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On: 13 March 2015, At: 20:09

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20>

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Published online: 10 Jul 2006.

To cite this article: W. H. Slingerland PhD. (1917) SOCIAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING CHILD CHARACTER , Religious Education: The official journal of the Religious Education Association, 12:1, 19-23, DOI: [10.1080/0034408170120103](https://doi.org/10.1080/0034408170120103)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0034408170120103>

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provides for and actually encourages them. The matter is not allowed to go by default. The people of the province have made it evident that they wish that the spirit of the schools should be religious, and the government has made provision for the full expression of the will of the people. The teacher is held responsible for worship unless he definitely declines to conduct it. In such cases the responsibility is placed on the local school board whose members are the representatives of the people.

SOCIAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING CHILD CHARACTER*

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We can note definitely the effect of "social hindrances" upon the personalities of children; dwellers in congested centers, housed in dark and insufficient quarters, denied pure air and playgrounds, and many of them forced into wage-earning toil almost as soon as they are released from the swaddling clothes of babyhood.

Let us realize that poverty, while the chief contributing cause, is but one element in the depravity and distress found in tenement life. The tenants of the slums are poor, but poverty does not necessarily create insanitation nor breed immorality. Virtue abides as constantly in homes of poverty as in homes of wealth. The poverty that sends a family into cheap rooms for a shelter does not radically injure their personalities, until we reach the plane where the house is unfit for habitation from insanitary conditions, or the human associations are to minds and spirits what darkness and sewer-gas are to physical life.

Environment is one of the greatest of the factors which determine the welfare of any family. If bad, environment is a terrible handicap in the race of life; if good, it is a tonic to the home and to each individual. Environment often disintegrates family life and ruins all its members. Homes close to saloons, gambling dens, and disorderly houses, are like the villages on the side of a volcano—liable to be destroyed at any time.

Every social hindrance in the congested centers trains its heaviest batteries on the mother and the children. In a sense, the

*The first part of Dr. Slingerland's paper, presented in full at the Buffalo convention, surveyed the actual conditions of city life in congested districts.

children experience a double assault, prenatal and post-natal. The insanitation that devitalizes the mother, devitalizes her off-spring. The troubles that make her life miserable are reflected in many cases in sad-faced children, old in spirit from the day of their birth. The languor caused by vitiated air, the dirt that is a constant guest in the home, the lack of sunshine in the narrow rooms, the strain and depression in which all live, stamp their imprint especially upon the bodies and spirits of slum children.

I have spoken of the excessive infant mortality among the poor. In a lesser degree, but still marked and awful, is the death rate among those who survive babyhood. At least one baby in five dies in the first year of life; and also in these "warrens of the poor," because of debility and lack of suitable food, another out of the five dies within the second year. They have not the vitality to make a successful fight for life. Later still, among those who survive, there is insufficient stamina effectively to battle with bad environmental conditions. They are stunted physically, backward mentally, and in large degree morally incompetent.

The prime requisite of morals is self-respect. How can children respect themselves, much less others, when families of from six to ten, with often one or two boarders, live in one or two dark rooms in a tenement? How can there be mental alertness when the home is a cellar, and life struggles on almost on the plane of a rat in a hole?

Bernard J. Newman of Philadelphia tells of a chronic truant from school who was trailed home one day by a truant officer. He says: "The trail led to a cellar apartment where the lad lived with his father, mother, and four sisters and brothers. The room was 12 feet square and a little over 7 feet from floor to ceiling, the latter being 17 inches above the surface of the ground. The light was poor, the ventilation bad, the room of course overcrowded, its 1,080 cubic feet of air space materially reduced by the furniture and truck. What could be expected but that the boy would be a truant? There was nothing in this cellar life to give him ambition. His brothers and sisters were defective, his mother mentally soporific, and his father a drunkard."*

We speak and write violent invectives against sexual immorality. In my judgment untold thousands of the poor are less immoral than unmoral. They have been forced by stress of poverty and crowding to live so that the sense of decency and the ideas

*Housing Conditions and Child Dependency, B. J. Newman in "A Child Welfare Symposium," R. S. F.

central in sexual morality have been destroyed. They are to be pitied, aided, and gently taught, rather than cruelly blamed for what in other conditions would be properly called immoral actions.

Bernard J. Newman says: "The greatest safeguard of childhood's innocency is the instinctive repugnance the young feel about the exposure of their bodies. Where families occupy one room, or share it with the ever-present boarder, and perform all their duties in plain sight of one another, sleeping, dressing, and undressing practically in personal contact, there is no shock to their privacy possible, for children have none from the time they are born until they leave the paternal dwelling. This lack of privacy within and without the home is especially hard on girls as they approach womanhood. Hence so many of these girls lack the moral character to resist the allurements of vice. The chief probation officer of Philadelphia is the authority for the statement that many of the street walkers of that city came from homes in an area where overcrowding and insanitation are chronic and acute."*

This is the natural effect of such conditions. Anything better would be a miracle. With the boys it is the same. They have little or no conception of sexual morality. The period of adolescence is critical for both sexes, but amid such poverty what can be done? One mother, who dimly recognized the situation and desired better things, was heard to say: "It is time I got more room, Mary is getting too old to sleep with Joe." Alas, for that poor brother and sister—Mary was already fourteen and Joe fifteen!

This abnormal life is also bound to have its effect upon general morals and conduct. Childhood's abundant energy rightly liberated results in good; expressed in such homes and environment as we are contemplating, this energy results in evil, in petty vices, in practices that in an adult would be termed crimes. This means war between the children of congested regions and the law. Many have intimate but unpleasant associations with the "cops" and the court. Ninety per cent of city children that face juvenile court judges come from homes in the overcrowded sections. "Gee," said one youngster after a visit to the house of justice, "I've been up before that guy four times already!"

The city educational problem is one of the most important matters of modern civilization. While it deserves much more space and time, I can only devote to it a few sentences.

The educational facilities for the city poor are both ill-adapted

*Housing Conditions and Child Dependency, B. J. Newman, in "A Child Welfare Symposium," R. S. F.

and inadequate. They confessedly do not teach the right things in the right way; and the buildings and teaching force are below the requirements of the multitudes who attend or ought to attend.

It seems impossible in large and growing cities to erect buildings fast enough to meet increasing needs, hence thousands of the children of the poor have only part time service in the public schools. There is no "race suicide" on the Bowery, however much there may be on Fifth Avenue. One mother when asked the size of her family replied. "Me no know. I stop count when I got 'leven. What de diff?" The children of this family when finally rounded up in pool rooms, barrel dives, dance halls, and moving picture places, proved to be fourteen in number. No wonder the schoolhouses are inadequate.

It is conceded that there should be study courses specially adapted to these and other conditions of city life. A twelve-year course is as impossible to these people as a trip to the moon. The grammar grade work should be modified and made more practical. Preliminary vocational training should be introduced early and specially emphasized.

When we speak of educational opportunities, what pictures of privation and mountains of difficulty rise before the mind. Thousands of the lads and lasses who should be in the grammar grades are bound to wage-earning toil like Prometheus to his rock. Half-starved parents send half-starved children to school a part of every day, and toil on far into the night for the half loaf which is their portion. Dr. W. H. Maxwell, superintendent of the New York city schools, tells us that in the metropolis 60,000 to 70,000 children in the public schools are unable to study or learn because of their hunger. Penny lunches are now being provided for a part of these, but such help compared to the needs is but a drop in the bucket. New York is not alone in this. Take the nation over and the hungry public school children number hundreds of thousands. Is this a "social hindrance" to child welfare? If so, in the name of humanity let us do something to remove it from the path of American childhood.

Finally, the sanctions and blessings of religion are but dimly known or experienced in the congested centers of our cities. Masses who are surrounded by brick and mortar, and herded in droves in flats and tenements cannot look up through nature to nature's God. Even the privilege of church attendance, and the message of hope from the lips of the preacher, are largely outside the range of ordinary tenement life.

The "down town" churches follow the "paying members" to the better residential sections or the suburbs. The "down town" masses who remain are served, if served at all, by special "missions," or self-sacrificing religious workers. It is felt to be a fact that most of the churches belong to the well-to-do classes and not to all of the people.

If among the poor, religion is not the mainstay of life, it is because they see God through distorting media, and because some of his professed followers fail to exemplify His real character. And it is true that immense numbers of the "common people," who 1900 years ago heard gladly the message of Jesus of Nazareth, are to-day indifferent if not antagonistic.

John Spargo quotes a touching story of a frail, dark-eyed girl, who one winter day stood at a public school radiator warming her blue and benumbed hands. When she had thus restored the circulation, the child looked wistfully up into the teacher's face and asked:

"Teacher, do you love God?"

"Why, yes, dearie, of course I love God," answered the teacher.

"Well, I don't—I hate Him!" was the fierce rejoinder. "He makes the wind blow, and I haven't any warm clothes. He makes it snow, and my shoes have holes in them. He makes it cold and we haven't any fire at home. He makes us hungry, and mama hadn't any bread for our breakfast. O, I hate Him!"*

Poor mite of humanity, how our hearts ache for her—and how quickly we forget her and her kind as we go out into the busy world to pile up more dollars or acquire greater honors. And those like this girl, and her people, are to be found by the hundred thousand in our great cities. It is now time to take real Christianity in abundant measure to these our neighbors. First we must provide the physical ministrations that will strengthen their bodies, win their hearts and open their minds, then the message of gospel cheer that blesses time and glorifies eternity.

*See *The Bitter Cry of the Children*, p. 57.