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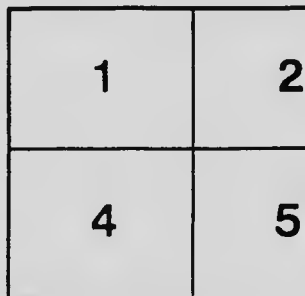
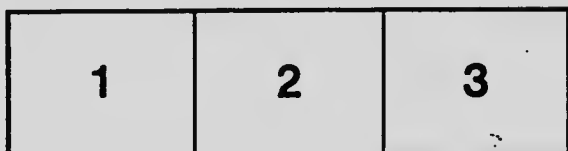
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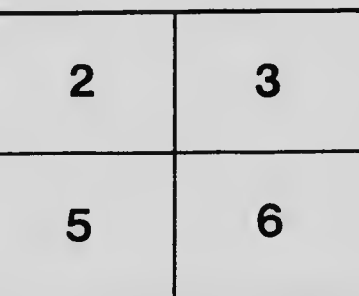
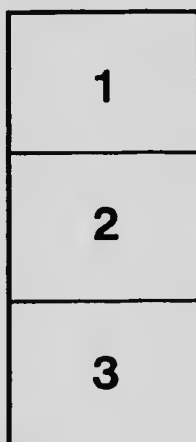
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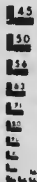
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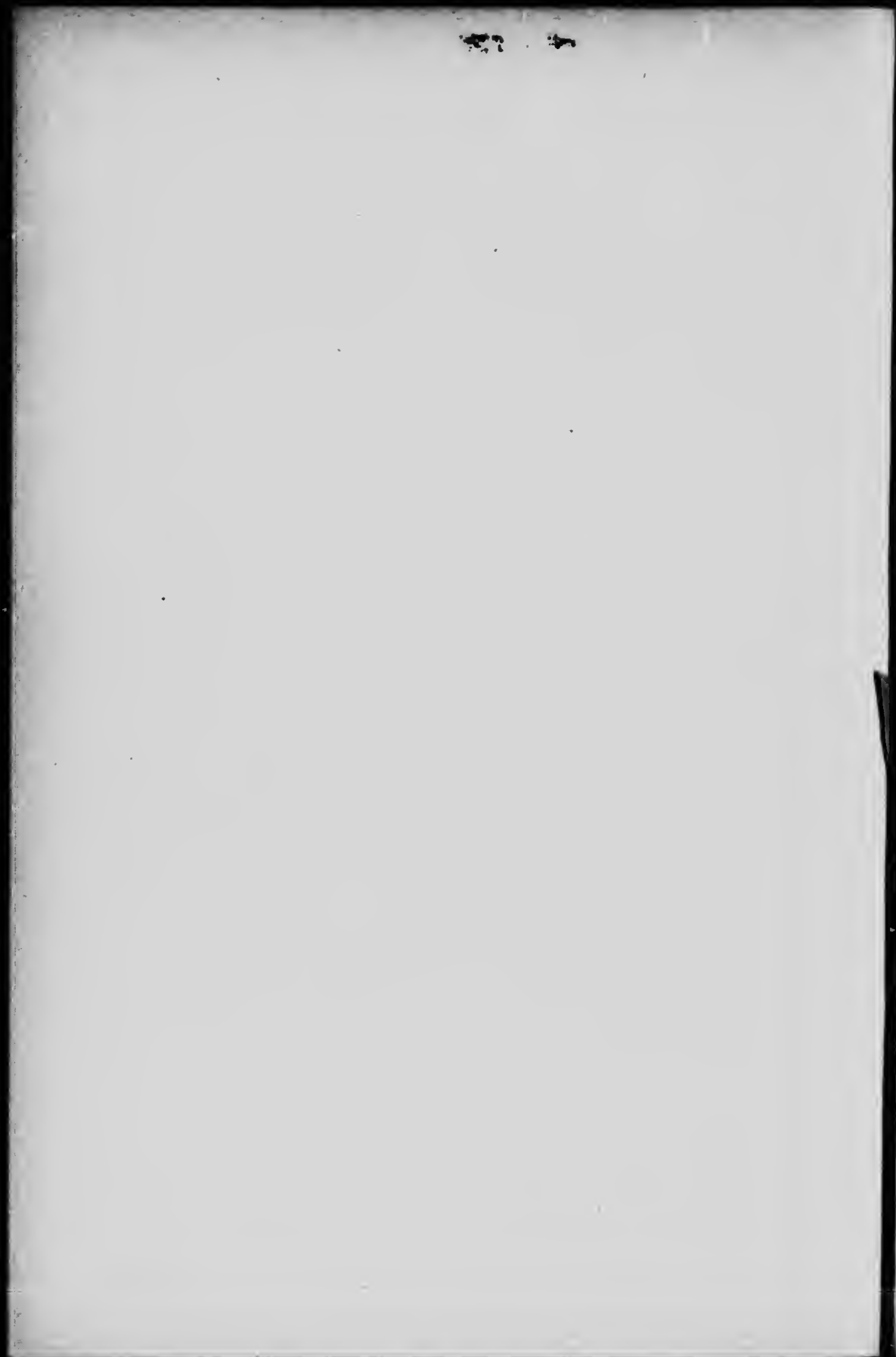
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PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

MEDICAL INSPECTION OF SCHOOLS.

By Dr. H. E. YOUNG, SECRETARY, PROVINCIAL BOARD OF HEALTH, VICTORIA, B.C.

THE subject of the medical inspection of our school-children is one that must appeal to the women of British Columbia, who are doing so much, and in such an understanding way, to help to win the war. Conservation of resources must have as a corner-stone the most important stone, that is conservation of human life. The condition of the individual is the most important in any consideration of the public health of the community at large.

The result of the medical services demanded by war conditions has shown us that there has been a great neglect in our attention to the physical condition of the manhood of the State. There is no other term than neglect to account for the many physical defects in the men that has been demonstrated by the medical examination necessary for enlistment. The findings of these examinations have only emphasized what has been known to those devoting their time to public health matters, that the fault has been in the neglect in the proper bringing-up of our children.

In Great Britain war examinations for the Boer war brought this fact so prominently to notice that the result was the institution of medical inspection of schools, and as a result of this medical inspection there has been a marked improvement in the number of recruits rejected for the British Army per thousand from 1900 to 1912. The figures of the result of the present war are not yet obtainable, but, even granting that there has been an improvement, the percentage of rejections are, to say the least, appalling.

The Government of British Columbia appreciated the fact that in a new country such as British Columbia, with its magnificent water-supply and almost perfect climatic conditions, the report of defectives amongst our school-children showed far too great a number, and it was determined at that time to make an endeavour to strike at the root of the difficulty by providing for medical inspection of school-children. An Act was passed empowering the Health Department to proceed with this work, and we are among the pioneers in the Dominion of Canada.

At times the question has arisen as to under which Department this work should be placed, whether under the Department of Education or under the Health Department. It is never advisable to have a divided authority, and the majority of cases practice has pronounced in favour of the Health Department. This is logical for hygiene and sanitation belong to the Health Department, even as purely educational matters belong to the Education Department. The Health Officer under his powers can act at once and can back up his position by an appeal to the police should opposition meet his demands. In addition, the actual school environment does not end the municipal or State obligation to the child. Home sanitation requires supervision and this can be undertaken by the Health Officer when a School Board would be powerless. It was for this reason that the enforcement of the Act was placed under the Health Department.

At first, considerable opposition developed from the school authorities and also from the parents. It was difficult to impress upon them the importance of this work, and also to impress upon them that the work incidental to the inspection of our school-children is the first step in giving effect to the care of the human wealth of the nation.

Under the working of our Act, municipalities were given control of the work and the Board of Trustees appointed the physician. Unorganized districts came immediately under the purview of the Health Department. As usual, at the inception of any new work, difficulties were encountered. The teachers did not quite realize the importance of the work, and the medical men were apt to be rather perfunctory in the performance of their duties.

A year ago, when the Act had been in operation for some four years, the Department wrote to all our Medical Inspectors asking them to give us their opinion as to the benefits that had been derived. With one or two exceptions, there was no uncertainty in the nature of the replies. The consensus of opinion is that there has not only been a marked improvement in the physical condition of the children, but that a greater interest is being taken by the teachers in the work, and particularly on the part of the parents is a desire being shown to carry out the recommendations of the Medical Inspector.

In a young and growing Province such as British Columbia, isolation of some of the districts militates against the children all receiving proper special treatment, and in some cases also the financial condition of the parents precludes the possibility of such recommendations being carried out, but it is safe to say that 90 per cent. of the cases requiring attention have been looked after and have been benefited.

The majority of the medical men are in accord in saying that the decreasing number of those receiving treatment on their recommendation is due to the fewer children requiring treatment. It is also noticeable that when the opinion of teachers who have been a number of years in the same school has been obtained, all say they note a decided improvement in the physical condition of the pupils the past year or two as compared with conditions at the time they went to the school.

It has been found that early recognition of acute trouble by the teacher and report of the same to the Medical Inspector has enabled us to check epidemics of diseases which are more peculiarly noticeable in school children, and it also enables us to keep our schools in operation even although there are serious epidemics existing; and in this connection I wish to emphasize the wisdom of keeping children in school rather than closing schools in the presence of communicable diseases in a community. School-contact instances of infection are rare if the system of medical inspection is at all adequate, and the presence of the children in the class-room each day, where they can be systematically observed for symptoms of approaching illness, offers a far greater degree of safety to the child and protection to other children than can be attained by allowing them to be in their homes or on the street in indiscriminate contact with other children.

Such control may be exercised by any community, and the school, instead of being the focus for the dissemination of communicable diseases, may become, because of its very adaptability to control, one of the most valuable methods we have of limiting the spread of communicable diseases in any community.

The success of medical inspection depends upon the interest taken by and the co-operation between the doctor, the teacher, and the parent. As a medical man, I may take the liberty of criticizing other medical men in regard to the work done, and I must say that, on the whole, the medical men have carried out their work in a satisfactory manner; with this exception, however, that as medical men, of course, they are prone to look upon the pupil as a patient and to confine their work entirely to the examination of the pupil. There are other factors which should come under the purview of the doctor; that is, proper heating of the school, lighting, ventilation, general sanitation of the school, seats, blackboards, exercises of the pupils. These are all factors which the Medical Inspector must have constantly in mind in order to prevent as far as possible the acquisition of disease or defects by the child in the ground for an education. A thorough physical examination is of the utmost impor-

tance, and this is a point to which I should like to call the attention of the members of the Women's Institutes. Objections have been made by the mothers to the examination of the children, particularly growing girls. I cannot see why there should be any objection to this. The medical man appointed is well known, examinations would be conducted with the child apart from others, and the examination made in exactly the same manner as if the doctor had been called into the home to examine the same child. We have had objections registered against the examination, insisting that no clothing should be loosened without first obtaining the consent of the parents; the result of this is that many children are examined only in regard to eyesight, teeth, and tonsils. The child may have been suffering from a crooked back, deformed arm or leg, weak heart, or lung-trouble. This examination need not be made every term, but say twice, as they do in New York. Have such examination made in the first, third, and sixth year of the school-life. If necessary the parents could be notified and, if they wished, could be present. It is the intention of the Department to ask the doctors to make these examinations at regular intervals, and I am asking through the Women's Institutes the consent of the parents to this procedure being carried out.

It is very essential for the proper working of the Act that all defects should be discovered. If the children are to be benefited by our efforts, no good can be accomplished by doing the work in a half-hearted manner. The teacher has a great deal to do with the enforcement of the Act, and the teacher's opportunity is the greatest in building wisely and well for the future of the community. They are dealing with the young and plastic minds—minds that yield readily to new suggestions and ways of doing things. The teacher that is well trained in hygiene is worth almost twice as much to the community as the teacher who can attend to the mental needs of her children only, and who is indifferent to the many conditions which bear directly upon the health of her charges.

I believe that in the Normal School instructions are being given as regards the use of the forms and a general outline of the work required. The particular work of the teacher in these cases should be an active and intelligent observation. Meeting the pupil from day to day, observation will show the teacher any particular variation from the normal in any pupil, and on the appearance of any symptoms out of the ordinary the child should be requested to remain from school and the medical officer notified. The great danger of spread of infectious diseases is in the first few days of the illness. It is personal contact between pupils at this time that causes spread of disease. As I said in the beginning, school-contact instances of infection are rare. The work of medical inspection is at all adequate, and children are far safer as regards themselves and protection to others at school than if the school is closed and they are allowed to be on the street in indiscriminate contact with other children.

Thirdly, as regards the parents. It is only by co-operation of the home and the school that we can hope to continue the good work initiated by the provisions of "Schools Health Inspection Act," and in order to secure this co-operation we must educate the parents, and a better way could hardly be devised than a medical examination for the children in which the parents could participate. If when the school is to be examined the parents are notified and they will attend, it would give the physician and the teacher an opportunity to give advice and to consult the parents in this examination in regard to the peculiarities of their children, the diseases the child has had, and his general condition of health. An attitude of co-operation would be easily aroused, and it would change the attitude of the teacher towards the parents, in many cases give them wholesome respect for the expert character of the parents as regards their own children and make it easier for both teacher and parents to co-operate. By securing such co-operation, by proving to the parents by actual demonstration the benefits to be derived from medical inspection, the hands of the Department would be strengthened, because such knowledge given to the parents would foster a demand upon the Government that would become insistent, and every facility be given to the Department to carry out to the fullest extent the work of proper examination of the pupils.

And this leads me to speak of our work in general up to date. We have started well; we have accomplished much; but our work has been directed more along the lines of detection of defects than that of curing. In the larger centres, such as Vancouver and Victoria, where there is concentration of children, and also facilities for treatment, the problem is not so difficult to meet; but in the unorganized districts, the rural municipalities, and in the country schools, while the physician may diagnose the trouble and the parents are notified, it is not always possible to provide the remedy. Families are isolated; families are not financially able to pay large fees for professional services, and some means must be devised whereby, if the mountain will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain.

One of the crying needs is the lack of facilities for the treatment of teeth. I may say that the difficulty is a real one, especially in a large Province like British Columbia, where the population is scattered, with centres not large enough in population to warrant a dentist settling in the district.

The Department has taken up this question with the College of Dental Surgeons, with the hope of arriving at some solution whereby the services of a dentist would be available at stated periods when reports from the schools would justify some effort being made to induce a dentist to make a visit to the district. Possibly by co-operation as between the parents, the dentist, and the Government a solution will be arrived at. I can assure you that we are doing all we can to bring about a working solution of the question.

Where the working of medical inspection of schools can be helped is through the Women's Institutes. I look upon the Institutes as one of the greatest agents for good as between the Government and the people that there is in existence. This is an organized society now, well established, with definite objects and aims, and as a going concern it can use machinery to facilitate the work of the Department in respect to health matters in the Province, and more particularly in reference to the rising generation. It is a subject-matter that is dear to the hearts of all women, who look upon it as their duty, and when the incentive of duty is backed up by the personal interest which every member feels, there can be only one result; that is, to bring about at least an approach to the ideal conditions which we all have in mind. Physical perfection must and does go hand in hand with spiritual welfare. There is no use to try to uplift the morals of the rising generation if the environment is, if I may use the term, materially immoral.

Every school-house should be a model as to cleanliness, heating, ventilation, lighting, and means of recreation. No child is permitted to be unclean. The children from a school properly conducted as to health-giving conditions form healthy habits which stay with him through life. He thinks in after-life of his teeth, eyesight, and ears. He wants plenty of fresh air always. He knows that he must be clean for his own sake as well as for his neighbour's sake. He knows that the house-fly is a carrier of pestilence. He knows many things that become matters of life long habits with him, because in a well-conducted school at the age when his habits were formed he was taught by precept and example what it means to live a clean and efficient life. School hygiene is of immediate and vital interest to every community. It is part of the great business of every community in the way of making and keeping the people well. The school should be a model for the community in cleanliness and health-giving conditions.

And this we can obtain by systematic effort, by personal interest, and by the exertions of your Institutes. I would like if the Women's Institutes would consider the school-houses of British Columbia their immediate responsibility; that as members of the Institute, as taxpayers, and as citizens concerned with the welfare of the community, they should feel that it is their bounden duty to exert all their influence upon those in charge of the school buildings to keep them up to the point of discharging their duties and to see that the buildings their children use during a portion of each day are as clean and as fit for habitation as the homes that they use for the balance of the day.

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