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“Woman’s Work in Promoting
the Cause of Hygiene.”

(STATE HYGIENE—SEC. IX.)

PAPER READ BY

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WOMAN'S WORK IN PROMOTING THE CAUSE OF HYGIENE.

CO-OPERATION WITH MEN.

THE vast strides which have been made in hygiene during the past few years have been due to the growing conviction that an intelligent knowledge of hygiene and its kindred sciences is essential to the physical and moral well-being of the people of our land, that the nation's health is the nation's best wealth.

Such a representative gathering as this Congress, comprising as it does all the experts and most thoughtful men of the day upon matters affecting individual and public health, proves that this conviction is having a practical outcome.

Each man present, by bringing the results of his research and experience, shows that he is actuated by the best and highest of motives, namely, a desire to improve the condition of his fellow-creatures.

The few words which it is in my province to say to-day, however, are more especially to deal with women's work in promoting the cause of hygiene.

Congresses on health are most valuable to the advocates of sanitary reform and to those making scientific experiments, but surely it is obvious to all that the efforts of such men will in many respects be almost valueless if unaided by the intelligent co-operation of women.

It is not given to many women to possess that wonderful mathematical ability which last year placed a

woman in the unprecedented position of heading the Mathematical Tripos List at Cambridge ; but women—all women—do possess an ability which, if trained and exercised, has an immense influence for good upon those dependent upon their household, sanitary, and hygienic knowledge. Co-operation with men implies this knowledge, not a mere vague “rule of thumb” knowledge, but a clear, definite, scientific knowledge, the application of which is necessary to the comfort and maintenance of health in themselves, their husbands, their children, and their servants.

Doubtless each one among us can point to women of our acquaintance who are all that can be desired in this respect, the designers, the regulators, and the mainspring of health and comfort in their homes ; but we must not overlook the fact that these are bright examples standing out among a number of those who are quite the opposite.

Some of these “bright examples” have gained their knowledge by a troubled experience ; they have worked out for themselves the solution to many domestic problems as their grandmothers did before them. Knowledge thus gained is very valuable, and not likely to be forgotten, but it is the possession of the few, and it is not based upon a knowledge of principles.

Others, from having studied these principles, have found their work much easier. It must be our aim to make the study of these general, so that it shall be rather the exception to find a mistress of a house ignorant of them.

In domestic economy and hygiene, as in any other subject, a thorough theoretical knowledge of “the reason why” best prepares the way for actual practical work, saves time, and leads to more valuable results.

And with regard to servants: mistresses who are acquainted with intelligent methods connected with cookery, cleaning, the care of children, and the health of the home generally, will find that they have better servants than if they were themselves ignorant. Their servants find that badly performed duties will not be

passed over, and they are much more likely to endeavour to improve in the service of a really clever mistress, whilst they would be content to go on in their ignorance, indifferent and careless as to mischievous results, in the service of a mistress who is herself ignorant of vital principles.

WOMEN'S WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, AS NURSES, TEACHERS, LECTURERS ON HYGIENE, &c.

Having spoken of women's work in their capacity as mistresses of the home, let us glance at their work in the cause of hygiene outside the home. Of all the numerous fields of work thrown open to women, I know of none which seems more suited to absorbing a large share of their outside interest than that of spreading a knowledge of hygiene.

In town and country the need is the same. Women who make it the daily work of their lives to go about doing good should not forget that the conversion to higher things can scarcely be hoped for whilst the life of the body is endangered by the unchecked presence of the active means for propagating ill-health and disease.

Women who work as district visitors, as promoters of mothers' meetings, as organisers of clubs for girls, such as the Hon. Maude Stanley's Club, and the Honor Club in London, have innumerable opportunities for making known the simple laws of health, and it is their positive duty not to let these opportunities pass. Let them do their best to save their fellow creatures from ill-health, disease, and pestilence. Let them, by teaching the simple laws of health, and the means of obtaining home-comfort, if not by the actual teaching of household management, endeavour to improve and raise the physical condition of the population.

Trained nurses, who are educated in sanitary matters, whether engaged in district or private work, may do much to quietly promote the cause of hygiene; and many, I believe, impressed with the importance of their mission in this respect, are doing good work.

Teachers in schools, by giving direct instruction in hygiene, may do much to awaken an interest, and to make the girls under them realise the importance of the responsibilities which will devolve upon them in after life.

When distributing the prizes at a large girls' school some time ago, the Bishop of Manchester said, "I would have domestic economy, hygiene, and physiology taught as part of the ordinary curriculum of every girls' school." That remark I heartily endorse. It is a matter for congratulation that those subjects are being included in the prospectuses of many of our leading girls' schools in England.

The Privy Council on Education, by the encouragement they are giving to technical education, are doing something for girls attending board and other public elementary schools. Direct practical teaching by trained qualified teachers is given in laundry work, cookery, and needlework. Theoretical teaching is also given in domestic economy and hygiene. In the latter subjects, the teachers give some proof of their theoretical knowledge by passing either the Queen's Scholarship or Government Certificate Examination in domestic economy, or the Science and Art Department Examination in hygiene. In the residential training colleges for female teachers a certificate must be signed by the lady superintendent of each college, stating that each student has done some practical domestic work during the year; but from my large experience in training large classes of students, I am in a position to say that the students, in many cases, do not take much interest in the performance of this practical work. It may be that the reason is, no ambition to excel is excited. All their other practical work is tested by examiners and inspectors, the needlework by a lady expert, cookery by an inspectress. Would it not be well if the students knew that their domestic and hygienic knowledge would be also tested by a competent inspectress? Such an arrangement by the Privy Council might have the effect of further promoting the cause of hygiene among the masses by means

of the female teachers. No means, however small, should be neglected for getting at the masses. In the past, many thousands have been sacrificed upon the altar of ignorance—ignorance of matters relating to sanitation, diet, fresh air, cleanliness. Those days of actual ignorance have passed away, we hope, for ever. But the awakening is not yet universal.

PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS FOR PROMOTING HYGIENE.

Women anxious to do something in this direction have formed "Ladies' Sanitary Associations," and have done valuable work in particular districts, but the matter is a serious national one.

Recognising this, the National Health Society was formed in London some years ago for the diffusion of sanitary and hygienic knowledge among all classes. The work of the society has been growing until it has succeeded in reaching all classes, from the highest downwards. Its teaching is given in the drawing-rooms of duchesses, and in the homes of the very poor. Its secretary, its officers, and most of its lecturers are women. Down into the very poorest districts of London, away into rural villages, the cottages of labourers, outlying school-rooms and farmhouses, they carry the information and practical knowledge which is listened to with eager attention, and not only listened to. Again and again, have the lecturers found their suggestions and hints being acted upon. We talk to the women in simple language, and they tell their difficulties, and ask advice from the lady who talks to them in such a homely way. As an illustration from personal experience, I may say that after the last such "homely talk" (I will not say lecture), given by myself in Whitechapel, quite 60 out of nearly 200 extremely poor women present remained behind to ask questions. It was quite pathetic to see how the desire to know how the home may be made and kept healthy exists. I noted specially that the questions nearly always included something about drains. These poor creatures do not know that the best drains

are those which require no disinfectants. They do know, however, that they have something called "drains," and they calmly accept the idea that, being drains, they must emit a bad smell, and so they begged, "Please will you write down the name of that stuff for drains." The Committee of the National Health Society are not only national in name, but are national in spirit, and their influence has spread to many parts of the country. They would gladly carry their humanizing work throughout the length and breadth of the land, but they need such local co-operation as has been recently given to them by the county council for North Devon, by whose arrangement the society sent 15 of their lady lecturers, during May, June, and July, throughout the county to teach cottage cookery, and the simple means for maintaining a healthy existence. The enthusiastic work of these ladies and their sympathetic and homely method of dealing with the ignorant poor have already produced large results in the increase of home comfort in the Devonshire villages. Paley said, "Virtue is the doing good to mankind;" surely women, who by their teaching are raising the material and moral standard of their fellow creatures, exemplify this.

WOMEN'S POSSIBLE WORK AS FACTORY INSPECTRESSES, WHERE WOMEN, GIRLS, AND CHILDREN ARE EMPLOYED.

And now, having stated what women are at present doing, it is only fair to mention that there are other paths in which, if opportunity were given to them, their work in the cause of Hygiene might be extended so as to prove of immense practical value to the working women of our country. I specially refer to the work they could do as Inspectresses of Factories in which women and children are employed. Thousands of women are working in factories, dressmakers', and other workrooms under conditions which are wholly opposed to the laws of health, and which must tend to the physical deterioration of the working classes of England. That women's work-

shops cannot be really efficiently inspected by men is a serious fact. A fact which has been realized in the United States,—women now being employed there as inspectresses. It has been said that men are telescopic—that women are microscopic; certainly women's patience in attending to small details would prove of great value in probing the evils which are without doubt prevalent in some of the sweating dens of London, and I believe that the nation would distinctly gain by the appointment of women as inspectresses of factories and workshops where female labour is employed.

It can and ought to be rendered impossible for such evils to exist. Earnest educated women are ready to forego some of the comfort of their daily life in the interests of their sisters whose lines are not at any time cast in pleasant places. Work is a necessary condition of their lives, but it is not a necessary condition that their work should be largely attended with discomfort and that it should bring about ill-health.

In conclusion, let me once again refer to and emphasise the necessity for that co-operation which is the basis of success when the greatest good for the greatest number has to be considered, the co-operation of men and women. Men, as they should be, are the pioneers of sanitary and hygienic reform; but they may sit in council, they may originate schemes, they may bring legislation to their aid, and they will find that most of their efforts are as a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, if they enlist not the sympathies and aid of women. When women are informed and interested they seem to be by nature sanitarians, and, as Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson has said, they are allies of the first order, but when not informed and not interested, they are silent opponents which no man nor sanitary board can withstand. Though not themselves eligible for seats on local sanitary boards, in women's hands the health of the nation lies. May we not hope that the impetus given to the cause of health by this Congress will be instrumental in stirring up those women of England who may not yet have realised the responsibilities which are theirs—

theirs by right—responsibilities which may be classed, indeed, as the highest *privileges*, and the noblest of all women's rights, the exercise of which will beneficially affect, not only their immediate circle, but humanity at large. As my paper deals primarily with women's work in promoting the cause of hygiene, I may, perhaps, be pardoned for substituting the feminine for the masculine gender in my concluding words—

“Women never nearer to the goddesses attain,
Than in the art of giving health to men.”



