

THE FINAL REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE HEALTH COMMISSION IS REVIEWED

UPON publication, hailed by public health authorities as the most adequate survey ever made of the public health resources of New York State and as the most comprehensive state program for the conservation of individual and community health ever formulated, the final report of the New York State Health Commission, "Public Health in New York State," continues to arouse favorable comment.

One reviewer states that it is "one of the finest contributions of recent years to sound public health doctrine," while another welcomes it as "a Bible for the whole public health profession in the commonwealth and an achievement which many other states would profit by emulating." One commentator greets the book as a "landmark in public health administration" and says that it will "serve as a stimulus to the advancement of sound health organization and as a valuable source book for many health administrators." In the opinion of another, it is "a most unusual document, containing much valuable material, not only for health authorities, but for educational authorities and industrial and commercial interests," and still another appraises it as "one of the great documents in the history of American public health."

The 500-page volume issued under the imprint of the New York State Department of Health, covers every phase of public health work and presents specific recommendations for the improvement of the service in each field. It represents the results of nearly two years' study and investigation by more than a hundred experts in the science and practice of public health. The investigation was financed by a grant of the Milbank Memorial Fund.

A preliminary report of the Commission, issued in February, 1931, has already been a factor in the enactment of needed health legislation. One bill passed by the Legislature last year contained among other provisions authorization for the construction of three district state tuberculosis sanatoria and appropriations of more than \$2,000,000 have been made available for their construction. By another provision, health officers in cities of over 50,000 population are required to give full time to the duties of their office. Members of the Commission recently met with the Governor of the State of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to discuss further plans for carrying out the recommendations resulting from the survey.

“Not since 1913 when the late Dr. Hermann M. Biggs laid the groundwork for public health work in New York State, and the rest of the country for that matter, with his famous report on methods by which human suffering could be reduced and human life prolonged has so important a document on public health appeared as that submitted to the public last week by the state commission headed by Dr. Livingston Farrand, president of Cornell University,” says the Poughkeepsie *Eagle News*. “It will be in time to come the guidebook which will supplement Dr. Biggs’ work.”

The editorial comments in several additional magazines and newspapers, are quoted in full or in part below.

PUBLIC HEALTH IN NEW YORK STATE

On May 1, 1930, the Governor of New York appointed a special commission to survey health conditions in that state and to offer recommendations for improvement. A preliminary report appeared on Feb. 16, 1931, and the

final report, suitably bound for permanent record, has just been made available. The Commission was headed by Dr. Livingston Farrand, and its secretary was the health commissioner of the State, Dr. Thomas Parran, Jr. Every reputable medical and public health agency in the State cooperated in the development of

the material, organized medicine being represented by the Medical Society of the State of New York. Among the striking observations is the evidence of great inequalities within the same state not only as to health conditions in general but particularly in reference to the control of certain diseases. Tuberculosis receives vast amounts of attention in comparison to what is done for syphilis and cancer. Some municipalities have been able to stamp out diphtheria entirely, whereas in others the disease continues to occur and even to increase in its incidence. Infant mortality varies greatly from the worst to the best.

In his foreword to the report, Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt indicates his approval of the results of demonstrations in Cattaraugus County, Syracuse, and the Bellevue-Yorkville district of New York City. He emphasizes particularly the inadequacy of town and village boards of health, suitable in 1850, to meet the conditions of 1932. The Commission urges the creation of 57 county boards of health to replace the present 1,158 town and village boards. Of especial significance is the opinion of the Commission that health functions which local governments can be equipped to perform satisfactorily for themselves should not remain functions of the state. It is recognized that a central control with power might be exceedingly efficient, exactly as is the control of highways by a state department of public works. However, as Governor Roosevelt emphasizes, roads have a single,

simple, impersonal function, whereas health service has multiple intimately personal functions. Governor Roosevelt would reserve as the ultimate functions of the state only the maintenance of adequate standards, financial assistance for rural health, and such duties as the hospitalization of mental diseases, the general supervision of public water supplies, and the registration of births and deaths. Those functions are so technical, so broad in scope, or so costly as to be unsuitable for satisfactory local administration.

Special attention is also given to the necessity for coordination of various health activities under a single head or through interdepartmental action. Public health education, child health and protection, statewide sanitary problems, the improvement of milk supplies, industrial hygiene, and the prevention of accidents are projects that may affect many different departments of the government.

The Governor's consideration of the report of his Commission concludes with special emphasis on the necessity for public health education and with particular attention to the mental hygiene program. Mental disease is becoming increasingly a problem of great importance. The New York State government maintains 26 institutions, with more than 50,000 patients, and a program is planned for the future to take care of many additional patients. Obviously, local communities cannot well undertake this function, at least under circumstances existing

at present; but a campaign of education and study might well serve as a preventive factor in diminishing as much as possible the increasing burden of mentally defective persons on the state.

Whereas the foreword of Governor Roosevelt to this exceedingly important volume outlines fully the scope of the considerations, the individual chapters constitute a textbook of public health. Nearly a hundred people participated in the work of this Commission, and the views of these experts, as well as of all those associated with the White House Conference on Child Health, have been surveyed in developing this volume. The report makes no attempt to handle the question of the cost of medical care, awaiting instead the report of the committee on that subject, which expects shortly to announce the report of its five-year study.

Rarely is there opportunity in any community for such a searching and competent survey as has been made in New York State. The results in the form of recommendations to individual communities, recommendations for legislative action and similar topics are bound to have a far-reaching effect.

— *From THE JOURNAL OF THE
AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION,
April 30, 1932*

HEALTH IN THIS STATE

Governor Roosevelt's foreword to the report of the New York State Health Commission—an unofficial body of fourteen appointed

by him two years ago under the chairmanship of President Livingston Farrand of Cornell—speaks of the health of the people as the State's "paramount concern." The following brief summary suggests that recent improvement has been creditable.

The span of life expectancy has lengthened from 47 years in 1900 to 57 years in 1930. Tuberculosis, which fifteen years ago stood as the first cause of death, has declined more than half. Deaths among infants under one year of age have shown a similar reduction. Typhoid fever, once very prevalent, is now a rare disease. Diphtheria since 1913 has diminished more than two-thirds. During the same period the death rate from all communicable diseases has decreased from 419.3 to 196 per hundred thousand population, while the general death rate from all causes decreased 14 per cent.

These results show that even on economic grounds what has been done through scientific research into the cause, prevention, and cure of disease, through the teaching of hygiene in the schools, and through the better medical service and general heightened standards of living, has been profitable to the State as well as a blessing to thousands of individuals. Even the depression has resulted in no serious increase in our death or sickness rates. For this we may be thankful to the legislation and health practices following the recommendations of a like commission under the chairmanship of Dr. Biggs in 1913. On the

other hand, there is still marked inequality in the health service in different communities and an "unevenness of popular sentiment for health action." Diphtheria continues in some municipalities, while others have been able to stamp it out completely, and in some places tuberculosis is "twice as prevalent" as in others.

The system of administration by town and village boards is in some measure responsible for this, being as "wasteful of lives as of money." The chief recommendation of the Commission is that the health service in the State be reorganized by making the county the unit, with a board of health and a health commissioner for every county. The program, which is one of decentralization but with continued state aid, is for the most part in promotion of health through education and the prevention or control of disease. The health of children is the outstanding concern, but with the lengthening of the average life, increasing attention must now be given to the degenerative diseases and especially to the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

The Farrand report will be a guide for the public health development during the coming twenty years, as the Biggs report has been for the last two decades.

—From THE NEW YORK (*New York*)
TIMES, April 6, 1932

CONSERVING LIVES AND HEALTH

Governor Roosevelt places the

proper characterization upon the report of the Commission appointed two years ago to develop a health plan for the State of New York when he describes it as an "inspiration and an indictment." It should inspire all residents of the commonwealth to give more thought to the conservation of life and health and thereby dissolve the indictment of carelessness and thoughtlessness. The Commission is not extravagant in its estimate that the lives of 50,000 New Yorkers can be saved every year. This number embraces only the people who die from diseases or what is termed natural causes. Fatalities from accidents are not included but should and could be greatly decreased.

Of course in the conservation of life the question of maintaining health is the important factor. We know that now there should be practically no deaths from diphtheria and typhoid fever. Science has conquered both where people cooperate with physicians and health officers. Actual experience has proved that at least 50 per cent of the cases of tuberculosis can be arrested and that although little is known as yet about the causes of cancer this malady can be permanently arrested if treated in an early stage of its development. We know that infant mortality has been materially decreased during the last few years and that the further reduction is possible.

When officials find that death and sickness rates in some communities are double those in others

the inference must follow that civic and professional indifference must prevail in the less fortunate places. There should be some agency or factor to prevent or to rectify such a situation. Our health laws are now drastic and if they do not produce reasonable results they are either unobserved or unenforced. People who value life and health or have conception of their worth should cooperate with officials in their conservation. And there should be no hesitancy in reporting derelictions in the performance of official duties.

—*From the Troy (New York)*
RECORD, April 7, 1932

A ROOSEVELT SERVICE TO PUBLIC HEALTH

No doubt the most thorough state survey yet made, the interest and uses of the final report of Governor Roosevelt's special Health Commission will indeed extend outside New York. It is a volume which comprehensively justifies the title, "Public Health in New York State." A remark from the New York Governor's comment on the document forcibly illustrates its largest significance: "Other than the indifference of local governments there is no reason why twice as many babies should die each year in some counties and cities as in other communities where a modern health program is in force, or for tuberculosis to be twice as prevalent in some counties of New York as in others."

Wherein states on the whole

when compared seem to excel or lag in health conservation is minor. Especially in the large states the question of effective health administration is local rather than general and is chiefly dependent upon the cities and counties. Citations so complete and convincing as this report affords of varying health conditions in the most populous of our states aptly demonstrate that better health administrations save lives and can compel the report's widespread study by legislators and social and civic leaders.

—*From the Detroit (Michigan) NEWS*
April, 4, 1932

THE HEALTH REPORT

The report of the New York State Health Commission, presented to Governor Roosevelt a few days ago for his approval, indicates the splendid progress and achievement of the Commission since its appointment less than two years ago. The report, representing constant study, research, and investigation of the health requirements of the State by 100 experts in the science of public health, is a document which reflects credit not only upon the Commission, but upon the entire State.

As a result of its recommendations, laws were enacted and passed authorizing the building of three tuberculosis sanatoria for counties too small to provide their own institutions for this highly important phase of health work; the jurisdiction of the state hospital for incipient tuberculosis

transferred to the control of the State Department of Health; creation of a new division of cancer control under the supervision of the Department; and the appointment of full-time health officers in cities of more than fifty thousand population.

These are only a few of the praiseworthy accomplishments of the Commission, which is doing all in its power—and with outstanding success—to create the highest possible degree of good health among the people of the State of New York. The work of the Commission is commendable, and the entire State should be duly appreciative for the tireless efforts being exerted in its behalf.

—*From the Ticonderoga (New York)*

SENTINEL, April 14, 1932

CONCERNING THE FARRAND HEALTH COMMISSION REPORT

From the standpoint of protection of health and conservation of life the masterly study and statesmanlike recommendations embodied in the recent final report of Governor Roosevelt's special State Health Commission, headed by President Livingston Farrand, M.D., of Cornell University, promise far-reaching human benefits and economies

For the next quarter of a century public health developments are bound to be influenced and guided by the work of the Farrand Commission. Unquestionably too

its recommendations will effectively contribute at the same time to the improvement of public health throughout the nation. To those who have given so generously of their time and thought as members of the Commission the public is deeply indebted.

—*From the SYRACUSE (New York)*

HERALD, April 17, 1932

THE SAVING OF LIFE

The final report of the State Health Commission, headed by Dr. Livingston Farrand, president of Cornell University, has just been submitted to Governor Roosevelt.

The report contains some arresting statements. It declares, for instance, that forty-three thousand people in New York State alone are now living who would have died last year if the death rates of twenty years ago had continued.

But, even more phenomenal results can be attained during the next twenty years, it adds, "if the simple, well-known facts on which public health science is based are put into practice everywhere throughout the State." . . .

All of which is very encouraging. The Commission would seem to have made a very thorough study of the subject in hand. It is to be hoped that its recommendations will be given every consideration by the legislative body.

—*From the Gloversville (New York)*

HERALD, April 8, 1932
