

THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

THE HEALTH OF THE SCHOOL CHILD.

The Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education—Sir Arthur MacNalty—is always a document of great importance, and that for 1937, recently published, is of outstanding significance, devoting, as it does, considerable attention to nutritional conditions as they affect the health of the school child, besides commemorating the establishment, after various voluntary efforts had demonstrated how badly the medical and nursing supervision of school children was needed, of the appointment by the London School Board of a School Medical Service in 1907 of the School Medical Service under the Education (Administrative Provisions) Act. The fine work done in this connection by the late Miss Helen Pearse, S.R.N., and the L.C.C. School Nursing Service which she directed and developed, and during her tenure of office increased from 25 members to over 300, is well known; and the School Nurse is now one of the most appreciated Nursing Services in the County of London, and an important factor, both physically and psychologically, in promoting the health of the London school child and elsewhere.

The year 1937, as Sir Arthur MacNalty reminds us, was eventful in the annals of nutrition. The first Report of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition having been published in the early part of the year, reference was made to it in the findings of the 1937 Report. The Board has consistently endeavoured to implement the central recommendation which may be thus summarised that the consumption of a sufficient quantity of milk is, in most cases, the key to the improved nutrition of the school child. The proviso "in most cases" must be carefully noted, for in other cases the provision of milk alone does not seem sufficient to enable the necessitous and under-nourished child to obtain the full benefit of the education, mental and physical, provided for him by the State, or to afford him the full opportunity for the healthy development of his body. The aim of that education, it must be remembered, is to develop to the full the potentialities of every child at school.

Dietary Surveys.

During the year large-scale dietary surveys were continued under the ægis of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition. In addition, the organisation for an important dietary investigation to be carried out by the Carnegie Trust under the direction of Sir John Orr, and with the co-operation of the local health and education authorities, was completed.

This will aim at ascertaining quantitatively and qualitatively the diets of families of different social and economic classes in various parts of the country, and, while concerned primarily with the family as the unit, will explore the relationship between the diet and the health and development of the children and adolescents in these families.

It will include controlled experiments on the value of supplementary feeding designed to raise to the level suggested by the League of Nations Committee of Experts in the case of children between five and 12 years of age.

This investigation will be the first attempt at an experimental controlled trial of the nutritive value of the diets recommended.

The year saw no relaxation of the careful watch maintained over the nutritional state of the elementary school child throughout the country. The general impression left by the reports of the School Medical Officers may be summarised in the words of Sir Frederick Menzies (London): "The nutritional state of the children has been well main-

tained"; and Dr. Dunstan Brewer (Swindon) says: "There has been a noticeable rise in nutrition of children, but the rise could be brisker, for we are a long way from the optimum diet for all children." This is generally true, but again it has to be said there are some areas which do not participate to this general improvement.

Importance of Sleep for Children.

Emphasising the importance of sleep for children, Sir Arthur MacNalty says that even in the presence of an adequate balanced supply of food, the efficiency of this food in producing good nutrition in children depends upon many factors other than the food itself—adequate sleep, proper and uncrowded housing, hygienic schools, sunlight, fresh air, exercise and, it may be added, happiness. That many children suffer from too little sleep has been recognised since, and indeed before, the beginning of school medicine, and has often been emphasised in these annual reports. It is a constant theme in the reports of many school medical officers.

The London County Council have issued for distribution to parents an admirable leaflet, "Health of School Children: Sleeping Time." Several other authorities, such as Kent, also issue leaflets on this important subject. Here the co-operation of parents is essential, and every effort should be made by school medical officers and teachers to secure this.

Sir Arthur MacNalty further says that valuable as is the provision of free milk in sufficient quantity for the prevention of malnutrition, it is, however, not sufficient in all cases. The observations of many school medical officers and others seem to show that a pint of milk per day as a supplement to home diet will have an appreciable effect in improving the condition of the more severely malnourished child, and thus will tend to reduce the percentage of D or bad nutrition, but is not by itself sufficient to build up the necessitous child to a reasonable average and so to prevent a considerable proportion of C nutrition in areas where there is considerable poverty or unemployment.

It is a matter for regret, says Sir Arthur MacNalty, that there are large county areas, some including special areas, where the only free meals provided are milk.

Importance of Open-Air Schools.

The importance of open-air schools is emphasised for the reason that they have these important functions: they receive the physically defective child who, for the time being, is unfit for education side by side with healthy school-fellows; they cure or ameliorate the child's ill-health, at the same time providing education suitable to his individual capacity; in the majority of cases they restore the child to normal health and enable him to be transferred back to the public elementary school, there to continue his education.

There is great need for a much larger number of open-air schools in England and Wales, says the Chief Medical Officer, and the need is commended to all local education authorities who have not yet made this necessary provision.

"A child may be unemployable because he leaves school without having acquired the art of writing. This is rightly looked on as evidence of failure on the part of the educational system; but many authorities still do not appreciate that inability to speak distinctly is an even greater reflection on the educational system, and this is all the more true in view of the fact that a large proportion of the children so suffering may be cured or much improved by modern methods of speech training."

Sir Arthur MacNalty also stresses the importance of adequate dental treatment and also, where necessary, of hospital treatment.

In this human spirit, says Sir Arthur MacNalty, a great deal has been achieved during these thirty years.

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