REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE TEACHING OF
HYGIENE AND THE CONFERRING OF A DEGREE
IN PUBLIC HEALTH.

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As I understand the object of the appointment of this committee, it is to consider the teaching of hygiene, not simply to physicians, but to the entire nation. It contemplates the education of our children in the elements of hygiene, beginning with the infant school and carrying up the instruction as the mind is open to receive it, to graduation from college or university. The teaching of hygiene at present given in our public schools is, as you are probably aware, to a certain extent a farce, as all of the public school text books are subjected to revision by temperance (so-called) reformers, and the laws generally require that a certain portion — and that an altogether ridiculous and extravagant proportion — of the book should be devoted to the dangers of the use, not the abuse, of alcohol and tobacco. It is earnestly to be desired that these books should be substituted by rational text books: and furthermore that the immature mind of the child should not be overburdened by memorizing descriptions of bones and muscles, but should be made to understand the object for which its body was created and the means by which it may keep this wonderful machine in the best possible order for doing service to its Creator and its fellow man. This alone opens a tolerably wide field for study and thought.

The teaching of hygiene in medical schools as an essential part of a medical curriculum is another branch of the subject which should also receive due consideration. And finally, the creation of a public sentiment which will demand that health officers shall not be the most ignorant men in a community, but shall possess such knowledge of hygiene including the essential branch of bacteriology, as will entitle them to receive a diploma in public health. In this way alone, can the colleges be encouraged to furnish such facilities as will warrant them in issuing such a diploma as a result of a carefully considered course, aided by a well equipped laboratory and museum.

So far as your committee has been able to learn, no especial progress has been made during the past year on any of the lines indicated. A committee of the Medical Society of the State of Pennsylvania appointed for the purpose of examining the text-books of physiology and hygiene, designed for the instruction of children, and more especially, those in use in public schools, has, during the past four years
been publishing critiques and reviews of such works in the Pennsylvania Medical Journal, the organ of the Society, to the number of fifty-one (51). In the large majority of cases they find that matters of the utmost importance to the citizen for the conduct of himself, his family and his home, and in which he should receive careful instruction during childhood and youth, have been lightly passed over in order to make room for, and give especial prominence to extravagant, worded and often altogether incorrect statements as to the poisonous effects of tobacco and alcohol on the tissues. It is evident from the report that the hygiene and physiology of many of this class of books is simply a cloak for the introduction of so-called temperance lectures. No cause, even so good a one as that of the prevention of intemperance, can be advanced by the use of false argumentation in its support.

The committee, however, was perhaps too sweeping in its terms of condemnation of the errors contained in the books and too much inclined in its final report to present an argument in favor of the moderate use of alcoholic beverages. This aroused a feeling of antagonism against the report in the minds of many of the members present. It was felt that in accepting the report, the society would be committing itself to that view of the question, and it was therefore laid on the table. But the fact cannot be gainsaid that there is much room for a more intelligent treatment of these subjects in the instruction of the young.

Dr. Jesus Gonzales Urena of Mexico, Mexico, a member of the committee, desires to go on record as "considering it very desirable for hygiene to be taught to children in primary schools and that such teaching should be inspired by the same principles that govern all modern pedagogy, that is to say, that without neglecting the objective method, it should be more educational than instructive as by this means they would be impressed with a truly practical spirit which is at present wanting." They should be taught the dangers of deadly germs, especially those lurking in the sputum, and "the disorders that are brought about by want of cleanliness and ventilation in living rooms." In his opinion, "the anti-alcoholic propaganda ought to be considered as a very important part of the instruction in hygiene at the present time" especially so in his own country "where this evil is causing enormous ravages and where no effort that is intended to remedy it should be considered as wasted."

The necessity for the granting of diplomas in public health is not so urgent in Mexico inasmuch as "the Supreme Board of Health requires a legal medical diploma as a first requisite to filling the position of health officer."
Dr. A. C. Abbott, superintendent of the Laboratory of Hygiene of the University of Pennsylvania and president of the Board of Health of the city of Philadelphia, writes:

"In reply to your question concerning the diplomas in public health, I would say, that the University of Pennsylvania has not yet taken up the matter with that degree of seriousness that might be desired. I have been advocating it more or less steadily for several years. I anticipate that some time in the future, the University will do what is one of its obvious duties. The signs of the times point very directly, to my mind, to the renewed interest in the demonstration of preventive medicine."

A practicing physician in the interior of this State, who is also a practical bacteriologist, in reply to a communication urging the importance of the appointment of physicians possessing knowledge of this kind, as health officers in towns, replies "urging the importance of all physicians uniting in an effort to promote this and other reforms and considers that should physicians thus combine, they could do wonders."

"The physicians as a body, cover the entire field in boroughs, and indeed in larger cities, and I am sure, we as physicians, do not appreciate the power we could wield were we united as one mind in the advancement of this extremely important branch of modern medicine." He adds, "Dr. McCormack of Kentucky spoke very truly, when he said at the recent meeting of our State Society, 'Ignorance and petty jealousies go hand in hand in the profession'."

Dr. Eleanor Parry, Resident Physician at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass., a member of the committee, writes: "Since most reforms in education seem to come from above rather than below, it seems to me desirable that pressure should be brought to bear on our higher educational institutions, not merely on professional and technical schools. It is from these institutions that teachers for all grades come, and in nearly every state some requirement is made that physiology be taught. Furthermore, through our colleges and universities general public sentiment should be educated.

"I was surprised to see how little attention was given to this latter subject at the meeting of the National Education Association, in Boston, last July. At present a committee of our college faculty is at work on the subject of the possibility of making a health requirement for college entrance and graduation."

Dr. F. F. Wesbrook, Director of the Bacteriological Laboratory of the Minnesota State Board, considers that it might be well for the Association to place itself on record as favorable to the legal requirement of special training and examination for public health officers, as they find their work very greatly handicapped by the hazy notions
and absolute misconceptions which many of their local health officers show in relation to the various phases of the work. They do not consider it advisable, however, to greatly enlarge the field of teaching in hygiene in the medical schools inasmuch as it is not the function of a medical school to turn out specialists. Such work must be rather in the nature of post-graduate instruction.

I trust that Dr. Wesbrook is present, and that we shall have the benefit of advice from him personally toward carrying out his pertinent suggestions.

As a preliminary step towards securing the measure of the conferment of degrees in public health, the Legislature of Pennsylvania has enacted a law authorizing colleges in the State to establish such a degree and to confer the same on persons who have pursued an adequate course of instruction and passed a satisfactory examination. No college has however yet taken advantage of the authority thus conferred. The educational bodies are evidently waiting for a demand before they furnish a supply. Is it not possible that if they were to take the initiative and create a supply in advance, this action might stir up a demand, leading the more intelligent communities to appreciate the importance of having their health affairs administered by men of guaranteed knowledge and ability?

[Note Dr. T. A. Starkey, a member of the committee, presented a verbal report and discussed the report of the committee. This will be found on a subsequent page.—Editor.]