

CAN THE CHILD SURVIVE CIVILIZATION?

ADDRESS OF DR. WOODS HUTCHINSON

The child is the embodiment of the future of the race. What we do to him determines our own future. It makes little difference how perfect our civilization may be for the well-being of adults. If it assumes such a form that children cannot grow up healthy and vigorous under it, it is doomed.

Whether the child survives civilization or not, civilization cannot survive the child. Our conditions of life have changed markedly and radically during the past fifty years. The wonderful progress, the boasted organization of our civilization, has been an organization for grown-ups exclusively, and has left the child out of its calculations. We have laid elaborate plans for the perfection of the product, but ignored the source of supply.

Half a century ago our social and industrial organization was so loose that there was plenty of room for the child to grow up in the gaps and interspaces. Now, it is so compact that he scarcely has breathing room and no play room. We have gone far to civilize the business of play out of existence. Then, our cities were, like Thackeray's Washington, "cities of magnificent distances". Now, ground is sold by the square foot, and every inch of it utilized for factory, store, street, or railway track. We have even abolished the back alley, that paradise of adventure. The modern city child has lost his most precious birthright—the backyard. Even in smaller towns, where some breathing space still surrounds the buildings, the blight of the lawn-mower has descended upon it. Lawns and flowers have taken the place of "our yard," with its brickbats, and barrels, and boards, and all its superb possibilities for play and empire building. We can't grow two crops on the same soil, and either the grass or the children must go. No place for play, no place for the child!

At the same time we have made the streets more impossible as playgrounds than ever. In the old sleepy times children could play on them in perfect safety all day long. Now, with street-car tracks down the middle, delivery wagons along both curbs, and automobiles all over the roadway, they are about as suitable for a play place as the track of a trunk line railway.

Not only has the child lost the backyard and the alley as a place to grow up in, but he has lost the small shop as well. The work that was done by the local carpenter, the blacksmith, the tinsmith, the wheelwright, the weaver at his house loom, the boat-builder, is now taken over by the huge factory, where the child is neither admitted nor wanted, except as a stunted and overworked laborer before his time.

Fifty years ago he grew up in an atmosphere of trades and craftsmanship and saw things made, and work accomplished on every side of him, where he could pick up the remnants and imitate the performance. Now all this is closed to him.

We have not improved matters much by substituting the school for the yard, the field, and the shop. We have simply attempted to correct underdevelopment of the child's body by overdevelopment of his mind. Since he no longer has any safe place to play, we shut him up in the schoolroom all day long. The change has come so gradually that we are hardly conscious of it. But the fact now stares us in the face, that the schoolroom has absorbed something like two-thirds of the time of our growing boys and girls. The old school terms of the country or small town were mercifully short,—anywhere from four to eight months of the year,—and left the child plenty of opportunity for physical development and the doing of chores, helping in the garden, on the farm, in the workshop. The modern school runs from nine to ten months out of the twelve, and has gradually, with the best of intentions and at the request of the parents—as modern life has grown so complex that there is no room for the care of the child outside of the schoolroom—come to absorb from three-fourths to seven-eighths of his time and energies during these months. It demands his personal attendance from 8.30 A. M. until 3.30 or 4.30 P. M.,—practically the entire hours of daylight,—and loads him down with books for night and evening study, lest he should find a moment in which to think or act for himself. If this were not so stupid, it would be criminal. The real business of the child is not to pass examinations, but to grow up. And where can he find time for that under the present system?

It is impossible to value education too highly, and we are justly proud of the system which we have developed. But the time has come when we must recognize that there is no necessary connection between learning and a desk, nor between school and

a room. As physicians, we must demand that the schoolroom, admirable as are its aims and its motives, must relinquish at least one-half its claims upon the time and strength of our children; that at least half of their education should be carried out in nature's school—the open air. Our schoolrooms should be relieved of the mere nursery duty of keeping children out of harm and of mischief, with which they are now loaded, and the playground should be organized, supervised, and recognized as a vital and coördinate branch of our scheme of education. The playground is the chief field for the development of body and mind; of training for social life, for organization and combination with his fellows. The real life of the child is lived not in the schoolroom, but on the playground. One of the most valuable influences of the school is the effect of children upon each other. But this can be attained in its perfection only upon the playground. Cut down the school hours one-half and double the playground hours, and you will have done more for the physical, mental, and moral health of young America than by any other possible step.

Better a playground without a schoolhouse, than a schoolhouse without a playground.

THE CHAIRMAN: The President of the Association, Dr. Luther H. Gulick, will speak on "The Century's Children." Dr. Gulick.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: CHILDREN OF THE CENTURY

BY DR. LUTHER H. GULICK

Some years ago a bit of twisted human life—a waif—was discovered and cared for by some good friends. His distorted form was carefully shaped into the most healthful position it could assume, and in that position was firmly and tenderly bound. He was taken to the country, where the birthright of all children is plentiful—sunshine and pure air. Tasteful and nutritious food nourished his body, while happy companionship and