

TWO BAD HABITS

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)

A NUMBER of diseases are passed on by personal contact. Pneumonia, influenza, diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, chickenpox, mumps and the common cold—these and other diseases are contact diseases. They spread from a person with the disease to another, mostly directly, but sometimes indirectly, through things touched and infected by the sufferer. It is the bodily secretions and excretions that are the transfer agents. When things are moistened with saliva and passed on to others, that is an effective indirect way of passing on infection. It is really a very close method of personal contact.

The clerk who moistens his or her fingers to turn over correspondence for somebody else; the ticket-seller who wets the tickets with saliva to facilitate the sale; the shop assistant who moistens the sheet of wrapping paper with a wet finger to pull it off a pile of paper; all the people who wet their fingers before doing something for somebody else; the people who moisten pages to turn them over—just keep your eyes open for a day or so and see how many lick-finger people there are about! The cure of this bad habit—a disease-spreading habit—is public recognition of its danger: that it is bad form: that licking of fingers, moistening them with saliva, is dangerous to others and socially wrong.

Don't spit! Haven't you seen that notice in many places? I think all the chronic "spitters" cannot have grown up. They must still be babies—for a baby's reaction, when it is told "Don't," is to go straight ahead and do it! However, baby gets checked by word or smack, and learns not to "do" when "don't" is said. Keep your eyes open, next time you are in town, and see how those grown-up babies, the "spitters," are doing their dirty work round about our footpaths and streets.

Common And Dangerous

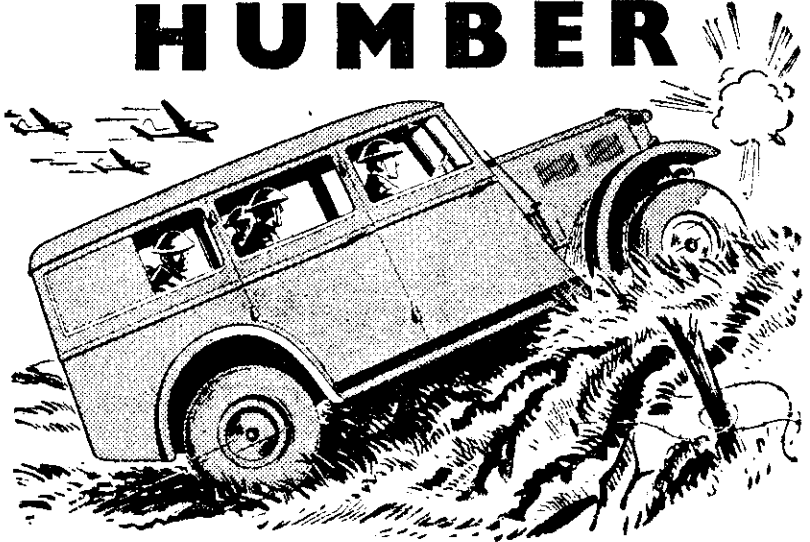
Wherever you walk you will see that spitting is still a very common habit. And here is the danger in it: as the phlegm is spat out, droplets break off, and pollute the air directly. Anyone walking through that patch of air immediately afterwards will breathe in some of the droplets, together with any harmful germs from that "spitter's" throat. When the sputum dries on the pavement, it contributes to the dust menace. Should the "spitter" be suffering from tuberculosis, T.B. germs will be added to the dust, and flow about in the air. While the phlegm is lying on the foot-path or floor, before it dries, it may be picked up by the shoe soles, and later spread on carpets, floors and so on. As these deposits dry, the germs will float and circulate by air currents through crowded shops or rooms.

The man who spits is a public nuisance—an ignorant fellow, who does not realise he is a public danger. Anyone who feels impelled to spit, should do so into a paper handkerchief, put it in a paper bag in his pocket, and burn the whole later. Best of all—don't spit!

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