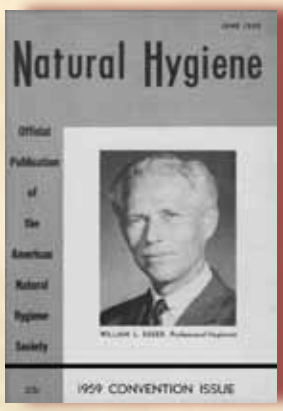
timeless teachings

The Time for Personal Appraisal

by Dr. William Esser



Editor's note: *From its founding in 1948 and until 1970, the American Natural Hygiene Society (now called the National Health Association) held annual conventions at major hotels around the country. Thousands of people were exposed for the first time to the benefits of an uncompromising, whole-food, plant-based diet as an integral part of a healthy lifestyle. The cost of those conventions was partially underwritten through the generosity of members whose contributions and advertisements produced special convention programs in which major articles on the Natural Hygiene health program were written by the leaders of the Society, including the legendary Drs. Shelton, Esser, Gross, and others. The following powerful article appeared in the 1959 convention program and was authored by ANHS cofounder, Dr. William Esser. We think you will find Dr. Esser's words to be as timely and insightful today as they were over 52 years ago.*

Life spends its sands of time quickly. One usually becomes aware of this certain fact sometime after the age of twenty, but the really rude awakening comes at a later date, when the mirror no longer pays its youthful respects and becomes less and less complimentary. Wrinkles begin to mark a smooth vital skin, a graying hair appears here and there, and the fine art of makeup or "gilding the lily" becomes a necessity rather than a compliance with style.

Less superficial and of relatively far more importance are the concrete evidences of physical deterioration which manifest themselves from one birthday to the next. The gradual projection and softening of the abdomen, the appearance of a hernia, the development of hemorrhoids, less and less normal bowel action, the frequent appearance of headaches, a persistent pain in one particular area of the body, the inability to take a short run without difficult breathing and overly active heart action, constant abdominal flatulence and the inability to digest even simple foods without unpleasant symptoms and distress, the everyday feeling of fatigue even before the day has begun—these and innumerable other signs disturb our added years and should serve as warnings that something is rotten somewhere, but not necessarily in Denmark.

It is true that many times the patient as well as the doctor excuses some of these symptoms as merely the accoutrements of middle age or later life, and therefore, they are burdenfully accepted and tolerated. It is also true that the individual sometime seeks advice and having received it just as quickly forgets it. There are also those who so thoroughly involve themselves in business, domestic or social activities that personal health receives attention only after one organ or another or one system or another in the body is seriously impaired.

There is still another group, the members of which have been flirting with the goddess Hygiea for many years but are somewhat like the inconstant moon. They are sporadically faithful, only courting her when ill health sparks the wooing, and upon the regaining of health forgetting her for other demoralizing loves. Hygiene is a jealous love and when she is jilted makes us suffer the punishment for faithlessness. Life is full of rules and laws, and Nature too has exacting ones. Indeed, she is more exacting about having them fulfilled than the department of internal revenue. The wisest men agree that the observance and obedience to universal law and order will best insure freedom. Ignoring or opposing Nature's laws can only result in punishment and enslavement. Being disobedient to Natural law is just as hazardous as racing through a school zone at 60 miles per hour when the speed zone recommends 10. Others may be very seriously affected as well as oneself by such recklessness. It is far wiser to observe obedience to the 10-mile speed limit than to insist on the "freedom" of smashing through a group of schoolchildren and being imprisoned on a manslaughter charge. Too often the objection to Natural Hygiene is by those who do not wish to be restrained by the rules of living which it recommends. Putting it frankly, is it better to have the "freedom" of violating physiological law in the way that is common and average and thereby preparing the way to an inglorious ending with a malignancy, degeneration of the nervous system, or heart disease?

One Way Only?

Everyone wishes to "live, live, live" till he "dies," the only problem being that there is only one way of doing it. … The conventional idea of putting this wish into practice is to ask for license to be gluttonous, sensuous and intemperate in everything. This is not even an honest, forthright way of committing suicide.

Walking Sepulchres

Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, once said, "The tombstones of a good many people should read: 'Died at thirty, buried at sixty.'" This is true not only of the spirit and intellect but also of the physical body. After people have "lived" in the conventional sense, they are more like walking sepulchres instead of healthy, vigorous humans, full of enthusiasm for life. They become automatons to whom life's worthwhile moments are comprised of reaching for a cigarette, lifting a cup of coffee, reaching for food, reaching for an aspirin, reaching for the TV button, reaching for a tranquilizer, and then repeating the whole procedure ad infinitum, ad nauseum.

Usually, much of our potential life span has passed before these disconcerting facts are sufficiently impressed upon us to shock us into a sensible plan of living. Perhaps there is no more appropriate opportunity for applying the brakes to the thoughtless manner· in which potential life force is being squandered than at a Hygienic convention.

Here is the ideal circumstance for the appraisal of our own personal lives. Life is brief, no matter how many years can be hoped for, and it is a personal tragedy to fail to recognize and put into practice the basic tenets of normal living until it is too late.

A convention offers the chance to study and learn. It is a gathering of people interested in achieving and having good health. Since the kind of health we have depends upon the life we live—in other words, upon how harmoniously we bring our lives in tune with the simplicity of Natural Hygienic laws—this is the time for a personal appraisal, the development of a plan for the future. Remember, you are not being urged to make a sacrifice. It is rather urging you to gratefully give up and discard the silly little harmful pleasures and habits which have been preventing you from achieving the fulfillment of happiness (moral, physical and intellectual) for which man was destined. Once accomplished, the happiness one feels shades into insignificance previous petty pleasures.