

SECTION 3.—THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF DEATH.

That there are other and even more promising points for attack upon the principal causes of deaths in New Zealand is shown by the following table, which gives the main causes of deaths last year in their order of magnitude, and the actual number of deaths therefrom :—

TOTAL DEATHS IN NEW ZEALAND IN 1927, 11,819.						
Causes.						Actual Deaths.
Heart-disease (all forms)	..	..	..	..	..	2,150
Cancer	..	..	..	..	..	1,324
Violence	..	..	..	..	..	877
Common chest-diseases—						
Pneumonia	..	..	..	..	..	313
Broncho-pneumonia	..	..	..	..	..	207
Bronchitis	..	..	..	..	..	303
						— 823
Senility	..	..	..	..	..	806
Apoplexy or cerebral hæmorrhage	..	..	..	..	..	771
Tuberculosis (all forms)	..	..	..	..	..	668
						7,419

These six main causes, with senility, account for 7,419, or approximately two-thirds of the total ; and that proportion has been fairly constant for several years past.

*Remaining Principal Causes.*

Infant deaths (under one year)	..	..	..	..	..	1,080
Kidney or Bright's disease	..	..	..	..	..	409
Diabetes	..	..	..	..	..	188
Disease of the arteries	..	..	..	..	..	179
Diseases and accidents of childbirth	..	..	..	..	..	137
Hernia and intestinal obstruction	..	..	..	..	..	109
Appendicitis	..	..	..	..	..	92
Diarrhœa and enteritis	..	..	..	..	..	91
Meningitis (all forms)	..	..	..	..	..	63
Epilepsy	..	..	..	..	..	40

*Common Infectious Diseases.*

Influenza	..	..	..	..	..	131
Diphtheria	..	..	..	..	..	58
Whooping-cough	..	..	..	..	..	41
Measles	..	..	..	..	..	29
Scarlet fever	..	..	..	..	..	16
Typhoid fever	..	..	..	..	..	11

From the numerical standpoint special consideration should perhaps be given to the afore-stated six principal causes. Obviously, with some of them—*e.g.*, tuberculosis, the common chest-diseases, some forms of heart-disease, and apoplexy—habits of life and environment are important factors. The correction of faulty habits, where applicable, and the improvement of the environment of an unfortunate or careless minority of the New Zealand public would reduce these deaths, and the numbers are such as to offer a margin of gain worth the effort.

HEART-DISEASES (ALL FORMS), 2,150.

The 2,150 deaths annually from all forms of heart-disease in a Dominion total of 11,819 merit consideration. While a large proportion are probably instances of a failing pumping-organ in a generally diseased or worn-out body, it is evident that some of these deaths are preventable. Recent investigation has shown, for example, that some cases of heart-disease are bacterial in nature.

As regards child-life, attention has been drawn by the dental and medical professions to the importance of correct diet in the prevention of carious teeth. Bad diet, particularly if associated with the overcrowding of children in houses and a sunless environment, will cause carious teeth, followed later by septic tonsils, and in some instances inflammation of the lining of the heart of bacterial origin.

The prevalence, too, of rheumatic fever, which sometimes involves the heart, is reduced by good habits and environment.

Some cases of acute disease of the heart in adults, too, are bacterial in nature. A septic focus elsewhere in the body, followed by invasion of the general blood-stream, may affect the heart.

With regard to sedentary adults indulging in overeating, sudden physical strain damages the heart. "Eat sparingly and keep constantly fit" is a good heart maximum, and the fact that the world's healthiest country loses 2,150 persons annually from heart-disease indicates that all do not keep constantly fit.

Syphilis, when it develops, often causes disease of the circulatory organs, such as heart-disease, aneurism, or apoplexy. New Zealand has special regulations designed to ensure prompt and efficient treatment for this malady, and to prevent its spread. By means of the co-operation of medical practitioners some success has been achieved in controlling the disease, but we can all increase our efforts in this direction.