

of the mother in matters of feeding, clothing, &c.; better housing-conditions, with baths, proper sanitation, and accessible fresh-air spaces, are among the things urgently needed."

In connection with the subject of the *home conditions* of children a report from one district states: "In New Zealand the necessity of giving relief to the mothers of large families is very great. The children of women who are overworked continuously before and after birth cannot have the vitality necessary for robust growth. Local organizations—as the residential nurseries of the Women's National Reserve, the Mothers' Help Organization, and so on—are of great benefit in cases of urgency, but their activities are necessarily inadequate for the great need."

The *overworking of children out of school-hours*, especially amongst share milkers, not only continues to prove a serious impediment to their school-work, but also is associated with a high degree of physical defect and impaired nutrition. In this connection the following conclusions, arrived at by a head teacher during five years of observation of the same set of children, are of special interest:—

"Standards V and VI (eight girls, two boys): Four milkers—average work poor. One defective sight—work poor. Five non-milkers—work good; neat, clean, and active.

"Standards III and IV (four girls, two boys): Four milkers—work poor, unreliable, untidy, and showing signs of fatigue. Two non-milkers—work quite satisfactory.

"Standards I and II (five girls, two boys): Three milkers—progress small. Four non-milkers—progress normal.

"In nearly every case the mother, in addition to performing house duties, does milking and other hard work outside. Normal children cannot hold their own even if only milking three hours a day. I have proved this during five years of 'starting the season.'"

In a preliminary inquiry into the home conditions and diet in twenty-five cases of city children suffering from *malnutrition* and severe physical defects the following predominating factors were elicited: (1) A large incidence of infectious disease, especially measles and whooping-cough; (2) want of adequate ventilation in the home; (3) crowded and dirty sleeping-conditions; (4) in many cases discordant parental relationship and indifference towards the welfare of their children; (5) in some cases drink is a serious disturbing element; (6) an insufficiency of fresh milk, dairy-products, and eggs, milk often being taken only as condensed milk; (7) meat is often of the small-goods variety or tinned; (8) an insufficiency of fresh vegetables, especially greens; (9) an insufficiency of fruit; (10) in spite of comparative poverty, in many cases a good deal is spent on sweets.

The diet of these children thus consists mainly of white bread, sugar, meat, root vegetables, and preserved food—a combination known to be seriously deficient in several important respects. The superior nourishing-value of wheatmeal bread in place of white bread; the importance of green vegetables and fresh fruit as regular constituents of the diet; the value of a certain amount of fresh milk, of butter, cheese, and eggs; and the harm done by the indiscriminate consumption of sugar, sweets, and confectionery—these are some of the matters which are receiving special emphasis in the propaganda of the Division.

#### SECTION 4.—EDUCATIONAL OR PREVENTIVE WORK.

As a comprehensive scheme medical inspection and the reporting of defects, even were they combined with the most complete provision for treatment, must fall short of the requirement. No real progress can be made towards the better health of children until fundamental causes are dealt with. The value of the prevention of disease as opposed to its treatment is now receiving increasing recognition in all civilized countries. Evidence and proof are steadily accumulating in support of the fact that the common diseases and defects of childhood are not only preventable, but are easily and simply preventable. The cause of dental disease, for instance, is as definitely established as the cause of any disease; it is at the same time the most prevalent of all diseases. Its treatment is troublesome, costly, frequently painful, and in many cases mutilating. The problem of the health of the child resolves itself largely into the problem of dental disease, not merely because dental disease is the most serious disease—it is the most serious, in view of its prevalence—but because by correcting the errors which give rise to it we at the same time correct important causes of other common defects such as adenoids, unhealthy tonsils, rickets, anæmia, poor nutrition, and backwardness. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the problem of the health of the child is primarily a simple problem. It is, however, intimately bound up with domestic, social, industrial, and economic problems in their far-reaching ramifications. To make the work effective public opinion and habit must be influenced, and with this object uniform and concerted action is required.

The most important duty of the school medical officer therefore is *educative propaganda with a view to the prevention of disease*. In connection with the medical inspection of school-children leaflets are issued to parents containing information of both general and particular application. These leaflets were revised early in the year, and their number slightly augmented. Those at present in use are: "Suggestions to Parents" (relating to general matters of diet, clothing, and so on); "Care of the Teeth"; "School Lunch"; "Adenoids and Enlarged Tonsils"; "Defective Vision"; "Common Skin-diseases of Childhood"; and "Care of the Hair."

At the meetings with parents in connection with the medical inspection of their children school medical officers have excellent opportunity for propaganda work. However hopeless may be the task of altering the long-established habits of adults, it can be confidently stated that parents generally are both willing and anxious to receive guidance concerning the upbringing of their children. One medical officer states: "Meetings of parents and School Committees were held in all the more important centres and many of the smaller towns. There is a widespread and encouraging public interest in all matters connected with the welfare of children, and a desire for information and guid-