

CHARACTER AND CITIZENSHIP SECTION

HABIT

THE ORDINARY person thinks of smoking, chewing gum, or personal peculiarities such as holding one's head on the side, as habits. He does not think of walking, skating, and catching a ball as habits, nor of the movements of his eyes in reading, or of his hands in playing a piano. But these are all habits.

Habit enters so largely into man's daily activities that it would be impossible for him to exist without it. He could not communicate with a friend without making use of the habits of enunciation or writing that he formed with great difficulty in childhood. If he had not made it a habit, he might be occupied all day in dressing and undressing himself, for the fastening of a button or the combing of his hair would be as difficult as when he first tried it as a child. He would, moreover, be completely tired out from his exertions. But habit enables him to do these things speedily and accurately, yet almost unconsciously, and so leave his mind free for other matters.

Habit formation has been likened to the making of a path across the field. After the first traveler has trodden down the grass, the next is likely to follow in the same route, and so on until presently the grass is wholly worn away and everyone thereafter follows the beaten path.

In the same way in the animal organism, nervous currents tend to employ those pathways which have been previously established, and thus many of our habits formed when we are young—such as posture, personal cleanliness, manners, and standards of dress, enunciation and tone of voice, and even moral habits—

become permanently settled upon us.

To break up a habit means a complete change in the nervous system, and this cannot be brought about only by a penitent attitude of mind.

It is important to remember that habits originate not only in conscious effort to do new things, but in conscious and unconscious limitation of what the child sees and hears about him.

One of the main businesses of life is the formation of correct habits, for habits are the substance of conduct and character. To each of us comes the day when we realize the "law of human souls that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character."

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Make a list of at least ten habits; more if possible.
2. Why are habits important?
3. How is a habit formed?
4. Are there good habits? Bad habits?
5. When, especially, should good habits be formed? Why then?
6. Is it possible to break up a bad habit? How?
7. Do you have any bad habits? If so, make a list of them.
8. Why not begin *right now* to break up your bad habits?
9. Why not begin *right now* to form some good habits which you do not have?
10. Ask your teacher at school to talk to your class about habits—good and bad.