

PLAYGROUNDS AND RECREATION CENTERS AS FACTORS IN CONSERVATION OF HUMAN LIFE.

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The enormous industrial development of this country in the past thirty years has brought with it the serious problem of devising some means whereby the harmful effects of factory labor and the crowding of workmen and their families into tenements and the districts about the factories may be counteracted and corrected. Our own native-born population, as well as the largest proportion of the immigrants that come to our country, have been forced to adapt themselves to a manner of life which is entirely different from that to which they have been accustomed. The child growing up in these surroundings, as well as the adult worker, needs besides proper food and properly constructed dwelling houses the playground and recreation center to preserve not only the physical but the moral health of the class to which he belongs.

The conservation of the life and health of our population cannot be attained through sanatoria and hospitals. From a business standpoint it is very poor policy to build institutions to repair damage that has been done and then not take the necessary steps of prevention. Although we will never be able to eradicate diseases entirely there is a possibility of a great reduction in disease, and with it a lengthening of the average life of the individual. We need more than good housing conditions, a living wage, pure food and proper sanitary conditions in our factories to bring about these things.

Recreation and play are as necessary for the physical well-being as are some of these other things just mentioned. The growing child needs them for the proper development of his body and the adult needs them to keep his body in a healthy condition. Although the prevention of infectious diseases is in the last analysis a question of quarantine, the physical condition of the individual plays a very important part in every infectious disease. As long as the community must suffer through the sick-

ness or death of a worker it is very plainly the duty of the community to take the necessary steps of prevention. The playground is one of the necessary means of prevention of disease and has already proven its worth in those communities where it has been given a trial.

The recreation center should be an important factor in the proper education of our workers in the laws of hygiene and health. The ignorance of the average person concerning the facts of health and the early manifestations of such diseases as tuberculosis, cancer and occupational diseases is in no small way responsible for the large number of incurable invalids which our community has to support. It has been estimated that tuberculosis kills almost one-third of our workers who die between the ages of twenty and thirty-five, and it is the experience of nearly all who have much to do with the treatment of tuberculosis, as well as the other diseases mentioned, that a large proportion of our incurable cases have applied to the physician for help and advice only after the disease has progressed to a point where relief or cure are impossible.

The factory and those conditions which have arisen in the growth of our present industrial system have affected not only our public health, but also the moral tone of the community. The church as it exists today is scarcely able to cope with the moral problems which have presented themselves, and it has been found that the moral and physical problems are very closely bound together. The natural desire of the average worker, and we might as well say his need, for play and recreation has had to be satisfied at the saloon, pool-room, cheap theatre or on the street. The enormous increase of crime and degeneracy in the past few years has shown that the effect of, at least, some of these agencies has been to work great harm to the individual and finally through him to the community at large.

The individual needs not exhortation to refrain from doing those things which are harmful to him morally and physically, but an opportunity to satisfy his needs for recreation and play in a way which cannot have this harmful influence. The tendency of the average person when given a choice between the good and the bad is to instinctively choose the good, when he once understands it. The experience of the settlement houses and Y. M. C. A.'s over the country is abundant proof of this. Conditions have now become so that it is the duty of the community to make the playground and recreation center a part of its regular activities as

well as the public school and library system. This work should no longer be left to public charity and the philanthropy of wealthy individuals, which of its very nature repels the self-respecting worker who cannot accept charity without sacrificing a part of his self-respect. The playground and recreation center should be built and maintained out of the taxes of which he pays his share, so that he will take advantage of these things as his own and not the gift of those to whose wealth his work has contributed.

Let the playground and recreation center be combined with our public school and library for the physical well-being of the community as well as its education. Make the influence of this combined institution broad enough and free enough to reach all of our workers. Then with proper housing, pure food, a living wage and hygienic surroundings in the work shop and the factory our playground and recreation center will complete the steps we must take for the conservation of human health and life.

