

# The Educational Weekly.

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THE attention of educationists and medical authorities throughout all the world has lately been strongly directed to the prevalence of over-pressure in schools, by the publication of the results of a very elaborate, persistent, and thorough enquiry into the health of the children of the better classes in Copenhagen attending school, made by Dr. Hertel, of that city, and republished in book form by the Macmillans, with an introduction by Dr. J. Crichton-Browne. Dr. Hertel found that one-third of all the school-boys were suffering from more or less serious chronic complaints. In the mixed schools 18 per cent. enter sickly, and in the third school year the number of sickly boys is about doubled, while in the second classical class over forty-one per cent. were sickly. Dr. Hertel noticed a very sudden increase in the proportion of feeble boys when they reach the age of about twelve and one half, due, as he thought, to the development of manhood, which begins then. "The complete change which the whole organism then undergoes is preceded by a short period of greater delicacy than usual, with greater susceptibility to external influences." From nine to twelve years of age boys grow about five and one-half inches in height, and increase nineteen pounds in weight. Between seventeen and twenty years they grow in height but two and one-half inches, and increase in weight twenty-three pounds; while in the three years from thirteen to sixteen there is a growth of nine and one-half inches and an increase of weight of forty-four pounds! The artificial condition which school life imposes upon a boy's habits and feelings during this latter period of his life Dr. Hertel considers to be the chief cause of the alarming invalidism which his tables show.

WITH the girls of the Copenhagen schools the case is worse, although they are by law exempt from state examinations, and allowed more freedom both in their habits and in their courses of study, which are to some extent elective. Twelve per cent. enter school more or less sickly, and sixty-one per cent. emerge from it so. Although it was impossible for Dr. Hertel to institute comparisons with children who do not go to school, since attendance is compulsory at Copenhagen, yet he could find no other factor than the conditions of school life to account for the prevailing sickness which he discovered. The most common ailment of both sexes, before puberty, was found to be scrofula; after that period, anæmia, nervousness, headache, frequent nose-bleeding,

and a great and constant increase of eye-diseases. Since the publication of Dr. Hertel's statistics and conclusions the Danish government have re-investigated the whole subject, and in an examination of nearly 30,000 children, Dr. Hertel's results are confirmed in almost every particular.

A CURIOUS feature in the whole case is what Dr. Hertel calls the "appalling" ignorance of the teachers in respect to the sanitary condition of their schools and the physical condition of their pupils. Many reported their schools to Dr. Hertel as exceptionally healthy, and were indignant at the least suspicion to the contrary, even when a subsequent careful examination revealed that one-third of their pupils were really sickly.

THE revelation of so much hygienic disorder was naturally followed by the suggestion of suitable remedies: the number of studies to be reduced; the judicious introduction of the elective system; an intermission of a few minutes between each recitation; a decided reduction of work from the thirteenth to the fifteenth year, especially for girls; more attention to be given to the conditions of bodily development; the avoidance of all that causes even temporary nervousness; a health record for each pupil, to be filled up by the parent, the family doctor, and the teacher; an eight or even seven o'clock opening of school, as in Sweden, with a corresponding early close; a more physiological system of gymnastics; and for the children of the better classes more exposure, and less petting and less society.

IT is but fair to state that the hygienic environment of Copenhagen school-children is probably worse than that in other European cities, and worse than in America; while the number of hours they are confined in the schoolroom exceeds those which measure a school-day with us. But although we have no carefully prepared statistics to guide us, the facts are undeniable that the hygienic environment of pupils in our towns and cities is not always as good as it should be, that the health of pupils suffers through this and other causes, and that the general public is constantly crying out against over-pressure.

THE sanitary condition of schools is a matter entirely under the control of the parents of the children. If they are alive to the benefits of good ventilation, immunity from drafts, evenness of temperature, pure water, properly constructed and properly kept closets, seats and desks that make

healthful posture possible, and arrangements for lighting which are not injurious to the eyes, they can easily secure all these conditions of good-health—they are purchasable at fair prices. A large proportion of the ill-health of school children is traceable to these causes, and it should not be charged against the teacher, nor against the school system.

A STILL larger percentage of the ill-health of school children, especially in towns and cities, is chargeable to the violation of hygienic conditions at home. Badly ventilated sleeping apartments, infrequent bathing, the wearing of under-garments till they have become saturated with excretory matter from the pores and no longer able to absorb it, irregular meals, hot bread and cakes, sweetmeats, unripe fruit, the wearing of thin boots and slippers, the wearing of unsuitable clothing in wet weather, the wearing of clothes that have become damp through exposure—all these causes add their quota to the sum total of the ill-health of children. Again, with the wealthier classes there are other causes of hygienic disturbance not less baneful, and more insidious. Children while still at school are submitted to many sorts of nervous excitation: evening parties, skating-rink carnivals, public amusements at late hours, which are anything but sedative in their influence upon the nervous organisms of children. But the one great cause of the nervous exhaustion of boys and girls which physicians so much deplore is the "society" life they lead long before their physical development is completed, and while all the recuperative agencies which nature intends to be used—sound sleep, regular exercise, quietness of habit, amusements which are exhilarating but not stimulating—are almost insufficient to make up for the exhaustion of energy and nervous force which the rapid growth of body and development of mind, at this time of life, produce. Scarcely any words can be too strong to describe the viciousness from a physiological, not to say moral, point of view, of allowing girls from twelve to seventeen, and boys from thirteen to eighteen, to play the rôle of party-goers, of beaux and belles, of gay gallants and ladies of fashion. And yet this is what one-half to three-fourths of the children of good society are allowed, and even encouraged to do.

WE have not by any means exhausted this subject. There are still to be considered the injurious effects upon the health of children and young people, especially upon the health of girls, of the "forcing" system, so much in vogue in our schools. Of these we shall speak next week.