

THE HEALTH OF SCHOOL-CHILDREN.

EXTRACT FROM THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF SCHOOL HYGIENE, 1924.

THE fundamental necessities of healthy growth are simple, and it is doubtful if there is any country in the world to-day where they are more universally procurable. Fresh air, sunlight, food of the right type and amount, adequate sleep and rest, wholesome exercise, are available for all but that small section of the people already mentioned. Sir Frederick Mott, in an address recently published in the *British Medical Journal*, quotes Voltaire: "Regime in diet is better than medicine. Eat moderately what you know by experience you can digest, for that which you can digest only is good for the body. What is the medicine that makes you digest? Exercise. What will repair your energy? Sleep."

To this text he adds the benefits of sunlight and pure air.

Reports from School Medical Officers continue to record that tea, white bread, and meat play the chief part in the dietary of many homes. Fresh fruit and vegetables, even in rural areas, are not eaten sufficiently.

Frequent eating between meals takes away appetite and retards digestion. Many children bring to school substantial "play-lunches" to be consumed at the mid-morning interval. Others consume large quantities of sweets. Healthy hunger they rarely know. A noteworthy fact is that in New Zealand the consumption of sugar per head per annum is 117 lb., as against rather more than half that quantity in Britain and much less in other countries. Apart from its directly deleterious influence on the teeth, the alteration of food values in the dietary necessitated by the inclusion of so much sugar results in digestive troubles and disturbed nutrition. In this country, with its many sources of supply, eggs, milk, cheese, butter, fresh fruit, and vegetables should be available in sufficient abundance and at low-enough prices to displace to a greater extent the meat that is such a prominent article of diet in many households.

The value of rest, both physical and mental, for children is not adequately recognized. In the country many children work early and late at farm-work, as milking, &c., and in the city children earn money as newsboys, message-boys, &c. Where the family exchequer needs to be augmented in this way excuse must be made, but in many comfortable homes children do not rest sufficiently. Mr. Cyril Burt, psychologist for the London City Council, was recently reported as deploring the tendency in modern education to attach undue value to the dramatic and theatrical. Children who possess talent are made to drag it prematurely into the light of publicity. They are over-trained and over-stimulated. Nearly all children are taught to regard frequent amusement as essential to happiness. To leave them to develop their own resources and allow them to find interest in simple and natural things would be to extend widely their chance of future happiness.

It is the wrongly fed, insufficiently rested child that most readily develops physical deformity. The fatigued nervous system is expressed in general bodily slackness. There is deficient muscular and ligamentous tone. The typical faulty posture is thus acquired, with drooping head, flat chest, wing shoulders, prominent abdomen. Vitality is depressed and the bodily mechanism out of gear. The grosser bony deformities so often found in older lands associated with rickets are rarely seen in New Zealand, but less evident manifestations of faulty diet and regime are frequent. It is fortunate that in this country we cannot altogether escape, however we seek our pleasures in stuffy rooms or dark, ill-ventilated places of entertainment, those powerful and beneficial agents for promoting healthy growth—sunlight and fresh air. For the prevention of defect it is essential that the classroom should offer hygienic conditions—*e.g.*, good lighting and ventilation, suitable furniture, &c. Another contributory factor in poor physical development is the use of incorrect clothing and footwear. It is a common thing to find from six to eight layers of tight garments constricting the chest even in a child whose legs are scantily protected from cold. Shoes which are too tight or too short, or which have heels so high as to prevent correct body-balance, are very harmful. Clothing should offer adequate protection, but should not prevent the most absolute freedom of movement.

SEXUAL OFFENDERS IN NEW ZEALAND.

THE Prisons Department has furnished the following return of sexual offenders serving sentences in New Zealand prisons in 1924: The total number of sexual offenders, 192; the total number of sexual offenders born in New Zealand, 126; the total number of sexual offenders born out of New Zealand, 66; the total number of persons in the prisons serving sentences exceeding three months, 980; the total number of New-Zealand-born prisoners, 673; proportion of sexual offenders—New-Zealand-born to total number of New-Zealand-born criminals, 18·722; total number of prisoners born outside New Zealand, 307; proportion of sexual offenders born outside New Zealand to prisoners born outside New Zealand, 21·498.