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*The Urgent Need of Sanitary Education
in the Public Schools*

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THE URGENT NEED OF SANITARY EDUCATION
IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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BY

MRS. ELLEN H. RICHARDS, Boston, Mass.

BEFORE THE

American Public Health Association

AT A MEETING HELD IN

OTTAWA, SEPT. 27-30, 1898.

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THE URGENT NEED OF SANITARY EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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If any one lesson stands out more prominently than another as taught by the experience in the recent war with Spain, it is that the average American citizen has not accepted the teaching of sanitary science as a part of his creed. Since it has been made so painfully evident that the diffusion of knowledge through the public print and by lectures and conventions has failed to reach the people, the remedy for this ignorance is to be found in securing the correct teaching of the elements of public hygiene in the public schools of the country. By this means alone will the entire population be reached and the habits which make for health be inculcated while the mind is plastic enough to receive and retain a new idea.

At this time, when every state in the Union is suffering the loss of men from preventable disease and is paying larger sums of money for the care of the sick soldiers than was paid for the support of the fighting men, there is a good opportunity to preach the gospel of preventive medicine.

A first essential for the teaching of the elements of sanitary science in the public schools is a school house in which every principle given is *not* illustrated by a *violation* of said teaching.

Why should our soldiers have believed that it made any difference what water they drank when they had been accustomed to the conditions prevalent in nine-tenths of the school yards in this country?

Why should the men on the transports have taken pains to keep the deck clean when they have been accustomed to dirty school-room floors, dirty school yards and streets littered with rubbish all their lives?

It was the ignorance and unbelief of the *men* which made the task of those officers, who knew, so hard, and we must assume that ignorance and unbelief existed even among the officers, else such a state of things could not have existed as has stamped the country with a brand of disgrace which it will take years to wear off.

Clean school houses, clean streets and special education cost money which municipal officials claim it is impossible to get, but the fact should be brought home to the community that the cost of needless

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sickness and death among our soldiers would have paid for the cleaning of every school house in the land, and the amount of the pension money will be more than sufficient to keep them clean.

Is it not, then, a patriotic duty for this Association to urge the matter of public school education and to appoint a committee to prepare a small primer, which shall contain the essential principles of preventive medicine which can be as universally taught as is first aid to the injured? That there is need of this spur to public opinion is shown by the following extract from the report of the meeting of the Boston School Board, August 20, 1898:

"Regarding improved heating, etc., in the — school district, the committee reported that the work, in view of the limited appropriations, should be deferred for the present.

"Dr. — hoped that this would not be voted. He stated that in the — street school house, in that district, the sanitary condition is deplorable. 'The plumbing of one of the sinks,' he went on to say, 'was disconnected last winter, and the pipe has remained open up to the present time. The closets are directly under one of the school rooms, and the foul odors come into the rooms. A teacher has been advised by her physician not to go there this fall on the opening of the school unless something is done to remedy this evil.'

"Dr. — asked that at least \$25 be appropriated to connect that plumbing. 'A peppermint test,' he said, 'has been made, showing that sewer gases have free access to the basement where the children play.' This condition he characterized as an outrage.

"Mr. — stated that if the matter was left to the committee it would do all possible to connect the plumbing. 'We cannot do things without money,' he said, 'and we have to pick out those things that are absolutely necessary. We know that the plumbing in many of the school houses is not what it should be. Bills left over from last year have to be paid, and we have only money enough to keep the school houses wind and water tight.'

"The report was accepted and the recommendation that the work be deferred was adopted."

Among the questions issued each year to the health officers of the towns should be found those calling attention to the condition of school buildings and the need of public education in sanitary matters.

The volunteer soldier's ignorance of food values and food preparation was even greater than his ignorance of the most evident of sanitary principles.

Good cooking would have undoubtedly postponed, if not prevented, the outbreak of fever. It is evident that the state troops should have instruction in camp cooking as an important feature of the annual

encampment. It is also evident that the luxurious habits of Americans in general have weakened their stomachs, so that much time and out-of-door life are required before they can digest the wholesome army ration, even when of good quality. The examination for the army should include the digestive capacity, for the man with dainty appetite has no more place in the army than the man with a bicycle heart. Whether the reported statement of one of the Rough Riders is literally true or not, it conveys the truth we should emphasize.

“The reason Roosevelt has not lost flesh is his great eating capacity. He can eat anything, and lots of it. When there was only hardtack and bacon, he ate hardtack and bacon as if that was just what he had been hungry for for a month. That’s the reason he was not laid up with the fever.”

The duty and responsibility of the healthy man for his own and other’s health is, just now, to see that all school children are taught to prepare and relish the simple wholesome food which alone can give a sound body.





