

PRACTICAL HYGIENE TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

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Read at Sessional Meeting April 12th, 1899.

THE outcome of enquiries recently made as to the present position assigned to the teaching of Sanitation in any form in Elementary Schools showed that not more than about one per cent. of the five and a half million children, whose names appear on the school registers, receive instruction in any branch of this subject, whether it be included under the head of Domestic Economy or approached as the advanced "specific" subject of Hygiene. The experience, gained by visits to Board Schools in many parts of England, affords evidence also of the unsatisfactory character of much of this teaching even when given. Such a position cannot but be regretted by those desirous of seeing Sir John Simon's ideal education a fact in our midst; viz: "that education which by model and example would lead the poorer classes of society to know cleanliness from dirt, decency from grossness, human propriety from brutish self-abandonment; . . . an education which would teach them to feel the comfort and profit of sanitary observances, and would apply their instincts of self-preservation to the deliberate avoidance of disease."

Many of those directly connected with Elementary Education are apparently considerably prejudiced in favour of existing conditions, though it seems possible to demonstrate a weak link in each chain of argument with which they support their views.

1. *The laudable and increasing desire to co-educate the sexes with the view of starting them fairly in life.* Domestic Economy, which covers some of the desired ground, is at present limited to girls in and above Standard IV., and members of School Boards, School Managers, equally with teachers, favour the

choice of unrestricted "class" subjects, (such as history and geography,) in order that boys and girls may be subjected to an identical mental training. Surely by adopting a somewhat different treatment, wider, yet simpler, of many of the points now included under the term "Domestic Economy," a course of lessons on Elementary Hygiene could be evolved, suitable for either sex, and capable of being advantageously included in the time-table of Mixed or Separate schools; thus removing this objection.

2. *The tendency to under-rate the dignity and value of domestic duties, and failure to appreciate the far-reaching importance of their intelligent performance, or to recognise the intimate connection between healthy family life and sound national prosperity.* This tendency should shortly disappear as the public mind slowly arouses to the duties and obligations of citizenship, and also grasps the economic value of widespread preventive knowledge in health matters. The interest, use, and influence of the subject, too, has been disguised by unnecessary limitations to its directly personal aspect; whereas young people ought to be gradually led on to realise and apply its principles in their important civic relations, being thus prepared eventually to recognise imperial responsibilities for the well-being of Greater Britain.

3. *The opinion that instruction in the laws of health savours of early "specialisation," and is better reserved for study later on in life.* This opens up the question as to whether the principles of a subject which should guide the whole conduct of life can be so described, or could be instilled at too early an age. "As the twig is bent the tree inclines." The evils against which the teaching of such rudimentary sanitation would be directed are among "the deepest rooted habits of the country;" and it is to the *early* excited intolerance of insanitary customs we must look for the rejection of stupid, ignorant prejudice, or for the justification of Local self-government in Health matters. The reports of Evening Continuation Schools, Technical Education Boards, etc., confirm the assertion that, unless interest be aroused in childhood, the chance of the subject being studied in later life has, so far, been remote. The comparatively meagre results perceptible also after many years' hard honest work among adults by Hygiene lecturers under the various County Councils, or Health Associations, are evidence of the serious obstacles to be overcome if life-long habits are to be changed, or even modified.

4. *Lack of interest on the part of the teachers, so that the subject is not invested with its truly attractive attributes.* A consequence arising either from (a) the practical omission of

Sanitary Science from the Training College curriculum. (b) The strain of studies so exacting that little time, and less thought, can be spared for domestic duties, and the regulation of health; "habit, if not necessity, having accustomed them to things non-hygienic," so that a low standard of health is passively accepted as the necessary accompaniment of intellectual life. (c) The circumstance that many teachers are of an age when life's experience has still to be bought, and a fictitious value is apt to be placed upon more showy attainments. (d) The fact that the power of teaching many subjects with equal ability and zeal is possessed only by the few; while practical hygiene pre-eminently demands that its truths shall be impressed by the force of strong individual conviction. (e) The plea that time would not permit of giving really practical lessons; for instance, it is possible—say they—to teach a child in a few minutes to repeat glibly the verbal definition of a "trap," but the claims of more important "grant-earning" subjects forbid devoting the time essential to a practical demonstration upon a gulley trap in the school yard.

These objections to a more general introduction of the subject for which I am pleading are serious and significant. Until the zeal of the teachers is awakened, the interest of their pupils will not be aroused. Would it be feasible to institute courses of lectures in the Training Colleges specially directed towards exciting this dormant interest? The wide practical scope of the subject would have to be emphasised; also its value and bearing in every relation of life; and the increased power to imbibe and apply general information which results from a practice of its tenets. A lecturer animated by absolute conviction, in addition to other qualifications, would be of course indispensable.

5. Again there is *the fear of adding a tittle to the existing burdens either of teachers or taught*; (in truth, a popular argument; for harassed teachers and bewildered, overwrought children are as a nightmare to the community), together with the conviction that the youth of the scholars and the limited time available render quite impossible adequate treatment of so extensive a subject as hygiene, which to be of practical worth, these objectors say, should be grounded on a thoroughly scientific basis.

I am thankful to have the support of several sanitarians and teachers in my belief that the elements of Practical Hygiene, wisely and suitably taught, would have the contrary effect from that so dreaded; that half an hour devoted to this study once or twice a week would prove to be of a recreative rather than of an exhaustive character.

If the subject be entirely confined to Standard IV. and upwards as at present, about one-sixth of the scholars never even have a chance of being introduced to it; and, so long as it remains "optional," the proportion is much larger.

For these reasons it is my earnest hope that weighty influence may be brought to bear to ensure deliberate and careful consideration being given to the strong claims of Elementary Hygiene to be constituted an "obligatory" subject. Many more arguments might be added, though to detail them to this audience would be superfluous; they are self-evident to all those aware of the vast amount of wasted life, health, and energy which raises our poor-rates, fills our hospitals, and exercises its prejudicial influence on our national wealth and prosperity. It is to education we must look to bring home to the people that it rests mainly with themselves to work out their own salvation from sickness, poverty and sorrow, by letting the light and air of hygiene into the dark places of ignorance, apathy, and prejudice. Can such education begin too early in life? The instruction is of equal importance to both sexes, and throughout the country; many miserable hovels in so-called healthy country villages are a match as regards overcrowding and dirt, want of thrift and dense ignorance, wasted food and sickly occupants, for any city slum; and it is against the condonement of these and other evils the rising generation must be armed, if our great population is to have a fair chance in the race for prosperity.

Almost as essential is it to reach and influence those somewhat higher in the social scale, from whose ranks are recruited the millions of the middle-classes; it is unnecessary to speak in detail of the ill-ventilated rooms, want of attention to delicate personal cleanliness, sacrifice of comfort to appearance, and the ignorance visible in the choice, care, and cooking of food, which characterise many fairly well-to-do homes, and steadily undermine the health of their inhabitants; especially as, on this occasion, I must confine myself to the needs and claims of the children in our Primary Schools.

Possibly it is still too soon to expect perceptible results in home life from the very small number of elementary school children who have studied Hygiene as a "specific" subject; but there are those who question in what percentage of cases their intelligence is sufficiently developed to apply the general principles of such knowledge to individual homely facts, or whether undue importance may not be attached by the immature minds to the elaborate laboratory environment of experimental apparatus, so that the ultimate object of domestic application be raised out of the plane of practical politics. Be

this as it may, and whatever the national advantages which may eventually accrue, such advanced teaching is scarcely likely to become general; meanwhile no one can dispute that great public benefit must result from furnishing *each* child with a limited, but sound, equipment of sanitary knowledge. To secure such equipment, however, its provision must not depend upon the whims of Boards or tastes of teachers; it must be esteemed of equal importance with reading or writing, and even more pains taken to ensure its right and intelligent treatment.

Given the realisation of an ideal, and the subject in suitable guise, constituted "obligatory," several teachers of long experience have kindly pointed out to me the facilities which exist for its introduction without upsetting present arrangements; the Leicester School Board has for eight years, shown this possibility; 8,000 girls annually devoting to the study of Domestic Economy the time previously given to parsing and analysis; the teachers being inspired by Mr. Major's (Inspector, Leicester School Board) zeal, and guided by his text-books; indeed, believing as he does, that boys as well as girls could profitably learn the principles of hygiene, he has also compounded a syllabus of the Elementary Science (boys) and Domestic Economy (girls) courses for the use of both sexes conjointly, which is employed in some of the Leicester schools.

The code requires thirty object lessons to be given each year in Standards I., II., III. Some of these might compulsorily be devoted to this all-important subject; better still were facilities given for going over the same ground twice in the year, so impressing the valuable facts by recapitulation, even at the cost of a few more hours. It has been suggested that in the upper Standards the course might easily be introduced as subjects for the weekly composition; the teachers could thereby gauge impressions received, note the relative importance attached to the different points by their pupils, and, possibly, detect their own shortcomings. A system of repetition in these Standards also would be most desirable. Some teachers favour the idea of breaking ground with a Preparatory Reader, to be followed up a few weeks later by a short recapitulatory lecture, furnishing material for the required composition; I would prefer a practical demonstration, however short, to the theoretical preaching of the very best "Readers." It would not seem unreasonable to ask for one lesson a week throughout the School year; but, I believe, to secure this boon for the children, it must be constituted a "grant-earning" subject. In any case, I attach great consequence to the teaching being obligatory for say ten years from now. A grounding in this subject of Elementary Hygiene would during that period be secured

to a whole generation, and if the foundations be well and truly laid, these children should not only be alive to the advantages of building their own lives upon them, but conscious, too, of their responsibilities towards others, so that, when in their turn parents, they would instil and practice at home information and methods which owing to prevalent ignorance must now be learnt at school. Perchance, too, the claims of this simple instruction in Hygiene would by the end of a decade be so widely appreciated and recognised that in spite of being no longer an "obligatory" subject it would never again be crowded out of Time-tables.

The simple lessons should treat of domestic subjects and associations familiar to the children, illustrated by facts and objects drawn from family life; and opportunities should be given for volunteering those scraps of personal information, or that comparison of experiences so dear to the childish heart. The conversational method is much to be commended in this connection, and relieves the tension of sustained attention which frequently interferes with the enjoyment of the most attractive subject. No additional demand need be made upon the teacher's acquirements; the instruction should deal almost entirely, and most simply, with the details of daily life, with which all adults ought to be familiar; taking first the "Home" as the centre of sympathy and shelter; then dwelling on the care essential to its right keeping, pointing out the intimate connection between this and the family well-being; so leading gradually on to the wider outlook and increased responsibilities of the intelligent citizen, concerned in all that works for the good or ill of his fellows. Homeliness of treatment, avoidance of technical and scientific terms, practical illustrations from actual objects or models, thorough "grinding in" of the absolute essentials to health (the details being varied to suit the children's needs), these should be the Keynotes; boys equally with girls sharing the advantages of such training. Believing that a young child's mind deals with concrete and isolated facts rather than with abstractions and the relation of facts, I hold that teaching on the above lines could be most profitably given from Standard I. upwards; remembering that these "commonplaces are new truths to the young, and if wisely handled, form admirable foundations on which character can be built." Many instances have also been furnished me by Mrs. Buckton and others of the good influence exercised in homes by little children taking back Health hints learnt at school to their mothers, and awakening not only their parents' interest, but leading to the inauguration of improved methods of household management.

Possibly the teaching of Domestic Economy is at present confined to girls because the early training of children, as well as the care of the home, comes within a woman's province (though, of course, Hygiene as a "specific" subject is available for both sexes, if they remain sufficiently long in a school where it happens to be selected for advanced pupils). Unfortunately, the training of her children by the lower class woman leaves much to be desired, and would bear with advantage to be supplemented, and intelligently supported, by her husband. Certainly the experience gained from a somewhat wide acquaintance with the homes of farmers, artisans, labourers, and mechanics, throughout England has abundantly demonstrated that the advantages of personal cleanliness, suitable clothing, varied diet, decent habits, and self-restraint need equally careful inculcation on both sexes. The women of a household have a poor chance of success in their ceaseless warfare against dirt and disease when hindered, discouraged, or worse, by the often slovenly or disgusting habits of its male members. The husband frequently plays a more prominent part in the domestic regulation of a working-class home than is the case among higher social grades, and the wife is more dependent on his goodwill to forward her plans for increasing cleanliness and comfort than in larger establishments. For example, the filthy habit of expectoration appears to depend upon more than the remonstrances of women for its discontinuance; perhaps better results would follow the arguments of a respected teacher, who could impress upon his pupils that this defilement of pavement, public conveyances, and rooms is not the hall-mark of manhood. Again, it is only necessary to read the reports of some of our Medical Officers of Health to learn the number of cases in which the chief obstacle in removing an infected child to an Isolation Hospital arises from the ignorant prejudices of the father; and the paternal parent is often as great a sinner as the maternal in foolishly feeding infants on any dainty which may offer, most young parents slowly acquiring some knowledge of the Hygiene of childhood by experimental practice on the health and characters of their families, and observing the effects on the survivors. The connection between dirt-sodden yards and such diseases as typhoid fever and diarrhoea receives ever-increasing substantiation, as does the high phthisis case-rate in foul, ill-ventilated rooms; unity of opinion, and the active co-operation of both men and women, are indispensable if these evils are to be abated by intelligent popular support, and observance of necessary restrictive measures.

Personal experience has taught me that, given the

opportunity, many working men not only possess a ready mind to learn about these things, but that they are frequently more alert to the value of immediate application than is the average woman; which strengthens my conviction that the progress of sanitary reform will be more rapid when such information on these and kindred matters as can be given during the short years of school life shall be extended impartially to the sexes; that the good intentions of well-meaning housewives will have a better chance of support when the necessary knowledge is a mutual possession; and that not till then will the national loss from preventible illness, and the high rate of infantile mortality cease to be a blot on the nation's honour.

Yet one more, and most cogent argument in support of extending this simple teaching to both boys and girls, viz.. the very serious responsibility conferred upon practically the whole community by the recent Local Government Acts. It is sufficiently serious that Imperial politics are allowed to submerge, in the bulk of cases, the contingencies in the balance in Local Government Elections, but additional anxiety is excited in thoughtful minds, when it is realised that an appreciable number of those who serve on the various Councils are virtually ignorant of the matters entrusted for administration to their discretionary powers. To deficient interest in the issues at stake may be attributed, also, the fact that the best and most suitable men and women are not always forthcoming as candidates; nor supported in their claims, when aroused to their duties in this respect. Surely, in this connection alone, even a bird's-eye view of the subject of sanitation would have its advantages; if, to quote Mr. A. J. Balfour, "the small amount of knowledge be learned thoroughly."

Of course, the amount of Hygiene acquired by such teaching as is suggested could only suffice as an introduction to the subject of Sanitary Science, but if the right method of instilling these elementary truths were adopted it should excite that spirit of enquiry which Prof. Michael Foster says, is one aim of teaching, and opens minds to intelligent conviction, so that their future actions are insensibly influenced for good. If the child be but trained to attach due importance to the Laws of Health, though his knowledge of detail and cause be limited, he will nevertheless be prepared to estimate at their right valuation in later life the further developments of the science of Hygiene, upon which he may have to form a judgment affecting the lives of thousands for good or ill.

It is my privilege to be engaged, with the approval of the Council of this Institute, in the preparation of a scheme of

instruction in Elementary Hygiene embodying the, to my mind, absolute essentials in an education which aims both at qualifying individuals for every day work and training them into complete citizens. Time only permits me to submit the outline to you this evening, though I would like to say that notes of each lesson, showing method, illustrations, &c., have been submitted to, and the ideas kindly approved by, Professors of Hygiene and Chemistry, Medical Officers of Health, school teachers of experience, and others interested in educational matters.

Briefly, the Home is taken as the axis around which both family and civic life revolve, and starting in Standard I. with the idea of this Home as the cosy shelter for warmth, rest, and happiness, attention is directed year by year to the essentials of a healthy, happy house; its necessary comforts and conveniences, such as light, air, space, cleanliness, its aspect, surroundings, rent, repairs, fittings, &c., a slight outline of the protection afforded to all by our Public Health laws being given in Standards VI. and VII. Dirt Dangers in the person, home, and community are selected for Subject II., Cleanliness and Comfort for Subject III., Air, Food, and Water follow on, supplemented by some teaching on the respective values and importance of judicious Rest, Work, and Play. The series being concluded by Lessons on the Care of the Person, Preservation of Health, and the Health of the Community, thus the subjects run as in the Table at pp. 248 & 249—(a Specimen Lesson is also appended, pp. 250 & 251).

Each of the ten points is gradually developed through the Standards, the parts being dovetailed into a fairly complete whole, the treatment and illustrations being bright, familiar, and I trust lucid, hard words and scientific terms being studiously avoided, and each lesson intended to be freely illustrated by homely facts as well as, almost invariably, by models, objects, and pictures, diagrams but rarely. I would suggest that the models and pictures be displayed only during the lesson to which they refer. Familiarity of eye rapidly breeds contempt, or, more exactly, the familiar objects cease to impress the brain. Most strongly I advocate the use in every possible case of school fittings and appliances as illustrations. In most instances natural ventilation, room cleaning, the care of sanitary conveniences and sinks, cleanliness of person and surroundings can be vividly impressed on the children's memories by school properties. I have endeavoured carefully to avoid in my illustrations objects unknown to an ordinary child, I mean in domestic life, though some latitude

must be allowed for the different environments of town and country children.

It is my earnest hope that this method of instilling the laws of health will not be condemned as "withdrawing children from that general teaching upon which the success of all higher technical training must ultimately depend," "or as concentrating their attention upon special subjects" which they are too young to understand or to put to any practical use. Too few people give a thought to the pitifully low standard of health among wage-earners, or, as Professor Marshall emphasises, how seriously the difficulties of raising it are increased by the ignorance and deep-rooted prejudices prevalent among those whose conditions of existence need no such additional handicaps to hamper their struggle for a livelihood. The children of our industrial classes are early familiar with these difficulties and inoculated with these prejudices. From infancy they are face to face with practical domestic details, which do not come before those in a higher social position till many years later. It is, therefore, for them this teaching is intended and is so infinitely to be desired; indeed, I rely to a certain degree for its success upon the familiarity of the pupils with some aspects of the subject brought before them, and venture to anticipate good results from the interest aroused by a recognition of home perplexities and suggestions for their removal.

"Teaching of this kind ought to, and will," wrote Charles Kingsley, "be held a necessary element in the school course of every child, just as necessary as reading, writing and arithmetic; for it is after all the most necessary branch of that 'technical education' of which we hear so much just now, namely, the technic, or art, of keeping oneself alive and well."

Necessarily the value of the treatment in detail must depend mainly upon the zeal and conscientiousness of the teacher; and a free hand and full scope should be allowed for application to local conditions. On this point I lay great stress; no text-book could possibly provide for every contingency; the notes of lessons can be only suggestive. All health lecturers well know the paramount necessity of acquainting themselves with local conditions, such as class of house, type of window and sanitary convenience, method of refuse disposal, source of water supply, prevalence of disease, and so forth; and to this knowledge of their audience's circumstances, and to the consequent possibility of proposing feasible applications of their teaching, is attributable the interest aroused at the time, and the encouragement which they obtain from results. So, in our Elementary Schools, certain broad principles can be laid

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