

A portrait of Catharine Esther Beecher, a woman with short, dark, wavy hair, wearing round black-rimmed glasses and a small hoop earring. She is looking upwards and to the left with a slight smile. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a light-colored wall and a dark door frame on the left. The text is overlaid on a black rounded rectangle in the top left corner.

***CATHARINE
ESTHER
BEECHER***

***THE DUTY
OF AMERICAN
WOMEN
TO THEIR
COUNTRY***

Catharine Esther Beecher

The Duty of American Women to Their Country

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[The following is from Judge Lane, of the Supreme Court of Ohio.](#)

[The following is from one of the leading Lawyers of Ohio.](#)

[The following is from E. C. Delavan, Esq., who has devoted so much of his time for several years to the cause of Temperance.](#)

[The following is from a Lawyer in Cincinnati.](#)

[The following extract from an address of Prof. Stowe, delivered at Portland in 1844, corroborates the views expressed by the author on the subject of moral training.](#)

[NOTE A.](#)

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[Preface \(for the American Housekeeper's Receipt Book.\)](#)

VALUABLE THEOLOGICAL WORKS RECENTLY PUBLISHED BY
HARPER & BROTHERS, NEW-YORK.

VALUABLE BOOKS OF TRAVEL IN PRESS OR JUST PUBLISHED
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Sufferings of Little Children from Bad Schoolhouses.

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One of the county superintendents reports of the schoolhouses in his district: "One house in K. is literally unfit for a stable; the sashes of several windows are broken, twenty or thirty panes of glass are out, the door is off, and used for a writing-table. Yet the district is wealthy, but 'they cannot get a vote to build a new schoolhouse.'" "Another schoolhouse in W. is nearly as bad; the gable ends falling out, the chimney down, and the windows nearly all boarded up." Many of the schoolhouses are situated in the highway, so that, at play, the children are endangered by the passing horses and vehicles, and the traveller is also endangered by the rushing of boisterous boys, frightening his horses. Instances of this sort have repeatedly occurred.

Another writes, that in one of the largest landed districts, the worst log schoolhouse in the district is still retained, offering no security against winds and storms. One of the window sashes was "laid up overhead because it would not stay in its place." To keep the door shut against the wind, one end of a bench was put against it, and a boy set to tend it, as one and another went out.

Another writes, that he *often* finds the schoolhouses situated on some bleak knoll, exposed to the howling blasts of winter and the scorching rays of the summer's sun, or in some marsh or swamp, surrounded by stagnant pools, rife with miasma, and charged with disease and death. It is not uncommon, in such places, to find large schools almost entirely broken up by sickness, and that, too, when no contagious diseases are prevailing among children.

One of these superintendents says, "A trustee of one school, where the schoolhouse was situated *in a goose-pond*, the water under the floor being several inches deep, told me his children were almost invariably obliged to leave school on account of sickness, and that the school was often broken up from this cause. Parents pay ten times as much, for physicians to cure diseases contracted at school, as it would cost to build a comfortable schoolhouse and supply it with every accommodation."

Another says of the schoolhouses in his county, that, in some cases, the latches are broken, so that, however cold the day, the door cannot be shut; sometimes the sills are so rotten that snakes and squirrels can enter; while there are cracks in the floor, one or two inches wide, and holes broken large enough for the children to fall through.

The wretched condition of these houses is not owing to poverty, but to the *leaden apathy* on the subject of education, and the belief among farmers that their money can be better applied in building barns and stables for their cattle. In one large village, where a great sum has been expended for adorning public grounds, and where is much wealth and style, the two schoolhouses are the meanest-looking buildings in the place.

Another says of the schoolhouses in his county, that, in many cases, they stand on the highway, no cooling shade to protect them from the burning sun, exposed to the full fury of the wintry northwester, clapboards torn off, door just ready to fall, and great caution needed in order to keep from falling through the floor. In one case, an aperture in the roof was of such a size, that the teacher could give quite a lesson on astronomy by looking up at the heavens through the roof of the house. Frequently, to the grief of the teacher, when the parent brings his child the first day, such expressions as these are heard from the clinging and

distressed child, "Oh, pa, I don't want to stay in this ugly, old house! Oh, pa, do take me home!"

Sufferings of Little Children from Want of Accommodations at School.

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One superintendent says, "But few of the schoolhouses are furnished with blinds or curtains to exclude the glare of the sun. Thus, children suffer great uneasiness, headaches, and often serious affections of the eyes. I have found *many cases* of weakness of eyes, approaching almost to blindness, caused by studying in such dazzling light."

Another states, that in most schoolhouses the desks are so high, as to compel the scholar to write in a half-standing, half-sitting attitude; while the seats for the smallest children are often twice the proper height, sometimes a hemlock slab with legs at one end, and a log at the other. Many of the little ones have to be helped up on them, where they are in peril of life and limb from a fall. Here they are obliged to sit, day after day and week after week, between heaven and earth, "and in a frame of mind unfit for either place," without anything to support either their backs or their feet. Those who would realize what distress this occasions, let them try sitting only one half hour on a table or sideboard, with back and feet unsupported, and see what suffering ensues.

Another writes thus: "Sitting with the legs hanging over the edge of the seat presses the *veins* (which lie near the surface, and carry the blood to the heart), and thus retard its return, while the arteries, being deeper, carry the blood with its full force from the heart. Thus the veins become distended, numbness and pain follow, and sometimes

permanent weakness is the result. Where children sit a long time without any support to their backs, the muscles that hold up the body become weary and weak, for no muscle can be too long contracted without weakening it. In schools thus badly furnished, it will be seen that the children prefer the northern blasts out of doors to the sufferings they endure within, and come in unwillingly, with chilled bodies and checked perspiration. In some cases, parents provide comfortable chairs for their children, and then it is seen, that such stay but a short time out of doors, while those seated on such comfortless benches stay as long as they can. This shows one predisposing cause of the curvature of the spine, and distortion of the body and limbs. Is it any wonder that so many of our youth have round shoulders, and a stooping of the body through life?"

What would be said of a farmer who made his boy hold a plough as high as his head, or a joiner who made his apprentice plane a board on a bench as high as his shoulders? And yet they expect teachers to make their children study, read and write with just such improper accommodations.

Sufferings of Little Children for Want of Pure Air.

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To understand this subject properly, it must be borne in mind, that the body is so constructed as to inhale at every breath about a pint of air. The air is composed of 79 parts nitrogen and 21 parts oxygen. When it is drawn into the lungs, the oxygen is absorbed by the blood, and what we exhale is the nitrogen, mixed with the carbonic acid, formed in the lungs by the union of the oxygen of the air with the carbon of the blood. Now, neither carbonic acid, or nitrogen

can support life. Take the oxygen from the air, and then breathe it, and instant death ensues. So, put any animal into carbonic acid alone, and it dies instantly. Thus, every breath of every human being uses up the oxygen in one pint of air, and returns it with only nitrogen and carbonic acid. Let a schoolroom, containing 18,000 gallons of air and twenty scholars, be made perfectly airtight, and in twenty minutes they would all be corpses. The horrible sufferings produced by this process, were once witnessed in Calcutta, where 146 men were driven into a room 18 feet square, with only one small window, and kept there from eight at night till six next morning. Before midnight they all became frantic with agony, fought for the window, choaked each other to death, screamed to the soldiers to shoot them, and thus end their misery; and in the morning only 26 were alive, and these in a putrid fever! *Lessening* the amount of oxygen in the air by breathing, produces languor, sleepiness, nausea, headache, flushed face, and sometimes palsy and apoplexy.

On this subject, the superintendents of the New-York schools make these statements:

“Confinement in some of our schoolrooms is *manslaughter*. Our children, shut up in these hot holes, made so by their own breaths, by perspiration, and by a close, overheated stove, lay the foundation for diseases which show no gain except to the physician, and which, in after-life, no riding on horseback, or journeys by sea or land, or southern residence can cure.”

Another states, that the uncomfortable condition of the schoolhouses, in his county, is such as to cause much suffering, both mental and bodily, to the children doomed to inhabit their gloomy walls and breathe the tainted air.

Another writes of the schoolhouses in his district, that they are usually low, and in cold weather so overheated as to be hotbeds of disease, the close atmosphere being

actually dangerous. One teacher, in one instance, was struck with palsy from the effects of confinement in such a poisonous atmosphere. At a public meeting, one citizen stated it as his conviction, that one of his children died from disease engendered by breathing the pestilential atmosphere of the schoolroom. Instances are numerous where the children come home dull, listless, and with severe colds and coughs. The teacher, in such situations, often loses ambition, energy, and health, and closes school pale and emaciated, perhaps to sink to an early grave, a victim of the poisonous air in which, for day after day, he has been confined.

Sufferings of Little Children from Cold, Heat, and Filth.

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One superintendent says, "Could parents witness, as I have, the sufferings of their children from cold, I am sure no other appeal would be needed. Some of those buildings, I am confident, would be considered by a systematic farmer, who regarded the comfort of his stock, as an unfit shelter for his Berkshires."

Another states, that in some cases the schoolhouses are small and overheated. Then the teacher throws open the door, and a current of cold air pours on to the children. The reeking perspiration is suddenly stopped, and "a cold" is the result, which is often the precursor of fevers and consumption. When no such results follow, the parents say, "It is *only a cold*;" when diseases and death follow, it is called *a dispensation of Providence*! A physician of extensive practice stated to this superintendent, that a large part of his consumptive cases originated from colds taken at school.

Another describes one of the schoolhouses in his county as too small, too low, the seats too high, half the plastering fallen off and piled in one corner, and the house warmed by a cook-stove unfit for use. Six sevenths of the panes of glass were gone, and two windows boarded up. Going to attend the annual school meeting at this house, he met two citizens coming with a candle and firebrands, and picking up sticks along the road for a fire, because there was no wood provided at the schoolhouse.

Another thus describes some of the schoolhouses in his county. It is very common to see cracked and broken stoves, the door without hinges or latch, and a rusty pipe of various sizes. Green wood, and that which is old and partially decayed, either drenched with rain, or covered with snow, is much more frequently used than sound, seasoned wood. Thus it is difficult to kindle a fire, and the room is filled with smoke much of the time, especially in stormy weather. Sometimes the school is interrupted two or three times a day to fasten up the stovepipe.

The extent of these evils may be perceived from the report, which says of one county about as well supplied as any, out of *eighty-seven* districts only *twenty* schoolhouses have provided means for keeping their wood dry.

Another says, "At the commencement of the winter term of our schools, some one of the trustees generally furnishes a load of green wood, perhaps his own proportion. The teacher proceeds till this is exhausted, and he is compelled to notify his patrons of the entire destitution of wood. After meeting his school, and shivering over expiring embers till the hope of a supply is exhausted, he dismisses the school for one, two, or three days, and sometimes for a week, before any inhabitant finds time to get another load of green wood. With such wood it is impossible to keep the schoolroom at a proper temperature. The scholars, at first,

crowd around the stove, suffering extremely with cold, and then are driven as far off as they can get, in a high state of perspiration, and almost suffocated with heat. Our schools in this country suffer much from such methods of procuring fuel. The time which is lost in school hours by the use of green wood, I think will include near one fourth of the whole time."

Another says, "The teacher found abundant employment in stuffing the old stove with green birch and elm, cut as occasion required by the teacher and the boys. A continual coughing was kept up by nearly seven-eighths of the children, and the teacher apologised for want of order by saying, 'they could not usually do much in stormy weather till afternoon, when the fire would get a going.' On this occasion, one trustee and two of the inhabitants of the district were present an hour, when, getting frozen out, they asked to be excused, and left the children to suffer, saying, 'We did not think our house was so uncomfortable. Some glass must be got, and a load of dry wood'" Some of the statements of these superintendents, as to the order and neatness of their schoolhouses, are no less lamentable. One remarks, that "some of them, as to neatness, resemble the domicil for swine." Another describes one schoolhouse as "having the clapboards torn off, the door just ready to fall, an aperture in the roof where the chimney once was, slabs with a pair of clubs at each end for legs, and so high no child could touch foot to the floor, rickety desks falling to ruin, the plaster torn off, and the whole covered with dirt, and as filthy as the street itself." But this is not all. "This house is situated in a district of wealthy farmers."

Another says, "It is a startling truth, that very many of our schoolhouses furnish no private retreat whatever for teacher or scholar. Thus is one side of the schoolhouse, and, in some instances, the doorstep, rendered a scene more disgusting than the filth of a pig-sty."