

TOOTH-BRUSH DRILL.

For some years Dr. Gunn has had tooth-brush drill established in practically all the schools in her district, and she very highly extols its value. A move in this direction has followed this year in the Auckland District, where, at the instigation of the school medical officers, the Education Board issued instructions to its teachers that tooth-brush drill was to be carried out at all schools. Some opposition from the teachers resulted, but a compromise has since been arrived at. Dr. Wilkie says: "The drill has been started in all of the schools I have inspected since September. Its beneficial effects are seen even after quite a short time." Other medical officers also have established tooth-brush drill in some of their schools.

School medical officers, however, are not unanimous that organized brushing of the teeth as a school routine is the best way of meeting the problem. Dr. Collier says: "I am glad to say that I do not now think it as necessary as it first seemed. The children are responding to the talks that have been given at all the schools, and are taking a live interest all over the district. There are very few septic mouths, and I hope before long there will be none at all." Dr. Clark says: "I do not advise the inauguration of schemes of tooth-brush drill, as this tends to remove the responsibility for the cleaning of the teeth from the children to the teachers. At the same time I enlist the co-operation of the teachers in frequent inspection of the pupils' teeth." It is important to recognize that tooth-brush drill is only one of the ways of meeting the problem of dirty teeth in school-children, and that as an educational measure it has drawbacks. Indeed, excellent results are being obtained by school-teachers placing the responsibility on the children and insisting on the idea of a clean mouth as a condition of common decency even apart from health. Dr. J. N. Keith reports valuable work in this direction. It must however become more generally recognized that the hygiene of the mouth is an important responsibility of the school-teacher as well as of the school medical officer.

SECTION 7.—SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND SCHOOL SANITATION.

As the designing of school buildings is the official concern of the Education Department rather than of the Department of Health, I only make brief reference to this important subject. As a result of recent scientific research our ideas of the relation of ventilation and exercise to bodily health have developed rapidly, and there is little doubt that the open-air school in some form or another will before long be recognized as an essential feature in education. The question should therefore be seriously considered whether the erection of buildings of brick and stone, designed to last a century, is not a mistake in view of the fact that our conception of the ideal in school buildings is undergoing change. It is important to recognize that a satisfactory school building need not be expensive, and it would appear desirable to erect light structures capable of alteration rather than massive buildings which it would be practically impossible to alter should it later be found desirable to do so. In the designing of school buildings and in the general planning of the school routine, much more deference should be given to that beneficent health-giver the sun, and to the maintenance of the natural warmth of the body by frequent bouts of exercise rather than by artificial means of heating. The practicability of more open-air teaching and the great benefit resulting to the health of the pupils has already been amply demonstrated. I wish specially to acknowledge a valuable report by Dr. Philipps on this important subject.

SANITATION AND CLEANING.

As regards the sanitation and cleaning of school premises much is to be desired. The school should inspire a high ideal and be a practical model to the children in regard to the principles of cleanliness, neatness, and order. How far we are from this ideal! No doubt there are often difficulties in the employment of suitable labour for cleansing purposes, but these difficulties, it should be emphasized, can be largely solved under voluntary self-governing schemes by which the children themselves assume the responsibility. The educational value of such methods is very great, and a number of schools have already adopted the plan with complete success. In view of the importance of a bright and cleanly school, from the educational point of view as well as of health, it should certainly not be possible for a school medical officer to report that "the majority of schools are dirty and very badly kept." In order to assist School Committees and Education Boards in maintaining higher standards in this matter a leaflet has been issued in which simple sanitary requirements are set forth.

SECTION 8.—RELATION TO EDUCATION BOARDS, SCHOOL COMMITTEES, AND TEACHERS.

During the last few years school medical officers have been brought into closer touch with Education Boards and School Committees. School medical officers now report regularly to their Boards, and in many cases by the Boards' courtesy the school medical officer personally attends the monthly meetings. It is the practice also to meet the School Committees as far as possible, and in general a very cordial relationship exists between the school medical officer and these bodies. Again, on behalf of my staff I wish to express appreciation of the co-operation and assistance of the school-teachers in the interests of the health of the children. The following extract from a letter to a school medical officer from the head teacher of a large high school illustrates the interest taken by many of the teachers: "I wish to say how much I appreciate the help rendered by yourself and the nurses. A twofold result has been manifest: first, the children have been led to make greater efforts in caring for themselves in the matter of cleanliness and in attention to their teeth; secondly, the parents are now paying far greater attention to the physical well-being of their children, there being a distinct improvement in cases where before were laxity and neglect." Again, the head teacher of one of the large town schools, writing of the progress made during the last few years, says: "The health and general conditions obtaining in our schools have vastly improved. The medical examination of school-children has become one of vital and effective interest."