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Health on the Farm A Manual of Rural Sanitation and Hygiene

H. F. (Henry Fauntleroy) Harris

Imprint

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HEALTH ON THE FARM
A MANUAL OF RURAL SANITATION
AND HYGIENE

BY
H. F. HARRIS

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INTRODUCTION

BY THE GENERAL EDITOR

This is the day of the small book. There is much to be done. Time is short. Information is earnestly desired, but it is wanted in compact form, confined directly to the subject in view, authenticated by real knowledge, and, withal, gracefully delivered. It is to fulfill these conditions that the present series has been projected—to lend real assistance to those who are looking about for new tools and fresh ideas.

It is addressed especially to the man and woman at a distance from the libraries, exhibitions, and daily notes of progress, which are the main advantage, to a studious mind, of living in or near a large city. The editor has had in view, especially, the farmer and villager who is striving to make the life of himself and his family broader and brighter, as well as to increase his bank account; and it is therefore in the humane, rather than in a commercial direction, that the Library has been planned.

The average American little needs advice on the conduct of his farm or business; or, if he thinks he does, a large supply of such help in farming and trading as books and periodicals can give, is available to him. But many a man who is well to do and knows how to continue to make money, is ignorant how to spend it in a way to bring to himself, and confer upon his wife and children, those conveniences, comforts and niceties which alone make money worth acquiring and life worth living. He hardly realizes that they are within his reach.

For suggestion and guidance in this direction there is a real call, to which this series is an answer. It proposes to tell its readers how they can make work easier, health more secure, and the home more enjoyable and tenacious of the whole family. No evil in American rural life is so great as the tendency of the young people to leave the farm and the village. The only way to overcome this evil is to make rural life less hard and sordid; more comfortable and attractive. It is

to the solving of that problem that these books are addressed. Their central idea is to show how country life may be made richer in interest, broader in its activities and its outlook, and sweeter to the taste.

To this end men and women who have given each a lifetime of study and thought to his or her specialty, will contribute to the Library, and it is safe to promise that each volume will join with its eminently practical information a still more valuable stimulation of thought.

Ernest Ingersoll.

HEALTH ON THE FARM

CHAPTER I

IMPORTANCE OF OUR SUBJECT

Notwithstanding the extraordinary advances in a material way that have been accomplished in this country within the last few decades, it is a significant and most alarming fact that progress in hygienic matters has lagged far behind. Why this is, it would be very difficult to say,—for the reason that the causes are perhaps many. Chief among these, probably, is the fact that our progress along industrial lines has occupied the entire time of the majority of our best intellects, and it is also in no small degree the consequence of a fatalism that regards disease as a direct visitation of providence and therefore a thing which man may not avoid. Another cause in some instances is the [Pg 4] pride of our people in their homes and respective localities, which causes them to repel with indignation the suggestion that any special measures are necessary in order to conserve the public health where they reside. Ignorant as the average man is of the causes that produce sickness and the means by which this result is accomplished, he is naturally not in a position to form a correct judgment concerning such matters, and as a consequence, sees no reasons for taking the precautions that are necessary in order to ward off disease. This ignorance, it must be confessed with sorrow, is in a measure the fault of the medical profession, which has not in the vast majority of instances lived up to its ideals in this connection. Petty and unworthy rivalry has played an extremely important part in this failure of medical men to do their duty in this particular—none of the physicians of a community being, as a rule, willing that others should instruct the public, however vital this might be for the general good. As a consequence, that class of vultures known as medical quacks has furnished to the laity by far the greater proportion of their instruction [Pg 5] on hygienic subjects, with the result that the average man has a greater misconception and less real knowledge of such matters than of anything else in which he is vitally interested.

Another, and very curious explanation for our general disregard of the laws of health is that our strong belief in ourselves impels us to think that however much others may suffer from things generally regarded as unhygienic, we, ourselves, will be immune. This belief is fostered by the fact that in early life there often seems no end to our capacity to endure, and we find ourselves constantly defying without apparent harm, what we are told by others is directly contrary to all rules of proper living. But it is unfortunately true also that the reserve force and great power of resistance that enables us to do these things begins to wane towards the end of the third decade of life, and we, therefore, find ourselves sooner or later breaking down after we have become thoroughly convinced that we were made of iron, and that while other people might not be able to do as we were, it could not possibly result in evil in our own cases. [Pg 6]

What a pity it is that the young will not learn from the experience of those who have gone before them! Could they only do so, how much suffering and woe could be avoided in this world. Unfortunately, however, there are few men so constituted that they are willing to be guided by the experience of those who have preceded them, and there is but a faint possibility, therefore, that any good can be accomplished by warning the coming generation of the troubles in store for them should they not heed the advice of those who have suffered before them. Notwithstanding this, the writer feels that these words of warning should be spoken to the young, since they, alas, are the only ones to be benefited by such advice.

As you value your happiness materially, and as you desire a healthy old age and a long life, inform yourselves as to the few simple laws that govern human existence, and attempt so far as lies in your power to follow them. If you do not do this, disaster will follow as surely as the night follows the day.

Apathy of the Public as to Hygiene.—As a partial consequence, probably, of all the reasons [Pg 7] mentioned, along with others, there exists in the popular mind a curious apathy concerning hygienic matters—an apathy so great that it is scarcely possible to get the average man to discuss, much less to put in practice the all-important laws that govern health. As a result of the work of the various State boards of health and of the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service, this condition of affairs happily shows some signs

of abatement, and we certainly have reasons to believe that the future promises great things along these lines. No sign of this change is more significant than the awakening of the press of the country to the vast importance of instructing the public in health matters, and their changed attitude toward the charlatans and quacks who live by promising the impossible. Largely subsidized by the infamous vendors of patent medicine, our newspapers and magazines still lend their columns to these human vampires who prey pre-eminently on the ignorance and credulity of the hopelessly-diseased poor; but within recent years some of our foremost journals show signs of an awakening of conscience, and a very few have [Pg 8] even gone so far as to exclude advertisements of this character altogether.

It has been said, certainly with more or less truth, that we are creatures of our surroundings, but whether we accept this in its broadest sense or not, there can be no question that our well being is most intimately connected with those things with which we come into every day contact. *Nothing is more important for us to recognize than that our diseases are contracted from neighboring subjects just in proportion as we are closely associated with them.* From our fellowmen we contract, as everyone knows, a large number of diseases, either by direct contact or by means of the air that surrounds us. From the earth we get hook-worms and other animal parasites, either by coming directly in contact with it or through eating uncooked fruits and vegetables. From water we get typhoid fever, dysentery, cholera, and many other parasitic diseases. From our food we likewise contract dangerous maladies such as tapeworms from uncooked meats and fish and the deadly trichina from raw hog meat. With decomposed breads we take the poisons that [Pg 9] produce pellagra, kakke, ergotism and acroдинia. From uncooked fruits and vegetables we get dysentery, typhoid fever, cholera, and parasitic diseases. Spoiled beans give us the deadly lathyrismus. From decomposed meat and fish we get ptomaine poisoning. Mosquitoes convey to us malaria, yellow fever and a parasite known as the filaria. The dreaded sleeping-sickness of Africa comes through the bites of a small fly; the bedbug is believed to be the means of conveying a frightful disease known as kala-azar, and the house-fly often brings

to us the germs that produce typhoid fever, dysentery, and probably other diseases as well.

The bubonic plague, which is one of the most frightful diseases known, is conveyed to man by the rat and mouse. [1] Hydrophobia is usually contracted from the bite of the dog, and it is a well-known fact that this animal often harbors a minute tapeworm, a single egg of which, when swallowed by the human being, is often followed by death. Both dogs and cats probably [Pg 10] convey diphtheria, and both unquestionably often have within their intestinal tracts tapeworms that occasionally infect children. With the exception of the rare disease known as glanders, the horse is not believed to be directly responsible for any of the maladies from which the human being suffers, but it is well established that fully 95 per cent. of house-flies hatch in the manure of these animals, and they, therefore, become indirectly responsible for some of the most serious diseases affecting the human being. It is thus seen that almost every object with which man comes in intimate contact is capable of conveying to him the poison of one or more diseases. If it were possible for us to separate ourselves completely from everything with which we are ordinarily associated there can be no question that the span of human life would be greatly increased, and that death from bacterial and parasitic diseases generally would no longer occur. All this is said not with the object of startling the reader, but to warn him of the dangers that surround him on every hand, and to urge a recognition of that which can so materially prolong his [Pg 11] life. Fortunately these sources of infection may be almost entirely done away with by a few simple rules of life, and the health and longevity of mankind must necessarily be directly proportionate to the care with which we observe them.

It is now in order to discuss in detail the subject of personal hygiene.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] See the volume in this Library, *Animal Competitors*, by Ernest Ingersoll, for the agency of rats and mice in the introduction and dissemination of plague and other diseases; and the means of destroying these pests of the farm.

CHAPTER II

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Top

CARE OF THE PERSON

It is happily the case that in America the importance of personal cleanliness is more thoroughly understood, and is more generally practiced than any of the other important hygienic procedures. While it is true that there are many—particularly those of foreign extraction, and who live for the most part in the larger cities—to whom an occasional bath appeals only as a painful necessity, a very large percentage of those born in this country bathe regularly. It should be thoroughly understood that a daily bath is essential, not only from the standpoint of cleanliness, but from the fact that this practice is in the highest degree conducive to health. It should never be forgotten that by cleanliness infectious materials are removed from the surface of the body, and at the same time the skin is put into a condition to eliminate from the system those waste products [Pg 13] which it is its special function to remove. The close relationship of the proper activity of the skin to health is perhaps not generally sufficiently appreciated—for it is true that the body cannot remain normal when the secretory power of its glands is impaired, and that even death quickly follows when they cease to functionate altogether.

Advice as to Bathing.—Much difference of opinion exists as to the proper temperature of the water for bathing, some holding that it should be quite cold, while others are equally positive that it should be warm. Unfortunately it is impossible to give fixed rules concerning this somewhat important matter, for there is every reason to believe that it should be determined in each individual case according to circumstances, and that, therefore, both may be right. Some persons unquestionably do better with one, and some with the other. It has been established clearly that the cold bath is highly stimulating, and where not too prolonged, and when followed by vigorous rubbing, is undoubtedly healthful for a large number of people. The cold bath is often used by physicians [Pg 14] in the treatment of diseases of low vitality. Many persons however, are unpleasantly affected by bathing in water of a temperature much below that of the body; particularly is this true of women, and the like may be said of thin and nervous persons of the other sex. It is claimed by the advocates of the cold bath that those who practice this proce-

dures daily are practically immune from colds, but this, certainly, is not always true; on the contrary the writer has seen instances where the cold bath has unquestionably led to chronic nasal catarrh, with increased tendency to inflammatory conditions of the air passages. It is also the case that baths of this description tend in some persons to prevent a normal accumulation of fat beneath the skin, and keep individuals of this kind unnaturally lean.

The warm bath is perhaps, on the whole, more popular than the cold, since it is preferred usually by children and women, and is practiced by a considerable proportion of adult males. It is unquestionably somewhat enervating, and at best fails entirely to give the agreeable stimulation experienced by those who take a [Pg 15] cold plunge. It is, however, to be preferred in those instances where cold water produces disagreeable effects, and if the bath be not too long continued it is followed by no ill results. Persons who become lean under cold baths not uncommonly take on flesh when they begin to use warm ones. It is unquestionably true that the latter is to be preferred in hot climates.

The sea bath is invigorating not only from the water being cool, but as a consequence of the pleasurable excitement with which it is attended. Its greatest disadvantage lies in the fact that there is a tendency to overdo it, many persons remaining in the water for hours. Ten or fifteen minutes is as long as the average person should indulge in sea-bathing, and it is a question if even those who are young and vigorous should remain in the water longer than half an hour.

Bathing of any kind should be indulged in before meals, the best time being before breakfast in the morning.

Care of the Teeth.—Nothing in connection with the subject of personal hygiene is of more importance than keeping the teeth properly [Pg 16] cleansed. The fact is not generally appreciated that sound teeth stand in a most intimate relationship with good health, and that disastrous consequences are sure to follow sooner or later where these most important structures are neglected.

While it is true that in a person of vigorous health one or two decayed teeth do not, as a rule, occasion obvious trouble at once, ill effects are sure sooner or later to be felt. For one thing, a person

without good teeth cannot chew his food well. Those who begin by neglecting what at first are slight defects in the teeth seem to acquire in the course of time a sort of habit of doing this, and ultimately disregard and fail to have corrected the more serious diseases of the dental structures. Nothing is more common than for the practicing physician to find patients with one or more teeth partially gone, or, even worse, with only the exposed roots remaining.

Where cavities exist, food is constantly forced into them, and undergoing decomposition, the breath of their owner becomes foul, and portions of decayed food mixed with multitudes of [Pg 17] bacteria are constantly swallowed; sooner or later there inevitably follows under such circumstances catarrhal conditions of the stomach, which reaches a point in some individuals where the health is seriously threatened. Not only do bad teeth produce trouble in the way just mentioned, but there is every reason to believe that germs that produce disease—particularly those that cause consumption—not uncommonly find their way to the interior of the body through the resulting cavities.

It is the duty of everyone to properly cleanse the teeth at least once daily—to do so after each meal would be even still better. This should be done with a moderately soft brush, with which it is unnecessary to use tooth-powders or lotions—though many prefer to do so. Where something of the kind is desired, ordinary lime-water is perhaps as satisfactory as anything else; peroxide of hydrogen, diluted eight or ten times with water, to which a pinch or two of ordinary cooking soda has been added, undoubtedly aids the cleansing process, and has the advantage that it leaves a pleasant after-taste in the mouth. In brushing the teeth care [Pg 18] should be taken that every part of the tooth receives attention, it being not sufficient, as is so often done, merely to brush the front. It should be the practice of everyone to have the teeth looked over at least once a year by a good dentist, as even where cleansing is diligently performed decay frequently sets in on their inner sides.

The utmost care should be taken of the permanent teeth especially, and as long as it is possible to prevent it no one should be allowed to pull them. There can be no doubt that life is shortened by

the early loss of the permanent teeth in most, if not in all, cases—not to count loss in health and happiness that follows their absence.

Clothing, – Material and Color.—Clothing will be considered in this article only as regards its function of properly protecting the body, which it does by preventing the escape of heat, thus keeping the body warm, or, under other circumstances, by keeping out excessive heat or cold.

Materials of which clothing is made differ very greatly in their ability to accomplish the [Pg 19] object just mentioned, some being comparatively poor conductors of heat and hence fulfill the desired function admirably, while others, for opposite reasons, are of comparatively little value for this purpose. In general it may be said that structures of animal origin, such as wool and silk, are much poorer heat conductors than those obtained from the vegetable world, and as a consequence the former are justly held in much higher esteem as material for clothing than the latter. It should not be forgotten, however, that the protective value of a fabric also depends upon the manner in which it is woven, since those that are loosely constructed are much warmer, other things being equal, than those that are put together more closely; this depends upon the fact that in the former there are innumerable small cavities between the fibers in which air is contained, and as this substance is a very poor conductor of heat, it follows that a garment made loosely and containing many such chambers is warmer than where the number is less. It may well be the case that a fabric constructed of a material which is a poor conductor of heat and closely woven [Pg 20] may be actually cooler than another composed of a substance which is a much better conductor of heat but of a loose texture.

The efficiency of different materials of which clothing is made also depends upon their capacity to absorb water. This may be done in two ways: the water may simply collect between the fibers, in which case it may be in a large measure removed by wringing, or it may be actually absorbed into the substance composing the fabric, and, as a consequence, the latter, even though containing much moisture, do not appear damp. Fabrics made from vegetable materials, as cotton or linen, have little power of actually absorbing water, and hence they become wet on the slightest addition of mois-