

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

WHAT INSTRUCTION IN PERSONAL HYGIENE WOULD YOU GIVE A SCHOOL CHILD TEN YEARS OF AGE?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Ména G. Bielby, Cranford.

PRIZE PAPER.

Instruction in personal hygiene to a child of ten years should be arranged on basic lines, so that the structure may be enlarged gradually from day to day without disturbing the foundations. To achieve the best results hygienic teaching should be of a threefold nature. Body, mind, and spirit are too closely interwoven, acting and reacting on each other, to be separately educated. The earliest lessons should make clear to the child that self-knowledge, self-reverence, and self-control (knowledge, love, power) are absolutely necessary, in our present state of civilization, to the maintenance of a high standard of health.

The first principle to establish in a child's mind with regard to personal hygiene is that his body is a temple; that it is not his own to misuse, but is entrusted to him to maintain in the highest possible state of efficiency and purity.

A ten-year-old child of intelligence is quite capable of receiving an outline of elementary physiology. Without this scientific groundwork the imagination would have too much play, and lead to confusion of thought. A simple explanation of microbes, their harmfulness or beneficence, should be given. This should lead up to detailed instruction in the right care of the teeth, nostrils, hair, hands, especially the finger nails, and the right method of breathing. A lesson in the functions of the skin should explain why a daily bath is desirable, and why at least a daily washing of the whole body should be practised, with special attention to the feet; also why clothing should be frequently changed, and well aired when not in wear.

Instruction touching growth and nutrition should include a simple account of the chief processes of digestion. The right manner of eating and drinking should be taught, laying stress on the advantages of Fletcherism. The importance of sufficient sleep and open-air exercise should be explained, and how growth depends greatly on this, as well as on the amount of oxygen supplied during sleep. The evils of living and sleeping rooms with closed windows should be expatiated on, and the reasons taught for arranging bedclothing that is light and only sufficiently warm. A right carriage, with head up and shoulders held back, as well as the right way of sitting and standing, should be taught, with reasons.

The supreme importance of rational clothing should be impressed on the child, especially if a girl. The lifelong results of the follies of fashion by deforming footwear, corsets, and tight clothing should be clearly pointed out; also the injuries caused by inadequate clothing or the other extreme. In the matter of attire it is well to establish firmly in a child's mind the axiom that *what is fit is fine*.

Most children are inclined to acquire little nervous tricks. They should be warned of the increasing tenacity of such habits, and should be helped to nip them in the bud.

Many children who find nothing alluring in the scientific side of personal hygiene will respond readily to an æsthetic presentment of the subject; and for this type of child stress should be laid on the æsthetic value of health.

The psychological side of personal hygiene may be just touched. A child can understand that ugly thoughts and temper poison the blood and so injure the health, and cause unhappiness to those who indulge in them. Also that it is the thoughts which hour by hour inexorably grave those lines on the face which are to determine its appearance at maturity.

The question of instruction in sex-hygiene for young children is still a controversial one as to amount and method. Personally, I have found the difficulty satisfactorily solved by answering all a child's questions truthfully, no matter how early in life he may begin to ask. "Better a year too soon than an hour too late." It should never be forgotten that, human nature being what it is, if a child is denied desired information he will *not* wait, but will go in search of it elsewhere. The consequences of leaving him to the mercy of whatever evil influences and teaching he may chance to encounter—and they are legion—are set forth in their appalling horror in the evidence concerning venereal diseases. Against the weight of this any possible dangers of too early sex-teaching are as nothing in the scale.

Undoubtedly mothers are the rightful teachers of this special knowledge; but until they are educated up to the level of their high opportunities, trained nurses and school teachers should endeavour to supply the deficiency.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Lucy C. Cooper, Miss Alice M. Burns, Miss J. Robinson, Miss P. Thompson, Miss L. Hodson.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

Name four of the greatest causes of discomfort to a patient after an abdominal operation. How relieve them?

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