

HEALTH A CIVIC OBLIGATION

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In forty-five states and territories the teaching of hygiene with special reference to alcohol and tobacco is made compulsory. To hygiene alone, of the score of subjects found in our modern grammar-school curriculum, is given statutory right of way for so many minutes per week, so many pages per text-book, or so many pages per chapter. For the neglect of no other study may teachers be removed from office and fined. Yet school garrets and closets are full of hygiene text-books unopened or little used, while of all subjects taught by five hundred thousand American teachers and studied by twenty million American pupils the least interesting to both teacher and pupil is that forced upon both by state legislation. To complete the paradox, this least interesting subject happens also to be the most vital to the child, to the home, to industry, to social welfare, and to education itself.

Whether the subject of hygiene is necessarily dull, whether the statutes requiring regular instruction in the laws of health are violated with impunity, whether health principles are flaunted by health practice at school, these are questions of immediate concern to parents as a class, to employers as a class, to every pastor, every civic leader, every health officer, every taxpayer.

Interviews with teachers and principals regarding the present apathy to formal hygiene instruction have brought out the following points that merit the serious consideration of those who are struggling for higher health standards.

1. *There is many a slip 'twixt the making of a law and its enforcement.* If laws regarding hygiene instruction are not enforced, we should not be surprised. It has been nobody's business to see whether and how hygiene is being taught. The moral crusade spent itself in forcing compulsory laws upon the statute books of every state and territory. Making a fetish of *Legislation*, the advocates of anti-alcohol and anti-tobacco instruction failed to see the truth that experienced political reformers are but slowly coming to see—*Legislation which does not provide machinery for its own enforcement is apt to do little good and frequently will do much harm.* Machinery, however admirably adapted to the work to be done, will get out of order and become useless, or even harmful, unless constantly watched and efficiently directed. Of what possible use is it to say that state money may be withheld from any school board which fails to enforce the law regarding instruction in hygiene, if state officials never enforce the penalty? So long as the penalty is not enforced for flagrant violation, what difference does it make whether the reason is indifference, ignorance, or desire to thwart the law? Fortunately, it is easy for each one of us to learn how often and in what way the children in our community are being taught hygiene, and how the schools of our state teach and practice the laws of health. If either the spirit or the letter of the law regarding instruction in hygiene is being violated, we can measure the penalty paid in health and morals by our children and our community. We can learn

whether law, text-book, curriculum, or teacher should be changed. We can insist upon discussion of the facts and upon remedies suggested by the facts.

2. *Teachers give as one reason for neglecting hygiene, that they are often compelled to struggle with a curriculum which requires more than they are able to teach and more than pupils are able to learn in the time allowed.* While an overcharged curriculum may explain, it surely does not justify, the violation of law and the dropping of hygiene from our school curriculum. If there is any class of citizen who should teach and practice respect for law as law, it is the teacher. Parents, school directors, county and state superintendents, university presidents, social workers, owe it not only to themselves, but to the American school-teacher, either to repeal the laws that enjoin instruction in hygiene or else so to adjust the curriculum that teachers can comply with those laws. The present situation that discredits both law and hygiene is most demoralizing to teacher, pupil, and community. Many of us might admire the man teacher who frankly says he never explains the evils of cigarettes because he himself is an inveterate smoker of cigarettes. But what must we think of the school system that shifts to such a man the right and the responsibility of deciding whether or not to explain to underfed and overstimulated children of the slums the truth regarding cigarettes? If practice and precept must be consistent, shall the man be removed, shall he change his habits, shall the law regarding instruction in hygiene be changed, or shall other provision be made for bringing child and essential facts together in a way that will not dull the child's receptivity?

3. *Teachers are made to feel that while arithmetic and reading are essential, hygiene is not essential.* Whatever may be the facts regarding the relative value of arithmetic and hygiene, whether or not our state legislators have made a mistake in declaring hygiene to be essential, are questions altogether too important for child and state to be left to the discretion of the individual teacher or superintendent. It is fair to the teachers who say they cannot afford to turn aside from the three R's to teach hygiene, to admit that they have not hitherto identified the teaching of hygiene with the promotion of the physical welfare of children. Teachers awake to the opportunity will sacrifice not only hygiene but any other subject for the sake of promoting children's health. They do not really believe that arithmetic is more important than health. What they mean to say is that hygiene, as taught by them, has not heretofore had an appreciable effect upon their pupils' health; that other agencies exist, outside of the school, to teach the child how to avoid certain diseases and how to observe the fundamental laws of health, whereas no other agencies exist to give the child the essentials of arithmetic, reading, and geography. "We teach (or try to teach) what our classes are examined in. If you want a subject taught, you must test a class in it and hold a teacher responsible for results, and examinations are mercilessly unhygienic, you know."

4. *Teachers believe that they get better results for their children from teaching hygiene informally and indirectly than from stated formal lessons.* Whether instruction should be informal or formal is merely a question of method to be determined by results. What the results are, can be determined by principals, superintendents, and students of education. It is easy to understand how at the time of a fever epidemic children could be taught as much in one week about infection, disease germs, antiseptics, value of cleanliness, etc., as in five or ten months when vivid illustration is lacking. Physicians themselves learn more from one epidemic of smallpox than from four years of book study. To make possible and to require a daily shower bath will undoubtedly do more to inculcate habits of health than repeated lessons about the skin, pores, evaporation, and discharge of impurities.

If one illustration is better than ten lessons, if an open window is worth more than all that text-books have to say about ventilation, if a seat adjusted to the child is better than an anatomical chart, this does not mean that instruction in hygiene should cease. On the contrary, it means that provision should be made for every teacher to open windows, to adjust desks, to use the experience of individual children for the education of the class. If the rank and file of teachers have not hitherto been sufficiently observant of physiological and hygienic facts, if they are unprepared from their own lives to detect or to furnish illustrations for the child, this again does not mean that the child should be denied the illustrations, but that the teacher should either have instruction and experience to incite interest and to stimulate powers of observation, or else be asked to give place to another teacher who is able to furnish such qualifications.

5. *Children, like adults, can be interested in other people, in rules of conduct, in social conditions, in living and working relations more easily than in their own bodies.* The normal, healthy child thinks very little of himself apart from the other boys and girls, the games, the studies, the animals, the nature wonders, the hardships that come to him from the outside. So true is this that one of the best means of mitigating or curing many ailments is to divert the child's attention from himself to things outside of himself that he can look at, hear, enjoy. The power to concentrate attention upon oneself is a sign either of a diseased body, a diseased mind, or a highly trained mind. To study others and to recognize the similarity between others and oneself is as natural as the body itself. Teachers are consulting this line of easiest access to children's attention when they honor children according to cleanliness of hands, of teeth, of shoes. Human interest attaches to what parks or excursions are doing for sickly children, how welfare work is improving factory employees, how smallpox is conquered by vaccination, how insurance companies refuse to take risks upon the lives of men or women addicted to the excessive use of alcohol or tobacco.

Other people's interests - tenement conditions, factory rules - can be described in figures and actions that appeal to the imagination and impress upon the mind pictures that are repeatedly reawakened by experience and observation on the playground, at home, on the way to school or to work. "Once upon a time" will always arrest attention more quickly than "The human frame consists." What others think of me helps me to obey law -statutory, moral, or hygienic - more than what I know of law itself. How social instincts dominate may be illustrated by an experience in advertising a public bath near a thoroughfare traveled daily by thousands of working girls. I prepared a card to be distributed among these girls that began: "A cool, refreshing bath, etc." This card was criticised by one who knows the ways of girls and women, as follows: "Of course you get no success when you have a man stand on the street corner and pass out cards telling girls to get clean. Every girl that is worth while is affronted by the insinuation." Acting upon this expert advice, we then got out a neatly printed card reading as follows: "For a clear complexion, sprightly step, and bounding vitality, visit the Center Market Baths, open from 6A.M. to 9 P.M. daily." The board of managers shook their sage masculine heads and reluctantly gave permission to issue these appeals. Woman's judgment was vindicated, however, and the advantage was proved of urging health for "society's" sake rather than for health's sake, when the patronage of the bath jumped at once to considerable proportions.

6. *Other people's habits of health influence our well-being quite as much, if not more, than our own.* Because we are social beings, ability to get along with our families, our friends, our employers, is at least so it seems to most of us quite as important as individual

health. For too many of us, living hygienically is absolutely impossible without inconveniencing and bothering the majority of persons with whom we live. I remember a girl in college, a fresh-air fiend, who every morning, no matter how cold, threw the windows wide open. Then, with forty others, I thought this girl a nuisance as well as a menace to health, but now, twenty years afterwards, I find myself wanting to do the same thing. Professor Patten, the economist, whom I shall quote many times because he is particularly interested in the purpose of this book, was recently dining at my house and illustrated from his own health the importance of teaching hygiene so as to affect social as well as personal standards. "To be true to my own health needs, I ought to have declined nearly everything that has been offered me for dinner, but in the long run, if I am going to visit, my eating what is placed before me is better for society than making those who entertain me feel uncomfortable."

Most of us know what uphill work it is to live hygienically in an unhygienic environment. I remember how hard it was to eat happily when sitting beside a college professor who took brown pills before each meal, yellow pills between each course, and a dose of black medicine after the meal was over. Mariano, an Italian lad cured of bone tuberculosis by out-of-door salt air at Sea Breeze, returned to his tenement home an ardent apostle of fresh air day and night, winter and summer. His family allowed him to open the window before going to bed, but closed it as soon as he was asleep. Lawrence Veiller, our greatest expert on tenement conditions, says: "To bathe in a tenement where a family of six occupy three rooms often involves the sacrifice of privacy and decency, which are quite as important to social betterment as cleanliness."

To live unhygienically where others live hygienically is quite as difficult. Witness the speedy improvement of dissipated men when boarding with country friends who eat rationally and retire early. It must have been knowledge of this fact that prompted the tramways of Belfast to post conspicuous notices: "Spitting is a vile and filthy habit, and those who practice it subject themselves to the disgust and loathing of their fellow-passengers." It is almost impossible to have indigestion, blues, and headache when one is camping, particularly where action and enjoyment fill the day. Our practical question is, therefore, not "What shall I eat, how many hours shall I sleep, what shall I wear," but "How can I manage to get into an environment among living and working conditions where the people I live with and want to please, those who influence me and are influenced by me, make healthy living easy and natural?"

7. Because the problems of health have to do principally with environment, home, street, school, business, it is worth while trying to relate hygiene instruction to industry and government, to preach health from the standpoint of industrial and national efficiency rather than of individual well-being. Since healthful living requires the cooperation of all persons in a household, in a group, or in a community, we must find some working programme that will make it easy for all the members of the group to observe health standards. A city government that spends taxes inefficiently can produce more sickness, wretchedness, incapacity in one year than pamphlets on health can offset in a generation. Failure to enforce health laws is a more serious menace to health and morals than drunkenness or tobacco cancer. Unclean streets, unclean dairies, unclean, overcrowded tenements can do more harm than alcohol and tobacco because they can breed an appetite that craves stimulants and drugs. Others have taught how the body acts, what we ought to eat, how we should live. We are concerned here not with repeating the laws of health, but with a consideration of the mechanism that will make it possible for us so to work together that we can observe those laws.

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