

## Anti-Tuberculosis Work in the Pittsburgh Public Schools.\*

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The value of public education in anti-tuberculosis work can hardly be over-estimated, since it is to an enlightened public we must look for the prevention and control of this dread malady. Much has been said and written on the best methods of this sort of education, and the systematic campaigns carried on in some of our smaller cities, such as Yonkers, as well as in New York, Boston, and Baltimore, are surely examples of the best methods, and are most encouraging in their results.

While the educational work in Pittsburgh has never reached the degree of organisation found in many other cities, it does have one feature which is absolutely unique, and can be recommended as a very satisfactory means of education—that is, an attempt to give systematic instruction in the cause and prevention of tuberculosis to school children.

In Dr. Trudeau's address at the First National Convention, he advocates teaching the public school children the main facts relating to the transmission of tuberculosis and hygienic measures of prevention. If many tuberculosis infections have their inception in childhood, and remain latent until some period of lowered vitality, we can hardly teach children at too early an age hygienic measures of prevention.

Surely, if every school child in our city could be taught the simplest facts of preventive medicine, and urged to tell his parents why it is best to boil the drinking water, why certified milk, though more expensive, is cheaper in the long run, and why we have anti-spitting and disinfection laws, the public health would be benefited in proportion to the enthusiasm of the teaching. For too many years effective legislation with regard to municipal hygiene has been thwarted, because the people ask not "How many lives will this law save?" but "How much money will it cost?" Teach the children that a pure water supply is cheap at any cost; that effective tenement house inspection will lower the death-rate; that municipal parks, where the people of the crowded districts may breathe fresh air, are cheaper than municipal hospitals to care for the sick; and you have done much to teach the future law-makers of the city that health is of more importance than money.

It is a difficult undertaking for an organisa-

tion with absolutely no connection with the city's school system, and the Tuberculosis League of Pittsburgh has none, to introduce into the schools talks on a disease, and particularly such an objectionable disease as tuberculosis. In the first place, it seems to be generally thought that a greater knowledge of this malady will create a greater fear of contracting it, a fear almost amounting to a phobia. What little reason there is for this fear is overcome by omitting all discussion of symptoms, and symptoms are in no way an essential topic in a talk on the cause and prevention of tuberculosis. Another difficulty encountered is the fact that any talk on the prevention of this disease must deal with the proper disposal of sputum, and this subject must be approached with the greatest care, or the children become disgusted. Every school-teacher knows that too vigorous denunciation of a habit often encourages it. To say to a child: "Don't spit on the sidewalk," and to be continually reiterating this command, is often the surest way of making him break it.

Even if these obstacles of presenting the subject were overcome, there remained the greater one—that of obtaining permission to enter the schools. Pittsburgh is divided into forty-three school districts, and each district is governed by its own school board. There is a Central Board of Education, but it has little power over the individual districts. The Tuberculosis Hospital is not widely known in educational circles; the very idea of talking about tuberculosis in the schoolroom is regarded with suspicion if not with disfavour by many of the boards; the idea that the children are already overburdened with subjects, and can ill afford the time to listen to a health talk, has to be controverted; and many boards have to be met and convinced that we are not propagating a money-making scheme; that we are not advertising a patent medicine, and that we will not "waste" more than twenty or thirty minutes of the children's time. The boards, when they fully understand our project, however, are uniformly kind and considerate, and help to further the work in many ways.

Our work in the public schools is divided into three parts—lectures, literature, and exhibitions.

We have felt from the first that it could have little lasting value without the co-operation of the teachers. We may teach the child the value of fresh air and sunshine, may tell him of dust and its dangers, but unless the teacher emphatically sets the stamp of her approval on what has been said, it will do no good.

\* Read at the International Congress on Tuberculosis, Washington, U.S.A.

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