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PHYSICAL TRAINING AN ESSENTIAL TO THE BETTER HEALTH DEFENSE OF SOCIETY*

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Good health—good, active, aggressive health—is the most important thing in this world.

If you want some first-hand original information concerning the importance of health, go ask the man that has lost it. If you want an experienced estimate on its value, go to the woman that is trying to buy back the health she once had.

I suppose there is no family in the world that has not at some time or other experienced the mental, physical or economic losses that are due to poor health, preventable disease, or postponable death; and I suppose there is no individual in this world that has not or will not sooner or later feel those losses himself.

Good health is the most important thing in this world, not only for its own sake but for the larger reason that the full and complete measure of the success of every human enterprise depends upon the quality and endurance of the good health that supports it. The measure of your success depends upon the sort of health that backs up your enterprise, whether it be mental, moral or physical.

Have you ever thought over what the world loses every year—every day—because of poor health, avoidable disease, and premature death? The slaughter in the great war now raging in Europe has shocked us beyond expression. But every year of ordinary peace brings the world a greater unnecessary death rate and a greater preventable morbidity rate than accompany this great war. The ravages of weak health, of preventable disease, of postponable death are greater, far greater, year in and year out, than the ravages of this awful war. There are about 3,000,000 people sick in these United States in any given day. Something like 1,500 persons die daily of preventable disease in the United States. A comparatively small part of the earth's population is in this country.

*An address presented before the Associated Academic Principals, State of New York.

I can't estimate the economic losses that occur daily or yearly because of inefficient health and unsuccessfully resisted disease. Great economists have tried but their estimates can never even approximate the real loss.

There are other losses of greater importance than the economic losses. They are world losses in intellectual output; losses in public service; losses in ideal commercial, professional, educational and religious progress; and, greatest of all, losses in human happiness—which follow this world-wide careless waste of human health and human life.

You must easily recall the names of great men whose usefulness to this country, or to some other country, and through such country, to the whole world, would have been continued at least for the period of an average life time had they been protected in health.

I do not know intimately very many communities represented here to-day. Perhaps I am not very well acquainted with a single one of the communities which you represent. But I know that no community exists or ever did exist that has not a long list of useful, public spirited citizens whose importance and value to the community was limited or cut short through poor health, preventable disease and postponable death. Your communities must have had such experiences.

If there were some way to save this human resource; some way to conserve these community assets for longer periods of time, would there be a community anywhere in this world that would refuse to go to any extreme for the purpose?

What would you not give if your father at sixty were as robust and active as Mr. X at eighty? What would you not give if that child of yours could have had enough vigorous health to have recovered from that last illness? What would you not give—but I need not ask—you know! I know!

Suppose there were some way in which you could reduce absences on account of sickness in your schools. Suppose you could secure an influence that would relieve your teachers of depressing, deadening fatigue and keep them off the sick list, would you be interested?

Nations, states, cities and even smaller communities, realizing the value of this human resource, have accomplished a remarkable progress in the prolongation of human life and in the reduction of poor health and the restriction of certain forms of disease. Morbidity rates are enormously decreased. The average duration of human life has been doubled in comparatively recent years. Wherever scientific knowledge and community resource have been brought together, we have found it possible to buy more health and longer life. Some years ago, in 1900, I believe—it was shown that the average

age of the rich Frenchman at death was fifty-seven years, while the average age of the poor Frenchman at death was thirty-seven years. The difference was—and is—due, not to the mere possession of wealth, but rather to the purchase by the rich of better sanitation and more effective protection from preventable disease.

Larger communities and more intelligent communities, have invested their capital in health protective measures and those investments are yielding large profits. I need only refer to Havana or Panama or to any one of a number of larger American cities to illustrate my point. Greater advance can and will be made along those lines but there is a limit beyond which the community cannot go unless it goes as a community of intelligent individuals of whom practically every one—not a bare majority, not a two-thirds majority but a near unanimity—practices regularly intelligent habits of health acquisition and habits of health conservation. There is a point or a line beyond which the power of community law and the might of the community's dollar cannot go without the help of community education. Beyond that line lies a region that can be reached only through the health education of the individual members of the community. That education must begin in childhood and it must be continued through the elementary and secondary school age. It must be an education for the fixation of intelligent health habits that will be practiced throughout the life of the individual.

Organized society may purchase the extinction of the malarial mosquito. It may buy the eradication of the yellow fever mosquito, the rat of bubonic plague, the tick of spotted fever, the fly of sleeping sickness or the louse of typhus fever or of trench fever. Organized society may buy clean pure water and it may purchase a successful food inspection. But it cannot buy habits of personal hygiene that produce human health; that defend the individual from disease and postpone his death. It cannot purchase health habits that give the individual resistance to disease, making it harder for him to become sick and easier to recover. It cannot purchase the personal consciousness of individual obligation in the health affairs of the community that is essential to an effective defense of the community health.

We have two ways in which we may successfully defend human life against poor health, preventable disease, and postponable death; two ways in which we may save our children, our kinsman, our countrymen and mankind in general from these merciless enemies of life, prosperity and happiness.

On the one hand, society may, and does, enact and enforce laws for the defense of the public against the insect, animal

and human carriers of disease. It may and does provide opportunities for the community practice of health habits. In these and various other ways the community spends its resource and applies its scientific knowledge for the protection of human health and vitality through a control of environment and through a police supervision of social activities.

On the other hand, society may provide opportunities for public instruction in the principles and practice of health. It may offer school experience that lead to the establishment of intelligent health habits in school children and it may establish laws which make better health education mandatory.

Both these types of defense are essential to the safety of the public health. Neither one may achieve success without the other. Community hygiene depends on personal hygiene and personal hygiene is helpless in the absence of community hygiene.

It is only through a combination between organized community activity and intelligent, educated, individual support within the community that society may defend its health. The individual who acquires health habits, renders a community service.

We have here in the State of New York various sane and intelligent legislative enactments for the health defense of the commonwealth. These laws are being operated more or less effectively but their real use, their greatest value, will come only when the people of the State are possessed of a sufficient health education to enable them to understand, appreciate and co-operate with the State in its plans for the acquisition and conservation of human resource.

The health laws of the State to be effective must be supported by a people trained to understand and trained to obey these laws. The hygiene of the State as a whole cannot be better than the hygiene of the people who make the State. An effective physical training of the individual is then a contribution in the service of the State.

The legislature of this State in its session of 1916, went farther in this direction than it has ever gone before. It went farther than any other State legislature has ever gone to bring community hygiene and individual hygiene together. The legislature enacted laws which now make physical training mandatory for all the children in our elementary and secondary schools.

The legislature gave us a program of physical training that is now a part of the rules and regulations of the Regents of the University of the State of New York. This program is a plan for the health education of our children which the State Department of Education is obliged to supervise; it is a pro-

gram which the schools of the State are obliged to operate; and it is a program whose operation the State Military Training Commission is obliged by law to inspect.

If you make this program effective in your school, you will thereby add to the health intelligence and the health habits of the individual members of this great commonwealth and you will meet your serious obligations to the health welfare of your pupils, your teachers and your community. And it will follow—it must follow—that the public defense against poor health, preventable disease, and unnecessary death, will become enormously more effective. It is the only way in which the defense may be made truly effective. If every school child is taught habits of health, every citizen will soon practice these habits. Our State laws on health will no longer lack the support that is essential to their success. An army will be added for the protection of the State in which every man, woman and child in the State will be trained for offense and defense in the campaign of the commonwealth against the enemies of its health, vigor and happy longevity.

The State program on physical training now before you is made up of three main divisions. These divisions are essential to the completeness of any effective plan for health education.

The first division deals with health examination—that is—with medical inspection. Personal health is on the average impossible in the absence of regular individual health examinations and consequent attention to the special health needs revealed by the examination.

The second division of the State program covers the instruction of the school child concerning the care of the body and the laws of health. With the successful development of this instructional relationship, we should be able in time to secure an intelligent understanding of the laws of health and therefore intelligent standards, intelligent co-operation, and intelligent aggressiveness on the part of society in its relation to the health problems of the community. The children you teach to-day will be influential voting citizens to-morrow. The health intelligence of the community to-morrow, therefore, depends on what you teach to-day.

The third division of the general plan is concerned with the establishment of health habits; particularly with habits of physical exercise for the various mental, moral and physical benefits that may be secured from such habits. Physical exercise in its various forms is perhaps the very greatest health habit we possess. Unfortunately, too many of us never learn the habit. If this State program succeeds there will appear

a generation of citizens who will practice useful habits of active recreation.

The general program of physical training is now contained in the rules and regulations of the Regents. It includes the mandatory requirements of the State concerning health education.

The more detailed syllabus that accompanies the general program indicates to the individual school the various ways in which the general requirement may be met. As a rule, the syllabus contains a choice of programs under each division with additional instructions to the effect that the individual school may submit, if it desires, a syllabus of its own in conformity with the general program of physical training. If this syllabus so submitted meets with the approval of the Regents, it may be put in operation by the school authorities concerned.

The State program and its elastic syllabus for the rational application of its general plan of health education is before you.

You will find many obstacles in the way of rapid application but you will never find an obstacle that is worth permanence. Sooner or later, every interference with the operation of this program in its general scope must disappear. No people were ever given a greater or more significant opportunity than our State has here given us. We must get together and realize that opportunity.

Two million children fall under its influence to-day; two million lives may be prolonged; two million future citizens may be saved the loss of working days, of income, of productivity of civic and military usefulness and of happiness. And each year a new army of untrained children will come to you for health education. You can make these lives more useful and more enduring. Here is the way.