
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

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Public Health—Saratoga-Springs Development as Health Center

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—This is a pretty fine gathering. I have heard of these in past years, and I am very glad to take part, even if for only a few moments, in this conference.

As you probably know, I am sort of doctor myself. I have been forced to become a doctor, because of a therapeutic experiment which, with the help of medicine, I started in Georgia a number of years ago. As I was coming up here in the car my mind took me back to the days when I was a boy in Dutchess county forty years ago. In that county, as in practically every rural county of the State, there was no health organization. I have seen most remarkable developments, and an entire change of thought on the part of our citizens, in matters of health. I will give you one or two examples.

When I was a boy, not far from where we lived there was an unfortunate girl, one who lived seventy summers, who had been a mental defective practically from birth. She was put in the attic, fed and more or less secluded up there for seventy years. Her family and the community regarded it perfectly proper, because she was feeble-minded, that she be segregated and kept in the attic and not even allowed to go outdoors. There she was kept all her life and lived to be a little old woman. Not so far away also there was another child, who lived to be an old, old man. He had been a cripple from birth. He, too, had been practically segregated from the community, and no one knew anything about it, except the immediate neighbors. He had his mind, and there he was, day after day and year after year, until finally old age took him. That was not so very long ago. You and I could go on enumerating contrasts with the present age. How has this change come about, and what is it going to lead to?

In the first place we have applied common sense. The State has taken care of the mentally deficient, and today in spite of the limited equipment it is carrying out a great work on the whole. A number of years ago the general thought came into the minds of modern civilization that there was a definite duty on the part of the State to do something more, so that the State of New York, and almost every State in the Union, not all, have undertaken a general supervision of the health of the communities. Fifty years ago, the matter of health was individual; it was nobody's concern, except that of the family, whether a person was healthy or not, and gradually we have built up a new doctrine, one that might be called socialistic—the belief that the State has a positive right, not just an obligation, to see that the health of its individuals is brought up to a higher level. Is it supposed that fifty years from now the citizens of the State will be in the same condition as previously? No, indeed! We are going to be more socialistic. I will cite an example: When I was at Warm Springs, Georgia, three or four years ago in a nearby town there was a typhoid epidemic. The older members of the medical profession did the best they could to treat the victims, and took care of these people with the best nursing facilities that were available. The epidemic went on, and apparently there were new cases every day of every week for a period of five or six weeks. It took a young man, recent graduate of The Johns Hopkins Medical School, to go to the Chamber of Commerce and impress upon them that the epidemic was a disgrace to the community and state, before conditions were remedied. He walked right in and asked to be heard. He said:

"The Chamber of Commerce is trying to make this place grow and up-to-date. Do you realize that this typhoid epidemic is a disgrace to the community, and that it will take ten years to live it down?"

They never thought of it in that light, and the result was that they voted him \$500, and he proceeded to analyze the drinking supply of that vicinity. The source of infection was soon found and eliminated. After the water supply was put in a safe and sanitary condition and all wells closed up, the epidemic ceased. I think that a good many of us in New York realize that a

certain typhoid epidemic in one of the communities of the State not so long ago was not only a disgrace to that city but to all of us in the State. I believe, therefore, that we are fast recognizing these conditions, and that leadership in promoting the doctrine of better health must come from the health officials and the support for such leadership from the citizens of the State. The State is going to insist, fifty years from now, on good health, to insist on it as a right of what is known as the sovereignty of the people. The old idea of the right of an individual to be sick or of a community to have epidemics no longer exists. That right has been turned around and transferred to the State. I mean by "State," the general governing agencies, and they undoubtedly have the right to insist on good health. If we in this State were a little more awake in our interest in local government, the task would be easy. As you know I have been doing a great deal of talking during the past four or five months about local government. The larger percentage of the taxpayers' money is spent by the village, township, county or city, and only a very small part of what the people pay goes to the State Government in Albany, and yet, while there is some interest in local matters, there is not half enough. We are much more apt as citizens to look at the fact that the State is spending two hundred and fifty million dollars a year as a governing agency, and overlook entirely the fact that the communities, towns and counties of the State are spending ten times that amount—something like two and a half billion dollars. Most of you are interested in the local end of things, and I recognize the difficulty of your task, and also how hard it is for a Governor to go around the State and get public opinion in favor of a broad public health program. It is easier for us to go to the Legislature and get appropriations for a general, State-wide program. We get the support of the newspapers and civic organizations. In the State Government we are able to work up an active interest in the usual public health program, but what can we spend compared with the local agencies? In the final analysis, public health must depend upon the locality. Today, in county after county the average amount spent for health improvements is under 50 cents per capita, while these same counties without any hesitation spend four, five or six dollars per capita for improvements to highways, and this is just one example. I do not want the highway work to stop, but the proportion is out of line, if we figure it on the population and the future generations. How are we going to increase that rate? By favorable opinion, of course, and this is necessary, if we are going to progress. I am afraid that local health improvement is not of very vital interest to the supervisors of the average town, the town clerk, the assessors or the road commissioners. There are not many jobs to be given out in the administration of health work. It is not very showy. Health officials cannot get much credit out of improvement to a road that goes to pieces, or for getting some special funds from the board of supervisors of a county. You will not get the good results you think you should out of the average local politician unless you can build a backfire under him. That is your job, a very definite task, and dependent in large part, upon the way that you carry out that task will the health work in the average county of the State progress. I know something about the counties, their local conditions, and the public interest. Some of the widely scattered rural counties are doing better health work than those containing large civic communities. It comes down to the interest aroused among the people themselves, and I am very certain that the work is progressing, although not as fast as it should. We must bring home more and more to the average citizen the fact that health has become a part of government, that it is no longer a question of charity. In going through reports, I occasionally find that this or that project will be paid for by private subscription. Why depend upon the rich residents to pay the salary of a local nurse, for instance? This should be a community obligation and privilege, because the success of this work throughout the State is going to depend largely on the citizens who will be living in the State fifty years from now. Let us consider the question of health census. In spite of the efforts of the State Department of Health and some county organizations, there are still thousands of undisclosed, undiscovered, and untreated cripples in the State of New York. In the far off Commonwealth of Australia public health goes hand in hand with

census, and every year through a continuing census work, in connection with registration for voting as I understand it, a system by which a tabulation is made of the electorate, a report is made on the health of the electorate, and through the electorate a report is made on the health of their families. Perhaps we will eventually have some such system in this State, through the aid of which every man, woman, and child will have a health record on file with some government agency.

With regard to the question of too much concentration of power in the central governing agencies, if we object to giving the local government too much power over local affairs, we should object to concentrating too much at Albany on matters which can be better handled by the locality. If we can obtain from the individuals of the electorate the right to see that the health of communities is kept up to the best modern standards, we will be doing a fine piece of work.

We are undermanned and underpaid in health matters, but I am not at all certain that we are insistent, insistent that the work be extended. In one of the counties of the State not so long ago a very rich gentleman offered to give a motor truck with a complete dental outfit, running water, and, as we say in the Navy, "all of the other gadgets" that go with that kind of a craft. This gentleman planned that this truck should start out in April and make a tour of the county, go to the various schools as long as they were open, and in summer go to the homes, and give even better attention in each case. This gift was dependent on payment by the board of supervisors for the gasoline and the upkeep of the motor truck. The dental association of the county agreed to pay the dentists,—gratis—the dentists to go along with the car. The board of supervisors turned it down with the understanding that the county could not pay for the upkeep of the car. This illustrated the point of view of some of our politicians, and I am glad that all our boards of supervisors are not constituted that way. I am hopeful that some other rich people will give dental automobiles for use as outlined.

The State of New York is undertaking an experiment here at Saratoga. When I was a boy I went a number of different summers with my father to some of the German and Austrian health resorts. In those days they were called spas. Before Saratoga became famous for other things I believe it was known as a spa, as we now know the word from the crossword puzzles. The difference between the use of mineral waters, both externally and internally, in this country and on the other side, is that we Americans have treated the subject as part of our vacation. In the old days, fifty and a hundred years ago, there were a great many springs scattered throughout upstate New York, and people would go there from all over the United States, for two reasons; first, to drink the waters without any medical advice and probably their mental attitude while drinking them helped physically; and second, to have a mighty good time and to meet people from this and other states, and they came for a vacation period, coupled with which was the idea that they were drinking waters that might benefit them. I am sorry to say that this is the spirit in which the development of Saratoga Springs has taken place. We have not approached anywhere in this country, except Hot Springs, Ark., the serious use of mineral waters for health in a manner to be compared with the use of these waters in Europe. Some years ago nobody could go to Naumheim to drink the waters and take the baths, unless sent there by a reputable physician. When the people arrived they could not drink or bathe until after complete examinations by a physician of long experience, who had served an apprenticeship with an older doctor. If you were accepted by the physician and told that the Naumheim treatment would do you good, you were given a card which would permit you to drink the waters, take the baths and the massages. You were there, however, for cure. Once approved by the doctor you were given the course of treatment, and if you did not live up to the requirements, "Out you would go." That is different from anything in this country. Here in the days of the old spas, some in the South, some in the West, there was absolutely no discipline, and at Saratoga up to the present time there has been very little discipline. Saratoga is worth developing as a health resort. I have no doubts, Mr.

Peabody has no doubts, and not one of the experts from the other side who have come over here and tested the Springs has any doubts that we have a very great gift of nature, equal to any of the great mineral springs of Europe. In order to put the whole thing on a scientific and disciplinary basis we have appointed a commission, and I am very confident that this commission will lay down a definite report first; that Saratoga can be developed for the good of humanity, and second; that they will submit plans for development in such a way that this particular spot in our State will point the way to all the United States. In this there are two thoughts: The conviction about the great good that Saratoga can do for many human ills of the people of the State, and the belief that it will point the way so that other states and other mineral springs can be developed along scientific and medical lines. From the Adirondacks to Georgia there are very wonderful springs on both sides of the range, and both in the West and Middle West there are springs going down through the Ozark mountains and borders of Oklahoma and Texas, and then there are those of the Rockies extending down to Montana, Arizona, and the Allegheny mountains. They are of every known size, form and heat, and I am very hopeful that, while the medical profession of the United States has been far in the arrear as compared with Europe with regard to the use of mineral waters, they will recognize the great natural gift we have at our own doors and take advantage of it. I am therefore looking forward to a very splendid development at Saratoga that will help this State and our sister States.

I am confident that you will go forward with your health work as rapidly as you have in the past, and I am equally certain that you will more and more obtain the support of public opinion. I realize the disappointment after long periods of effort by many of you in not being able to stir up the people to definite needs, although you must be able to see perhaps not in definite signs, that the people are behind you in public health education. As the younger generation goes along they will understand better than the previous one the need of giving their support to health work.

I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you all again.