

SECTION 6.—TEMPERANCE AND SEX EDUCATION.

TEACHING OF TEMPERANCE.

In response to the wish of the Hon. the Minister of Health and Education that the teaching in the schools relating to temperance should be placed on a more definite footing, it was recommended that a pamphlet be prepared in which the present position of scientific opinion concerning the effect of alcohol on the human body and mind should be briefly set forth. Such a pamphlet, after receiving the sanction of the Health Department, has been published as a "Special Report" of the Education Department, and issued to all school-teachers as a basis for their teaching in the schools. Without question, the facts concerning the effects of alcohol must be included in propaganda aiming at the better health of the children of the community. In its influence through heredity, in its influence on the parental care of children, as well as in its effect on the children themselves as they reach adult age, alcohol must be regarded as a factor to be seriously reckoned with.

SEX EDUCATION.

For some years this subject has recurred for discussion at the conferences of educationists in New Zealand, without a course of action being decided upon. In response to the Hon. the Minister's wish the matter was brought before the conference of School Inspectors, Training-college Principals and Vice-principals, and representative teachers held in February, 1921. The discussion, which followed an address by the Director of the Division of School Hygiene in which the salient points were briefly reviewed, showed that there was a large measure of agreement on the main points at issue.

The practical difficulties in setting in operation a general scheme of sex education are well recognized. It is a subject in which the greatest care and discrimination are needed; precipitate action must be guarded against. The choice before us, however, is between parents and trained teachers on the one hand and playmates and other unreliable persons on the other as the instructors of children. Although under ideal conditions this is admittedly the function and privilege of parents, yet the vast majority do not, will not, and cannot undertake it. It must therefore form a part of the public system of education. One step to which there are no objections, and which is essential as a sound basis for future work, is the inclusion of a general survey of the subject in the training-college course for students qualifying for the teaching profession.

As regards the treatment of the subject, it should be emphasized that sex education is only in a minor part a matter of hygiene: it is mainly and primarily a moral matter, a matter of general education in the broadest and truest sense. It is primarily not a technical subject requiring special knowledge, but a general one requiring specially careful treatment. It consists much less of formal instruction than of fostering in young people a wholesome, frank, and dignified attitude to questions of sex. As regards class education, it has been urged that there is special value in this, as we are not here concerned with an individual problem, but with a social one for which a social or collective conscience is required. Difficulties in class teaching can be largely overcome by commencing the instruction sufficiently early, and especially in the hands of a sympathetic and broadly intelligent teacher. Finally, we have here to do essentially with an educational problem of a moral and social nature, and in this the teacher is the one best fitted for the task. The duty of the school in relation to sex education is incontrovertible.

In conclusion I wish to emphasize that it is in childhood—especially in early childhood—that the greater problems of health are to be solved. They are fundamentally problems of nutrition, and their solution lies well within our power. As Sir George Newman has said: "The fundamental requirement to make us masters of our fate is a universal improvement in the standard of health and the conditions of life. No technical device, no narrow or specific remedy for pestilence, can ultimately triumph apart from a sanitary environment for the community and the sound nutrition of the individual. They are the bed-rock. Out of them spring the sources of national vitality."

E. H. WILKINS,

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PART VI.—DENTAL HYGIENE.

In connection with the work of my division I beg to submit a report for the year ended 31st March, 1921.

SECTION 1.—STAFF, ACCOMMODATION, AND EQUIPMENT.

STAFF.

So far six dental surgeons have been appointed on the usual six-months probation, and are allocated as follows: One in Auckland City, one North of Auckland (stationed at Warkworth, and to include surrounding districts), one at Wellington, one at Nelson, one at Christchurch, and one at Dunedin.

The following is a summary of the operations performed and treatment carried out from approximately October to the end of March: Fillings, 5,619; extractions, 3,798; minor operations, 1,328; total, 10,745.

Besides the above, a considerable number of children have been examined and teeth charted, and duplicate charts have been sent to parents. This has resulted in the treatment of many cases by private practitioners or at hospitals.