

II.

GIVING INTELLIGENT ATTENTION TO THE PHYSICAL WELFARE OF CHILDREN

AN EXPERIENCE

Last fall the members of the home economics department of the Harrisonburg State Normal School assembled and discussed plans for the year's work. It was encouraging to find that each member had been following with keen interest the work of the Child Health Organizations of the country. Ideas were exchanged in regard to the work being done in some of the various health and nutrition centers in New York City, Chicago, and Boston, with which some of our members had been actively associated during the summer.

Some of the states have splendidly organized departments; and it was agreed that the greatest piece of work our department could do during the year was to enlist the interest of the schools of Harrisonburg in improving the child health conditions and at the same time give our normal school practice teachers an opportunity to learn of this important work and carry it into the schools of Virginia as they go out to their respective positions in the coming fall.

Everyone is interested in the health of children, but not all are awakened to the necessity of teaching health and fixing health habits so that they may make for the highest degree of physical efficiency in manhood and womanhood. It is not necessary that the home economics teacher alone should be responsible for the teaching of health, but every teacher of children should realize that a high type of mental work is impossible when the physical condition is below normal.

No teacher has a greater opportunity in this field than the home economics worker. Her vision has been broadened, her interest has been stimulated, to include not only the mechanical duties of the house—cooking, sewing, and household management—but also the more vital problems of the home; for the house is but the "place in which the home, the *living unit* of a *living state*, is made." And these 'living units' are the children reared in that home. Furthermore,

if we are to possess a "living state" the children in these homes must grow up to be happy, useful citizens.

Home economics specialists appreciate the fact that the attractive preparation of wholesome food is not enough, but that children must be encouraged to eat these foods with pleasure and with a knowledge of what foods are nourishing for them.

"It is estimated by the best authorities that three out of every four children in the country are suffering from some special defect which might be prevented or corrected. This means that there are, perhaps, 15,000,000 such school children in this country today. Every one of these children, handicapped however slightly by some physical defect, is failing to attain quite the physical and intellectual development of which he is capable. When weighed and measured these children will all be just a little below standard. Moreover, of these 15,000,000 handicapped children there is a large group, estimated at possibly 6,000,000, who are in such bad physical condition and who fall so decidedly below the normal standard of weight for their age and height that their condition demands immediate recognition and attention. From one cause or another every member of this great group of children is suffering not merely from one, but from many, physical defects. They constitute the class of "malnourished" children, whose great number is a shame to our civilization. These children who do not measure up to the standard become, in later years, the men and women who do not *measure up*—the men who are physically unfit to bear arms in their country's time of need, the women who are physically unfit to become the mothers of men."

Our home economics department has felt the urgency so keenly that it prepared its Degree Class in dietetics and nutrition to assist in combating all cases of malnutrition that might exist in the schools of Harrisonburg. That we might secure the ready cooperation of all the teachers of the training school and the parents as well, it was thought advisable to secure the help of an outside person who was known to be an authority upon the subject and an inspiration to her audiences.

Miss Sally Lucas Jean, Director of the Child Health Organization of America,

with headquarters at 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City, was extended a very urgent invitation to address an open meeting of the Harrisonburg Educational Association and we were most happy in having her accept it.

To our great delight every one was alive to the merit of the movement. Some of Miss Jean's suggestions were speedily put into effect the very next day by Miss Porter and her third grade, in the Harrisonburg Training School. A Klim Club was organized and every child agreed to bring a bottle of milk each day, to be taken as a forenoon lunch. Straws were provided for drinking the beverage, making it both sanitary and a pleasure for the children. Every club must have its own song, yell, and secrets and these the children suggested.

These are some of the yells formulated:

We are strong;
We are strong;
To the Klim Club
We belong.

Two, four, six, eight;
What do we appreciate?
Milk! Milk! Milk!

Rub, dub, dub;
Rub, dub, dee;
We're the Klim Club,
Don't you see?

The following song is to the tune of "Drink Her Down."

Here's to good old milk, drink her down;
Here's to good old milk, drink her down;
Here's to good old milk,
She will make you well and sound;
Drink her down,
Drink her down,
Drink her down, down, down.

It has been a bit hard to discover the club secrets. When one small girl said she did not like milk and was going to give it to her neighbor, she was reminded of one of the club secrets—"you must not let any one know you don't like milk." This being the case, she had to drink the milk herself—but the secret was out.

The second grade has done some interesting work in illustrating the health rules as compiled by the Child Health Organization. These rules are so simple that even the youngest child can understand; and if the habit is fixed in early childhood, there will not be the need of the mothers attempting to force the child later in life to do those

things it should do nor to break bad habits which have been slowly forming.

The Child Health Organization gives only eight health essentials which, it says, should be emphasized every school day:

A full bath more than once a week.

Brushing the teeth at least once every day.

Sleeping long hours with windows open.

Drinking as much milk as possible, but no coffee or tea.

Eating some vegetables or fruit every day.

Drinking at least four glasses of water a day.

Playing part of every day out of doors.

A bowel movement every morning.

It has been found that the easiest method of interesting a child in his own health condition is to interest him in his weight. Every child loves to be weighed, and it is for the teacher to compare the actual weight with the standard weight for that height and age. If the child falls below this standard weight he is below par, and usually he is eager to resort to any method of restoring himself to normal, if he feels that by so doing he can rival some stronger child who has always been an object of envy or fear.

Here is where the nutrition expert has an opportunity to suggest the right kinds of foods, and to recommend the school doctor and nurse if physical defects are apparent.

Our nutrition class has begun its work of weighing and measuring the children of the grades and with the help of the teachers it hopes to repeat this work once every month. Out of two grades 58 were weighed and 41 were found to be under weight; and 26 were found to be 7% below weight, or malnourished. The actual weight and the standard weight of each child are recorded, and both are given to the child on a tag which he carries home to his parents.

This is only a very small beginning of the important work we hope to do; but who can say that any teacher has failed of her highest good who is instrumental in bringing the children of her school up to the highest standard of physical efficiency, thereby making happier homes and more useful citizens.

GRACE BRINTON