

HYGIENE OF THE MIND

AN ADDRESS GIVEN BY DR. JAMES THIRD.

Before the Frontenac Teachers' Convention—Tendency to Forget That the Child Has a Body As Well As a Mind.

The following paper on "The Hygiene of the Mind" was read before the Frontenac teachers' convention by Dr. James Third, of Kingston:

The adult human brain weighs from forty-five to fifty ounces. With the exception of the liver it is the heaviest organ in the body. The weight of man's brain has not increased since early Paleolithic times, but its powers and qualities have been, and are, steadily developing. The brain is made up of units, which we call cells. At birth these cells are more or less independent. As the mind develops strands of fibres are thrown out and connections made between different cells and different groups of cells. It is estimated that the average brain has no less than 3,000 millions of cells. The human mind is incapable of taking in the ideas of even a million units. We cannot imagine, therefore, the complex mechanism of the human brain. If all the telegraph and telephone batteries and instruments in the world, with all their communicating wires, were thrown together and worked in harmonious relationship, it would be a mechanism not to be compared with the human brain in complexity. The fact is, the human brain is the most wonderful and most complex mechanism in all nature, and, moreover, that complexity is increasing with intellectual development. The more highly developed the intellect the more cells the brain contains and the more complex the connecting net work. An idiot has relatively few cells, and usually these are badly formed. Every movement of the body is governed from the brain, and the brain is the motor centre of the body. Early in life the brain cells group themselves together for certain functions. These groups we call "centres." Certain centres, or groups of cells preside over motion of the body; these are known as "motor" centres, certain ones over general sensation, and these are known as "sensory" centres; and again certain ones over the special senses—"special sense" centres.

Now I have said that the brain governs all our movements. If the motor centre in the brain, for say the right arm, were destroyed, the right arm would be permanently paralyzed. Nor is that all. If the arm were amputated, at say the age of eight, the motor centre in the brain, for that arm, would not develop. You will observe, then, the happy combination of action and reaction between the brain and the muscles, and you will perhaps understand the better, why kindergarten and allied exercises are necessary for the proper development for the child's brain. The phonograph offers a somewhat distant analogy of some of these brain processes. We have, first of all, voice with all its modulations, then the tiny electric wires to convey the energy—the auditory nerves—and next the phonographic plate—that is a row of brain cells—to receive the impression. Then there must be a considerable number of these phonographic plates—and lastly we must have them assorted ready for use. What piles of phonographic records lie assorted in every human brain! Perhaps not all carefully assorted; we have met disorderly brains. The material was good enough but it lacked arrangement.

To Develop The Cells.

Now the function of the teacher is to develop in an orderly way these cells, and to extend the communicating lines that binds them together for harmonious work. Make the right connections between these brain cells and you have good conduct; make wrong connections and you have bad conduct. You will observe, then, that there is a physical basis for conduct. It need scarcely be pointed out to teachers' association that no two brains contain the same number of cells, or are capable of the same development. It is a waste of time and worse to attempt uniformity here. To a certain extent we must allow each brain to unfold in its natural way. It is a foolish notion of some modern educational theorists, that every boy in the image of God, is capable of developing into an intellectual giant, providing his mental training is properly directed. These faddists disregard entirely heredity. Every child's brain has from the beginning through heredity and innate capacity, fixed limitations, beyond which no effort, no teaching and no favorable environment will make it any stronger, or more powerful.

The hygiene taught in our schools is largely the hygiene of the body and as far as it goes, good enough, perhaps, but surely this complex organization, this main-spring of our joys and sorrows, of our loves and hates, and of life itself, merits some more serious consideration, than it has been our wont to give it. No text book on hygiene is complete, without several chapters on hygiene of the mind. Perhaps few outside of a small section of the medical profession—the alienists and neurologists—realize this pressing need. This is essentially an age of materialism. The mad rush for wealth by men, and women too, is responsible for the creation of conditions of life on this North American continent, the very tendency of which is to undermine the mental status of the individual, and, thereby, of the nation. We are inclined to forget amid the rapid development of material interests in this country, the true secret of a nation's life. The measure of a community's or a nation's value to the world, lies not in its great wheat belt, nor in rich Cobalt mines, however important these may be, but in its moral and intellectual standards, which alone are imperishable. We have a disease in this country, known as neurasthenia—nervous prostration—misdirected nervous energy would be a better name. It was first described by an American physician, and has for years been known as "The American Disease," because here it flourishes. It is largely the result of

bad methods of education, improper home training during childhood, and the so-called strenuous life in after years.

Tottering At Asylums' Gates.

Nervous energy is everywhere taxed to its uttermost. Time and again, children have been brought to me by mothers, who venture a diagnosis of "all run down" when as a matter of fact they are "all wound up." Their nervous energy has been overtaxed—their days are fidgety and restless—their nights sleepless. The same may be said of adults. The natural result of these social conditions is an appeal to stimulants and narcotics.

The practice to which this high-pressure civilization prompts, of taking stimulants of various kinds, during the day, in order that the round of duty may be performed, and then when night draws on, of goading the tired and jaded system into sleep with a portion of bromide, cannot long be continued, and the mental status of the nation be preserved and respected. This is no idle dream. Such conditions we have. Such conditions are the keys that unlock the gates to nervous ruin, that swing wide open the asylum doors. Perhaps you are not aware that in every three hundred of our Canadian population is to be found in our asylums, public and private, and that thousands more are tottering at the gate.

Statistics show that in the province of Ontario in 1891 there were in our public asylums 3,085 men and 2,770 women, a total of 5,855. In 1907 there were 2,931 men and 3,159 women, a total of 6,090—an increase of 235. These are probably 1,000 more in our private asylums. I have not the actual figures by me, but I doubt whether the population of the province has increased proportionately.

One of the great causes of insanity in European countries is physical disease, especially syphilis. In Canada this is a causal factor in only a very small percentage of cases. To heredity, faulty social conditions, and weak points in our educational system must be attributed the large share. The figures I have cited do not include the insane in our penal institutions, nor the imbeciles and idiots at Orillia. In this latter institution the census shows there are 775 persons mentally defective. Of late the admissions to this institution have averaged about 118 a year.

The Sphere Of Woman.

What is the remedy for this breaking down of nervous energy? It is a large subject and we can only touch on some aspects of it here. Our treatment must start at the cradle. Home life, home ideals and home training, must be improved. Parents and teachers must study, actually study, the temperaments of children. Do not clamor for woman's rights, for votes, etc., and neglect a higher duty—a work that none but they can do. It is hardly respectable now for mothers to care for their children. The woman who is the possessor of well-trained and well-balanced mind, will take infinitely more pleasure in watching and directing the development of muscle and the wonderful unfolding of mind in her child, than in joining any number of friends for an afternoon bridge, at so much a corner. We must not criticize her too harshly, however. This is one of the outcomes of our social conditions. Every mind craves for, and must have, a period of excitement, now and then, and if it is not trained to get that exhilaration in "Child Study," why it must fall back on subjects more easily acquired. Every effort to benefit humanity, must have before it a high ideal. Train the future mothers of the country in the simple elements of mental hygiene, and the nation will be enormously the gainer—public education, not premature legislation, is the best way to fight any wrong or any widespread disease.

God's Leaven.

Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, in the *Canadian Magazine*.
What do I see in the Spring?
In the fresh grasses growing,
The new leaves all budding,
The soft breezes blowing,
The brooklets all flooding?

It is God that I see in the Spring!
The bleached winter grasses
Turn green as His fingers
To touch, as He passes,
The trees with His fingers.
The gentle wind bending
The scents that are straying
Is a breath of His sending
For Earth's new creating.
The prison-free leaping
Of brooks overflowing
Of God the all-keeping.
Escapes not the keeping
The flowers that tarry
In sunny-sweet places
Are Earth's—yet they carry
His smile on their faces!

So do I see in the Spring
All the love up in Heaven
Turned steadily
Instilling the leaven
That raises us birthward!

Home Girls For Wives.

Catholic Register.
In these days, when almost anything can pound a piano, there is no particular interest attached to the young lady whose musical education consists of five tones and two or three heart-breaking wails, filled to overflowing with the mushy tenderness of youthful love. Sensible young men of means are looking for cooks and housekeepers and not for prima donnas and piano players. It has been discovered that the musical prodigies with their fancied artistic sensibilities make poor wives. The woman who can bake and sew and keep a house clean and homelike are once again in general demand.

Fat, Lazy And Awkward.

The other temperament is seen in the phlegmatic, somewhat stupid child, unreactive, insensitive, slow in imitative action and wanting in keen emotion. Such children are apt to be fat, lazy, and awkward. They tend to sleep too much, noises disturb them little, they suffer pain with equanimity and all their outward expressions of passions and affections are deficient. I need not point out to you that these temperaments require entirely different treatment, both in the home and in the school room. The nervous, irritable child, must be soothed; the phlegmatic stimulated. In both the controlling processes require to be strengthened and developed. They are the physical equivalent of self-control and morality in after life.

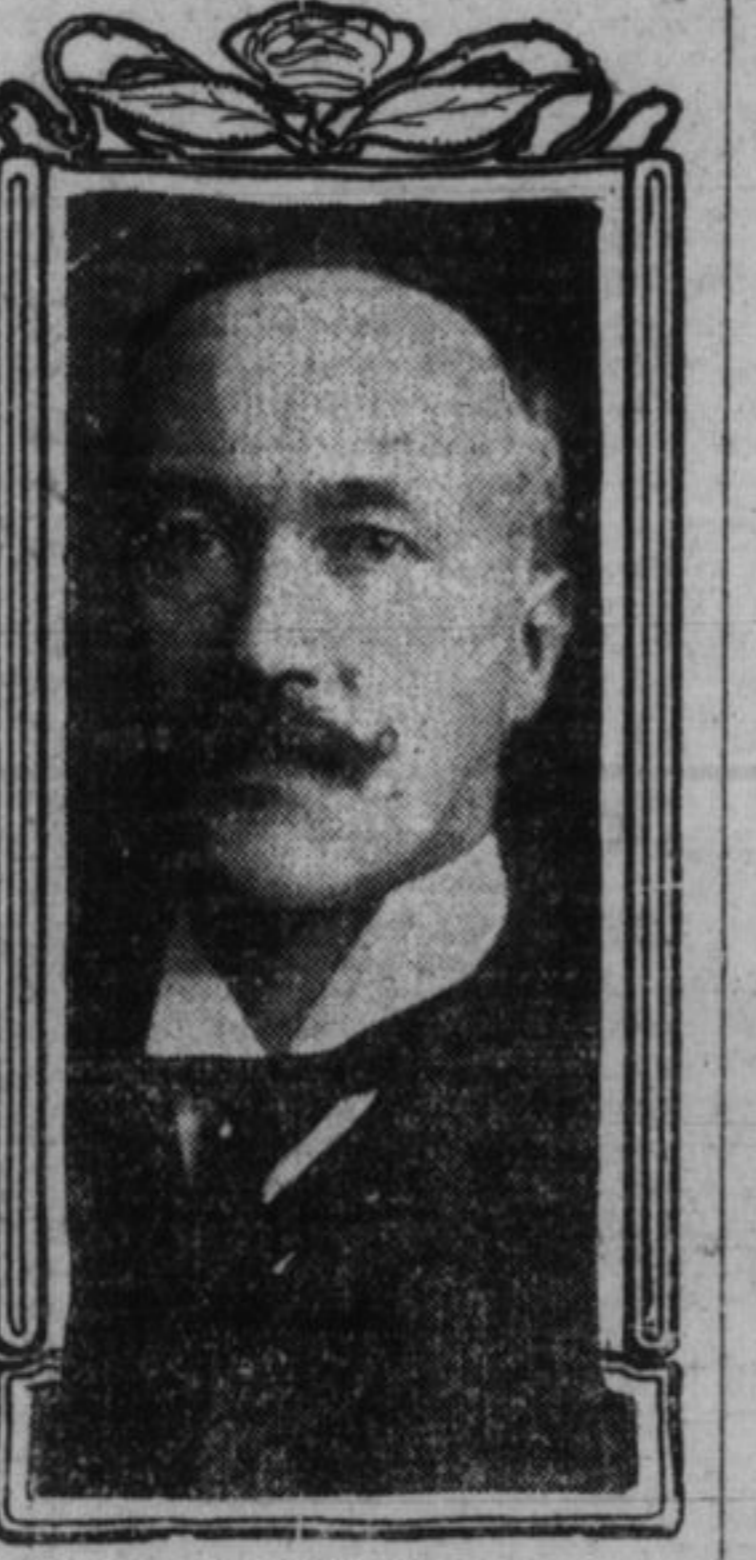
A few details: Sleep is the divine restorer of the nervous system. Here again order and punctuality should rule. A sleepless child is always a nervous, irritable child, and usually an unhealthy one. During sleep the process of building up brain cells goes steadily on. A child's brain is apt to receive far more stimuli from the senses during the day, than can be written legibly on its miniature pages. Each page should only take on the impressions of a few types at a time. If more are applied, the printing is apt to be blurred and the page more or less defaced. Sleep sufficient not only for the building up, but for the repair, is the remedy. How many hours? The nervous child should have

more than the phlegmatic. From seven to fourteen years of age, ten hours a day may be put down, as the average requirement.

Turning Sods Of Early Graves.

Food: And here but a few words, because this does not come specially within your sphere of control. The school boy and the school girl should be fed on a not too stimulating diet, should live as much as possible in the open air, and school rooms and bed rooms should be well ventilated. The character of the food, however, depends to a certain extent on the climate and on the season. Cold climates call for more animal food. It is safe to say, however, that the growing child in any climate should have, in addition to other foods, at least one pint of pure, fresh milk daily, and under certain conditions much more than this amount. In this country, where fruit is plentiful, there should be a plate of oranges and apples, or other fruits always on the sideboard, and not too many questions asked as to their consumption.

Exercise: Muscular exercise as we have already indicated, is an essential to mental health. The technical educationalist is prone to forget that the child has a body as well as a mind. Proper physical training during school life is essential. Scholars who do not receive this training, suffer in speech, in writing, and in rhythmic movements of the limbs, and in that great process of co-ordination between mind and muscle. The lack of it is evidenced in after life by awkwardness of gait, awkwardness of gesture, boorish manners, harsh grating speech, bad handwriting, and coarse needle-work. You will observe I said "proper" physical training. This means graduated exercises. Every now and then, some one performs a feat of great physical endurance, and the wildest enthusiasm ensues. Thousands are fired with ambition to "break the record." Not a few by their reckless effort, injure the heart and blood vessels and turn the first sods of an early grave. Such is our present Marathon craze.



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