to regulate this may be found necessary.

The standards which are followed for drugs are, with few exceptions, as laid down in the British Pharmacopœia and the British Pharmaceutical Codex. Generally speaking, it can be said that there is a very satisfactory observance of these standards by chemists and other traders. Many everyday substances such as camphorated oil, paraffin oil, boracic powder, aspirin, Friar's balsam, iodine, cascara, Epsom salts, cod-liver oil, and the like, are included in the British Pharmacopœia or the British Pharmaceutical Codex. These are what may be termed common property, as are most of the ingredients included in a medical prescription, and accordingly there is a standard as to strength and purity laid down for each. However, it is obviously not practicable to lay down standards for proprietary medicines and secret remedies. Where the medicine is intended for internal use by human beings, and contains a poison, the name and proportion of the poison must be stated on the label, but otherwise a proprietary medicine must be taken on trust, as is the case with the advertising concerning it. There is a Quackery Prevention Act in force, designed to deal with this aspect, but its provisions are inadequate and in any case do not include radio broadcast advertising.

Poisons.

The Poisons Act, 1934, was enacted to regulate the sale, custody, importation, and carriage of poisons. Appropriate regulations to give effect to the licensing provisions of the Act are in force and are working satisfactorily. Draft proposals for general regulations will shortly be submitted, having now been cast in final form after much inquiry and discussion with all interests concerned.

The primary object is to see that poisons and poisonous substances are classified as to potency, and that they are then packed and labelled in such a way that the purchaser will have adequate warning as to their nature.

However, much of this precautionary work can be nullified if the purchaser does not take sufficient care to keep the label intact, and store the poison where no harm is likely to result. To obviate this, it is not practicable to institute a system of inspection which would ensure that the regulations are observed in people's private homes, but a knowledge of the regulations should give guidance to persons who handle poisons, and in cases of accident where investigations have to be made, should the fault be due to carelessness on the part of the owner of a poison, penalties may be enforced. There is no doubt that there is room for much improvement in the practices followed in workshops, factories, and farms, where poisons are taken from the bulk supply and mixed for use or partial use in the first container that comes to hand, such as a beer-bottle or some utensil ordinarily used for holding or preparing food.

The regulations, it is suggested, should apply to all transactions in poisons whether disposed of by sale, gift, loan, or otherwise, as unless this is done there is no subsequent check on responsibility after a poison has been acquired by the first owner obtaining it from a wholesaler or chemist.

The system of classification used follows, as closely as is permissable within the framework of the Act, the principles recently adopted in England; and the methods of labelling provided for will not conflict with the labelling which will be generally followed where poisonous mixtures are made up in England and imported into New Zealand.