

Democratic Watchman

Bellefonte, Pa., April 1, 1910.

HEALTH FORCES DEFEAT DEATH.

Three Million Dollars Spent in Conservation of Public Health Shows a Saving of Twenty-Three Million Dollars to the Commonwealth—Diphtheria, Typhoid and Tuberculosis Give Way Before the Steady Advance of State's Health Officers.

The precious lives of thousands of little children have been spared because the state in its wise beneficence has furnished diphtheria antitoxin to the poor.

Typhoid fever is killing 2500 less people per year in Pennsylvania than it did four years ago.

Tuberculosis now claims 1000 lives less a year in this state.

Education and co-operation of the people in health matters, backed by vigorous support of the public press, is helping Commissioner Dixon to win out in war against disease.

Industries seek states where health records show low death rate.

In the last five years the state of Pennsylvania has been engaged in conservation work of an extremely important and fundamental kind. With President Roosevelt it believes that the preservation of the people's natural resources should begin with the preservation of the people themselves. The public cannot conscientiously permit the wasteful sacrifice of its forests and its other forms of natural wealth, but even less conscientiously can it permit the wanton sacrifice of its children's lives.

In maintaining a fully equipped state health department and engaging on a large scale in this great warfare against disease, Pennsylvania has taken a foremost stand for real modern civilization. The creation of governmental agencies for the preservation of the public health marks a new conception of governmental responsibility. The work thus far marks only the beginning—merely suggests the good which this department, under the direction of Dr. Samuel G. Dixon, the commissioner, has in view.

In the last thirty years the attitude of the public towards ill health has radically changed. Until the researches of that resourceful genius, Louis Pasteur, disclosed the real cause of contagious diseases, the average man's conception was practically that which had prevailed in the middle ages. The infections were merely manifestations of the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, expressions of divine wrath; punishments for sinful human kind. Even the scientist regarded them as fundamental facts of nature, like death itself, which everyone must uncomplainingly accept. Pasteur, however, in a few masterly experiments, brushed aside all this ignorance and superstition. He showed that all contagious diseases had a clearly defined and obvious origin. They were not mysterious visitations, without tangible cause and insusceptible to tangible control. They were caused by an infinitely large universe of infinitely small forms of vegetable and animal life. He demonstrated that the connection between these malevolent micro-organisms and the ensuing disease was as close as that between sunlight and heat. And he also immediately drew the inevitable conclusion. If the world were once rid of these organisms, he declared, it would be rid of contagious diseases. "It is now within the power of the world"—such was the deduction which he drew from his experiments. "to rid itself of all contagious diseases."

Setting Pace in Health Work.

This was the goal at which Pasteur aimed; that has been the goal at which all movements for improving the people's health have necessarily aimed since. And this was the ultimate ambition which led, five years ago, to the organization of the Pennsylvania State Department of Health, a Pennsylvania in which there shall be no young men and women languishing away with tuberculosis; a Pennsylvania in which no children shall die of diphtheria; a Pennsylvania in which there shall be no typhoid, no scarlet fever, no smallpox, no meningitis, no dysentery, no malaria—this is the kind of Pennsylvania which the State Department of Health hopes ultimately to create. It does not expect to reach this goal in a year, or ten years, perhaps not in a single generation, but this is the ideal that it has constantly in mind. It recognizes the fact that, so long as any of these diseases exist, their prevalence is a distinct reproach to the state. It is a reproach simply because the method of eliminating them is known. The old theory of government as a power which protects its citizens only from foreign foes and native marauders is giving way to new standards of civilization. The greatest enemies to the state are those which are unseen, and the first duty of an enlightened commonwealth is to protect its people against them. Other states are gradually rising to this new conception, but Pennsylvania now clearly heads them all, for in no other state is the battle against the common enemy being waged on so large a scale as here. The experiment, therefore, is not only of extreme importance to Pennsylvanians,

but as an example to the nation and the world.

Does It Pay.

Naturally the people are interested to learn precisely how the large sum the state is investing annually in good health is being spent; what are its dividends, as measured in the actual saving of human lives? Is Pennsylvania a richer, a more healthy commonwealth now than it was four years ago? Is the average citizen less likely to acquire a mortal disease—less likely to die if he does acquire one?

In exchange for its generous appropriations, Pennsylvania has received, first of all, a considerable reduction in its death rate. Not so many people die here now as died in 1906, the year when the new department began its organized work. The citizens of Pennsylvania, especially its little children, stand a better chance than they formerly did of reaching mature life and a green old age. Mortality statistics do not commonly furnish exciting reading, but, when considered from this point of view, they make an emphatic personal appeal. Thus, in 1906 and 1907, the death rate in Pennsylvania per thousand of population was 16.5; in 1908, it had dropped to 15.7, and in 1909 to 15.3. At first glance this may not seem a remarkable diminution, but in a state with a population of more than 7,000,000 even a fractional decrease is a substantial gain. This appears when one figures precisely what this slight numerical drop means in the actual saving of human lives. Had the death rate of 1906 and 1907 prevailed in 1908, precisely 5519 more people would have died than actually succumbed. Had this same rate applied in 1909, instead of the decreased percentage recorded by the Bureau of Health, just 8383 men, women and children now living; and presumably in good health and spirits, would have rendered their final tribute to nature. In other words these matter of fact statistics, when interpreted in their real relation to the welfare and happiness of the state, mean the saving to the state of 13,907 lives.

Human Lives as State Assets.

This fact has an immense personal meaning for all people of the state—among these rescued lives might have been your own, your wife's, your child's; but they also have a value which is measurable in dollars and cents. The political economists now recognize that the most valuable kind of wealth is the human life—that human labor is worth at least five times that of all other forms of capital. Even the newly landed immigrant, according to these investigators, has a per capita value of \$875; that is, he adds just that much to the nation's capital. Professor Irving Fisher, of Yale, one of the foremost American economists, has painstakingly figured the financial value to the state of every citizen at particular ages. A new-born infant, says Professor Fisher, is actually worth \$90, while a five-year-old child is worth \$950. From this point on his value rapidly increases; at ten, he could be sold at least \$2000; at twenty it would be \$4000, and at thirty, \$4100. From this point the average human being begins to lose value, in proportion to his decreasing productivity, until at fifty, Professor Fisher gives him a value of only \$700. This same authority places the worth of the average life lost by preventable diseases at \$1700. Taking this as a basis the decreased death rate in Pennsylvania for the last two years represents a money saving of \$22,641,900. The state, in other words, is just that much richer—has just that much more available capital. For its actual expenditure to date of \$3,000,000, including a large portion for permanent improvements, it has taken in more than \$23,000,000. The earnings of the new Department of Health, considered purely from the commercial standpoint, thus represent dividends of more than 766 per cent in four years.

What is the value placed by the average citizen upon his children's lives—not the financial value estimated by the unemotional economist, but the worth in affection, good citizenship and in all that holds the social organization together? Is it good business policy to save the lives of children at \$7 apiece? Is it paternalistic and socialistic to protect them against dangerous infections at the rate of \$2 per head? That is what the state of Pennsylvania is doing now. This conservative old commonwealth has reached that stage of paternalism where the government will not sit quietly by and watch a little child choke to death with diphtheria when the expenditure of a few dollars from the public treasury will relieve its sufferings and save its life.

Saving the Little Ones.

For the last ten years the practical remedy for diphtheria has been available for the children of prosperous households, but it has not been available for the poor. Since Von Behring's immortal discovery that the blood serum of a horse which has recovered from diphtheria possessed wonderful curative properties, and when introduced into the human organism, would usually destroy the disease, this former scourge of childhood has lost nearly all its terrors. In the old days diphtheria destroyed nearly one-half of all the children it assailed. It would do the same today among the poor in Pennsylvania were it not for the antitoxin which the state provides free.

That large numbers of unprotected children have died most shocking deaths in the past for the sole reason that their parents were too poor to afford them anti-toxin, is a melancholy reflection, but these things will not happen in the future. In every corner of Pennsylvania, usually at well known drug stores, there are now stations for

the free distribution of anti-toxin, numbering 650. Whenever any poor man's child falls ill with diphtheria, his physician, by making out a proper application, can secure free of all the anti-toxin he needs to effect a cure.

Since October, 1905, the Health Department has in this way distributed 49,442 packages of anti-toxin. It has treated 19,929 sick people, mostly children, who, but for the state's intervention, would have been neglected. In the old days about 10,000 of these children would have died; as a matter of fact, only 1725 died. Nearly all those who died were children who did not receive the anti-toxin until the late stages of the disease. The detailed statistics of the department show that the earlier the sick child receives the anti-toxin, the greater his chances of recovery. These facts should emphasize the pressing need, in all cases, not only of anti-toxin treatment, but of this treatment at the earliest possible time. The department has also thoroughly tested the powers of antitoxin as an immunizing agent. Diphtheria, as every one knows, is one of the most virulently contagious diseases. It travels like lightning from the sick to the well. In the crowded homes of the poor, many of them ideal culture tubes for the growth of the microbes, its virulence is especially marked. The department in three years has immunized with anti-toxin 14,527 persons, nearly all children, who had been exposed to the disease. Of these only 251 acquired it—a little more than one per cent. The State Department of Health's free distribution of antitoxin to the poor, therefore, has saved over 8000 lives at an average cost of seven dollars each and prevented contagion in several thousands of cases at an average cost of two dollars.

Battle Against Tuberculosis.

In its attitude towards the great problem of tuberculosis, the state government also shows this keen sense of responsibility for the safety of the people. The department of health regards all the tuberculosis poor as in a large sense the wards of the state. Its efforts, in the first place, are to prevent them from falling victims to this insidious disease, and in the second, to assist materially in curing those who have become infected.

The death rate from tuberculosis in this state has fallen from 134 to 120 per one thousand of population in four years. This means a saving of 1060 lives annually.

In the matter of tuberculosis, however, the death rate tells only a small part of the story. Any work in improving conditions must be fundamental, and it will necessarily take many years before extensive results are obtained. What the department has done has been to lay the foundation of comprehensive attack. From its laboratory investigations of the tubercle bacillus to its especially equipped sanatoria, there is no aspect of the disease that it does not study and combat. It aims to enter at every stage into the life of the tuberculous poor. To many citizens the state government is more or less of an indefinite idea; they seldom come into contact with it as a living, acting entity; if you are once stricken with tuberculosis, however, especially if you are poor, the commonwealth of Pennsylvania becomes physically manifest in your daily lives. In the medical inspection, in the physician and in the nurses the state ceases to be an economic abstraction and becomes a kind, helping, fostering personality.

The Dispensaries.

If you are stricken down and cannot afford proper medical attendance, there is always near at hand a tuberculosis dispensary, established for precisely cases of this kind. There are many thousands of patients in the state who are still able to be about and to follow the daily routine, perhaps even to support their families. The 114 tuberculosis dispensaries are of especial assistance to this class. The dispensary physicians have treated 21,227 patients and actually cured 712, while the condition of 8649 has so greatly improved that the arrest of the disease is almost assured. Here the sick man or woman is received by a professional nurse, who makes a complete first-hand investigation of the case. By questioning the patient she learns all the details of his family history, his occupation, his financial resources, his surroundings, at home

or at work—the latter particularly for the purpose of protecting his intimates and associates from infection. This information she records for the use of the physician, and the department. She follows up this preliminary talk by an inspection at the patient's home. Here her administrations amount to a liberal education in the treatment of tuberculosis. She instructs the patient as to the proper handling of himself—how he must dress, how he must eat and sleep, and tells him of the well known ways of building up the nat-

(Continued on page 7.)

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