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TENT-SPEAKING FOR HEALTH

An Experiment in Chautauqua Health Education

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HOW to reach those leaders in each community to whom we must look for the development and support of public health programs is a problem that all public health educators must face and solve. In the belief that Chautauqua provides one of the best media for reaching the highest concentration of intelligence in the small town, the American Public Health Association, the National Tuberculosis Association, twenty-three state health departments, five chautauqua circuits and the Milbank Memorial Fund have cooperated in the organization of a chautauqua health program. The venture, organized in the summer of 1928, is so new that as yet it is in the experimental stage,

but already 375 communities in twenty-three states have been reached and the estimated audiences of the public health lectures incorporated into the chautauqua programs number 820,000. The establishment of two full-time county health units in Tennessee, one in Lincoln County, and the other in Giles County, was an outstanding immediate achievement of the program.

In addition there were many other tangible results. Health officers expressed their delight with the results of the lectures, which in many instances cleared away objections and obstacles which had been confronting them. In one populous county a full-time county health unit with a good record had been voted out of existence by the local fathers. This action was reversed shortly after the chautauqua health lecture. In a small city plans have gone forward for a public water supply and better sewage disposal system. One doctor reported no less than a dozen calls for typhoid or diphtheria inoculation on days following the lecture. A health department employe reported that the lecture had resulted in the

DURING the past two summers, the Milbank Memorial Fund has cooperated with the American Public Health Association and the Redpath and Swarthmore Chautauqua Systems in utilizing professional public speakers to interpret the public health movement to audiences in 372 towns and cities distributed over twenty-three states east of the Mississippi River. Homer N. Calver, executive secretary of the health association, here writes about this experiment. *Hereafter the Quarterly Bulletin* will be utilized from time to time for the presentation of articles concerning the various interests of the Fund beyond the horizons of the three New York Health Demonstrations.

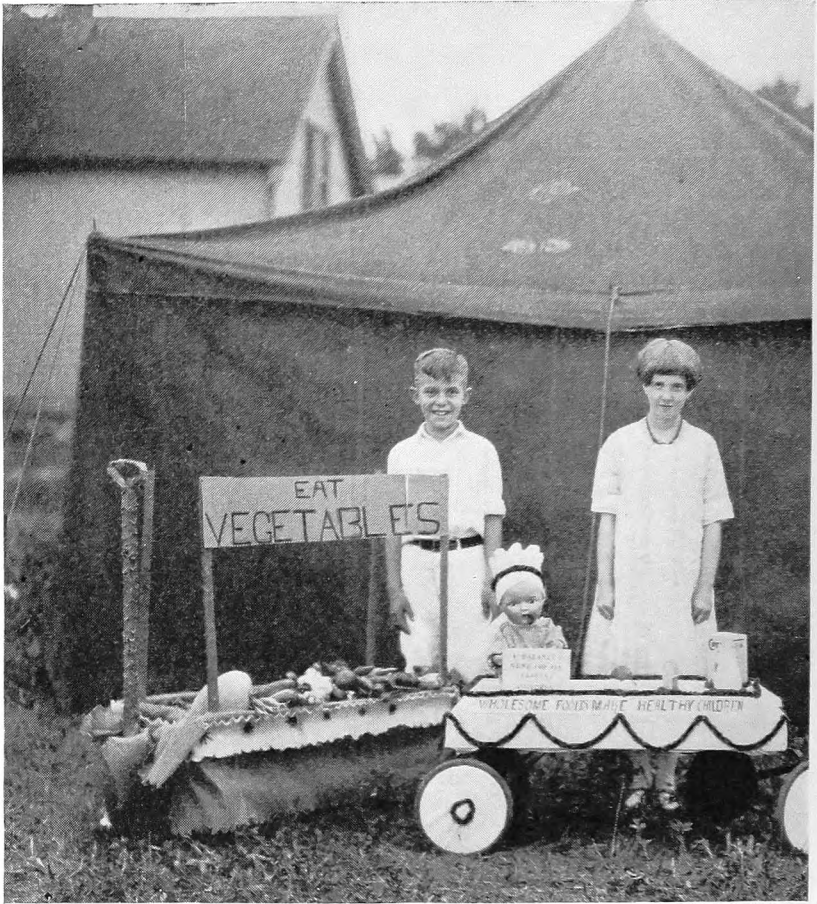
hushing of complaints against strict health requirements. School authorities expressed their gratification at the importance given in the health lectures to problems of school hygiene, and local business men joined in approving the project.

IN 1927, the Syracuse Department of Health directed a survey to ascertain certain facts about persons then residing in Syracuse who at some time had been diagnosed tuberculous. With the co-operation of public and private agencies and institutions and of private physicians, the records of the Department of Health, and of such other likely sources as clinics, hospitals, schools, and a preventorium were searched. A digest of the findings of this study appears as the second article in this issue. (On page 99 is an index to the titles of articles and the names of persons appearing in Volume VII. The *Bulletin* was established in 1923, this being the twenty-seventh issue published.

One health officer reported that the chautauqua health lecture had created sufficient interest in a proposed local ordinance governing milk distribution by dairymen to enable this ordinance to be passed and put into effect quickly. Another health commissioner declared that the health lecture had crystallized local support of health measures and at the same time had brought him

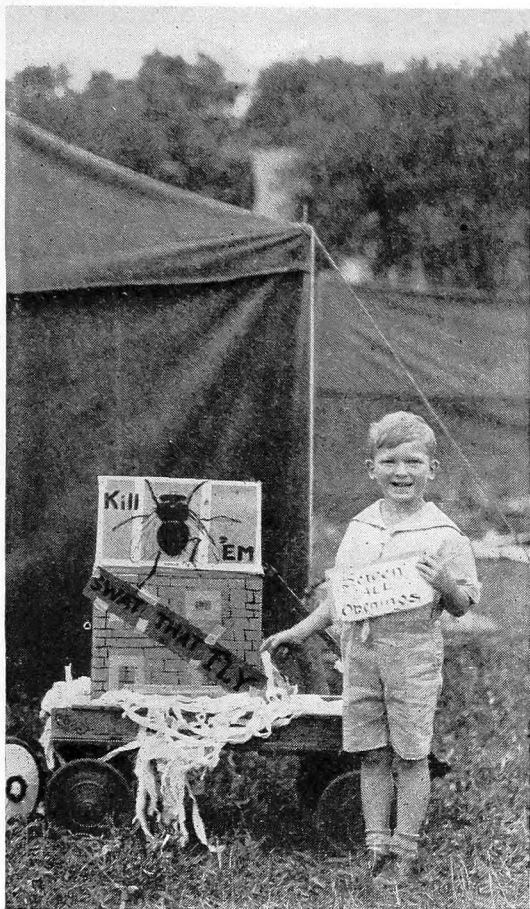
to the realization of the importance of keeping his community informed concerning local health activities. "We are so busy trying to keep these movements going that we forget how to keep the results before the public," he wrote, "and a lecture like this gives us enthusiasm and courage to continue. I think this is a wonderful work."

The chautauqua health program, financed by the Milbank Memorial Fund, was operated under the general direction of a committee of the American Public Health Association, under the chairmanship of Dr. S. J. Crumbine. It was planned



so that the chautauqua health lecture in each town and county would be no ordinary vague discussion on hygiene but that it should be inspired and inspirational general public health information and education, plus a very intimate and accurate presentation of local health problems.

There were four lecturers the first season, but, according to a change of policy, only one, Mr. Frederick M. Snyder, was engaged for 1929. The lecturers were chosen with great care, particularly with respect to their gifts as public speakers. They were each supplied with a condensed public health



library in order to familiarize themselves with the general facts, and in addition they were given particular information gathered for the occasion about each community.

It was to a man behind the scenes that the chautauqua health program was indebted for the local color that made these health lectures as popular and as successful as they were. An experienced health officer, employed by the American Public

Health Association, acting as an advance scout, visited state and local health officials; - - preceded the chautauqua into the towns on its route, and visited the local health officer, if any, and unearthed the status of public health in that county and town. These nuggets of local health history were transmitted in memoranda to the speaker in advance of his address. An advance agent was responsible too for some of the health publicity that whetted the interest of townspeople in the personality and powers of the health speakers.

When the health speaker came to the chautauqua plat-

form, he was faced by an audience that was already interested in hearing what he had to say about their town, and in learning how much he knew about it. They were never disappointed, for his knowledge seemed almost omniscient.

He knew when he was in a county that had no county health department, and he knew whether the reason was inertia or politics. He knew when a devoted health officer was struggling against great odds with inadequate appropriations. He knew where the health department was operating without either a nurse, a laboratory, or a technician. He knew that in one wealthy county the only public health nurse had been dismissed when her car wore out because no money would be appropriated to provide her with a new car. He knew when he was in a town where there were no sewers, where the little stream that flowed through the town had been turned into a gutter for human filth because estimates on the costs of sanitary sewers had been filed away in the town archives and forgotten for four years.

He knew when there was no milk inspection, no typhoid immunization, no school physical examinations, no diphtheria protection. He knew where there had been twenty cases of smallpox in one county within two years, and he knew that the reason was because the "courthouse gang" wouldn't support enforcement of vaccination. He knew about a recent local typhoid fever epidemic that had resulted in twenty-one cases and one death, and he knew, likewise, the old spring of polluted water to which this epidemic had been traced. He knew, too, that just the day before he arrived in one town the entire populace had been saddened by the death of a little girl whose death could have been prevented had there been public health efforts at immunization. He was even familiar with such dark details of local history as the fact that the largest office building in the town had no toilet.

The lecturer knew where to praise as well as where to condemn, and his position in each town was that of the prophet, coming from the outside, daring to ignore local politics and personal desires for gain that kept the town and county inactive in the face of antiquated laws and lax administration. After the lecture he answered questions and made appointments with local men of influence in order to follow up the interest that his words had inspired.

In commenting on the value of the chautauqua health program in the State of Tennessee, Dr. E. L. Bishop, State Commissioner of Health, expressed the opinion that the work done in Tennessee alone will yield dividends over a period of years to come that will be far in excess of the actual amount of money spent in all of the states reached by the lectures.

"Briefly summarizing," Dr. Bishop writes, "we feel that Mr. Snyder's visit to the state was largely instrumental in bringing about the establishment immediately of two county health departments and the quite probable establishment of two additional departments and the possible establishment of still another county health department. Mr. Snyder worked in direct and intimate association with this department, saying, much more effectively than could we, exactly the things we would have said. No amount of money similarly spent, we think, could have resulted in more definite, specific and constructive improvements."

Members of the community who acted as guarantors of the chautauqua program as a whole indicated their enthusiasm at the new departure in including such a lecture on public health in the week's program. "A lecture like that makes Chautauqua worthwhile," one of the guarantors stated. "When the Chautauqua brings such fine and helpful lecturers, we will continue to buy season tickets."

Editorial comment was universally favorable. "Nothing

better illustrates the value of the Chautauqua to a community," the *Columbus* (Georgia) *Ledger* wrote of the lecture.

The *Fayetteville* (North Carolina) *Observer* stated, "We recall one outstanding address on public health which, for its value and influence to the community, was probably worth the entire cost of the season's ticket. Today Fayetteville is thinking more in terms of public health than at any time heretofore because a man who had the facts at his command made it plain that the fight against disease is the bitterest battle that man has ever waged."

In chautauqua towns the school children were organized into a miniature municipality by a Junior Town director with the assistance of local teachers. This miniature municipality represented the children's own home town and they dealt with its actual problems. Special attention was paid to personal and public health, hygiene and sanitation. The Junior Town director guided these town meetings, often assisted by the county nurse. At the end of the week the juniors put on a health education program.

