Hygiene of women and children

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HYGIENE
OF
WOMEN AND CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

DURING the last half-century or more there has been a great expansion of the whole subject of Hygiene. This has taken place both in the depth and extent of our knowledge and of our practice. When the early reformers commenced their work their efforts were directed to the improvement of the general conditions which concerned the community as a whole. They worked for, and secured, great advances in communal cleanliness—that is, in the general cleansing of the streets, improvement in the water-supply and drainage, and also in the methods of dealing with infectious disease. It was, in fact, mainly with a view to the prevention of epidemics that they pressed for the amelioration of the other conditions. The latter part of last century witnessed the consolidation of a number of Public Health Acts and the development of the legal powers necessary for communal hygiene by the formation of Local Sanitary Authorities.

The first step, therefore, was that of undertaking for the people of any district work which, from its nature, could not be undertaken by any one individual, but required the collective efforts of the community. The present generation is apt to take communal hygiene for granted, and perhaps hardly realizes how much has been accomplished. Unfortunately, it is necessary to add that a very great deal remains to be done, especially in some of the great industrial towns and in the rural parts of many counties. We know the advantages of good sanitation; anyone can see them for himself, since it is usually provided in the residential areas of those towns whose poorer areas are in great need of improvement. We know how disease takes hold and spreads in dirty, overcrowded areas; how, for example, the children in those
parts suffer from summer diarrhoea out of all proportion to the children in areas of good sanitation. We can see, if we will, the troubles of the housewife with dirt and flies, and the impossibility of providing adequately for family comfort in the insanitary and incommodious houses found in many congested areas.

All this is dealt with in numerous text-books, and he who runs may read. While nurses, health visitors, and other sanitary workers may see the ill effects of bad sanitation, it is a subject which should be studied and made their own by women, and every effort should be made to secure improvements where they are needed.

In this book passing references only have been made to general sanitation—just to point out how general sanitation affects the individual.

The next development of the whole subject of Hygiene was along certain special lines—the hygiene of the child at various ages. Thus, the school medical service deals with the child of school age, the infant welfare work started on the infant after birth, and spread backwards to the mother and onwards to the child of school age. As a whole, the subject had arisen and had of necessity been dealt with, as it were, in sections of the community. Again, we have the special arrangements for dealing with tuberculosis and venereal disease, all on communal lines.

A community is, however, made up in the aggregate of families, and these of individuals, and it is to the individual and the home that attention has been directed in this book. After all, it is to the individual that we must come in the end for any concerted effort. General public health measures will only carry us a certain way—they must be the first step—but the final step must be by the individual. It has been well said that people can be made neither healthy nor sober by Act of Parliament. Acts of Parliament are, however, essential in dealing with the impediments which prevent individuals from working out their own salvation, but they cannot effect this.

Much breaking up of ground still remains to be done under
the various Acts of Parliament which are now in operation for
the improvement of the health of the people as a whole. But
the time seems to have come when the note of individual
hygiene should be sounded more loudly than has hitherto
been the case. It is with a view to giving what is hoped
may be some aid in this direction that this book has been
undertaken. A good many important investigations have
been carried out of recent years which have enlarged our
knowledge of the whole subject, and an effort has been
made to collect this material and to present it, so far as
may be, in a simple and practical form.

Of all the branches of hygiene that of the individual is,
I fear, the most difficult in practice. If carried out as it
should be, it makes demands upon the person of a far-
reaching nature. It is not known by instinct, and knowledge
is required; but knowledge is of no use without practice, and
the practice of personal hygiene implies self-control and
often self-denial. Our desires are not always in the direction
of health, but the contrary, and those who would retain
health must often control their natural tendencies. Self-
control is not a marked feature of present-day life in general,
although both health and happiness are frequently lost by
allowing free rein to fancies and desires. Often, no doubt,
it is due largely to ignorance, because the reason for taking
care of the body has not been appreciated.

It is hoped that some of the difficulty of obtaining in-
formation may be met by this book. So far as possible, no
branch of hygiene on which information was already easily
obtainable has been dealt with other than in passing. In
infant hygiene it may be thought that the last remark does
not hold, but it is hoped that some points are brought for-
ward here, upon which information has not, as yet, been
readily accessible. The same remark applies to the chapters
on milk. There are, of course, numerous large works upon
this subject, but they can scarcely be held to be readily
accessible. Hence it was decided to insert some chapters on
this subject. It is a wide branch of hygiene, and has been
condensed so as to deal with only the more important
aspects which are necessary for an intelligent appreciation of the reasons for dealing as is suggested with milk in the home, and when used as the sole food for infants.

It had originally been intended to insert one or two chapters upon sex hygiene and the physiology of the reproductive system. While the book was being written the whole subject has come very much to the front, and a number of books on special aspects of the subject have been issued. It would have been necessary, if dealt with at all, to consider the whole question at greater length than had been originally intended. The alternative was to omit the whole, as being in a sense a special branch and requiring more elaborate treatment than was possible in the space available, and this was the course selected.

There is no intention of suggesting that sex is not closely interwoven with the whole question of personal hygiene. Rather is it of such importance as to require special handling.

While this book is intended especially for nurses and health visitors, it is hoped that teachers and individuals will find it of general assistance to them in their work or in their daily life.

Throughout, the practice has been to refer constantly to other chapters and to endeavour by this means to draw attention to the interweaving of the various parts of the subject.

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