

**The National League for Physical Education and Improvement : address given in the Town Hall of Sheffield on October 22nd, 1906 / by Sir Lauder Brunton.**

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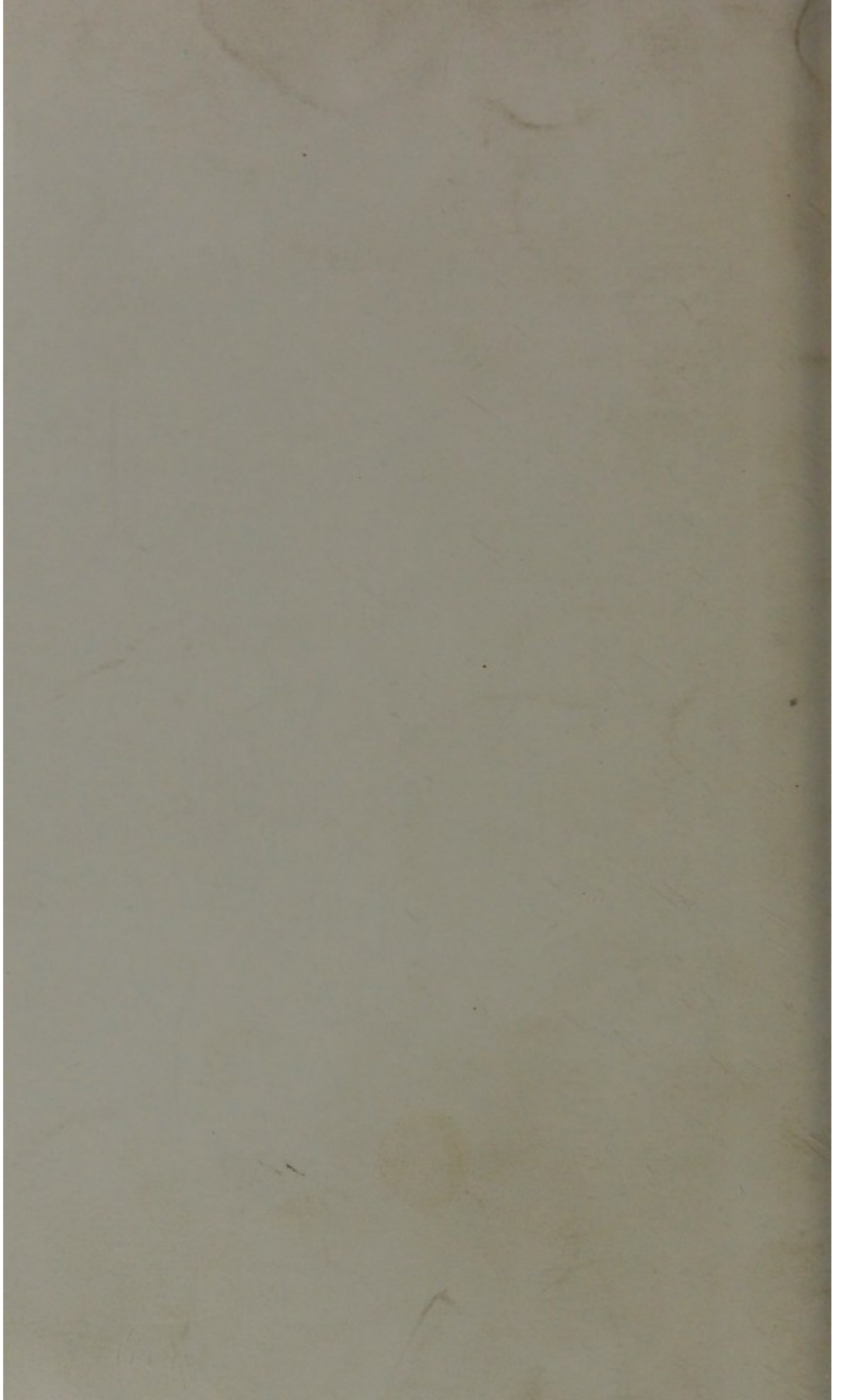
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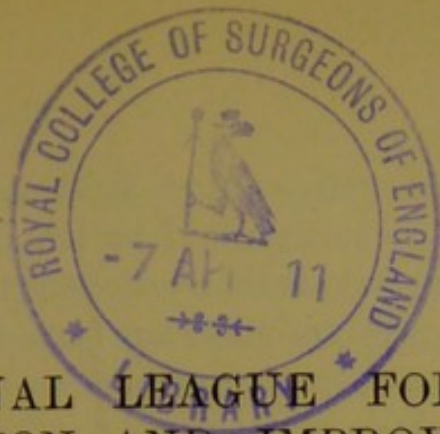
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## THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND IMPROVEMENT.

ADDRESS GIVEN IN THE TOWN HALL OF SHEFFIELD  
ON OCTOBER 22ND, 1906.

By Sir LAUDER BRUNTON, M.D., D.Sc., LL.D. Edin., LL.D. Abrn.,  
F.R.C.P., V.P.R.S., Consulting Physician to St. Bartholomew's  
Hospital.

MY LORD MAYOR, MY LORD BISHOP, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—The subject on which I have to speak to-night is the National League for Physical Education and Improvement. Whenever one speaks of Education one's thoughts naturally turn to teaching and teachers, and in considering what I should say to you to-night, the words of the greatest of all Teachers came into my mind, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." When speaking of the League to some persons they have said to me, "What are we going to get out of it?" and I can well imagine that you might ask me the same question. In reply to it I would say that the people of Sheffield are not to receive from the League but to give. What are they to give to it? They are to give two things—their example and their support. Their example they have already given to a certain extent, for they have been in the forefront of the movement for physical education and improvement; and the support that they should now give to the League is in order that the example they have thus shown may be made known to others, and may be followed by others throughout the length and breadth of this land. There are a great number of people who are willing to do good but they do not know how to do it. They are willing to give but they know that indiscriminate giving is often productive of more evil than good, that it tends to destroy self-respect and independence, and to foster habits of idleness and greed. So much is this the case that many people limit their giving almost

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entirely to hospitals, and at first sight it would seem that no better channel for charity could be found. For what could be better, one might say, than to succour those who, through no fault of their own, are suffering from sickness, weakness, and pain, or who are in danger of death from some dire disease, a disease which may not only cut short the sufferer's life but remove the breadwinner from the family and leave behind a helpless widow and orphans. What can be better than to lessen the sickness, relieve the pain, prevent death, and restore strength? And yet, perhaps, there is something better even than this, and it is to prevent the occurrence of these calamities. But some of you may ask, How is this to be done? and I would answer—You, the people of Sheffield, have already begun to show the way, and you have taken up the problem aright. For, instead of attempting to deal with grown-up people, you have begun with the young lives, with the lives of infants, which may grow up strong men and women, fully qualified to hold their own in the battle of life, but who, if neglected, may either die off and swell that frightful *rôle* of infant mortality, or may have even a worse fate, and grow up sickly and feeble, unable to play their part in the struggle for existence, and go to fill the ranks of the submerged tenth.

By the careful supervision of your milk supply, which is carried out by your admirable medical officer, Dr. Scurfield, under the powers which you possess by your local Act of Parliament, you are able to provide a supply of pure milk for the infants whose mothers may be unable to suckle, and for the children in whom milk, though no longer their sole food, still forms an important part of their diet.

The rules which the Health Committee of the Sheffield Corporation and the Committee of the Sheffield and District Cowkeepers and Dairymen Association have drawn up are admirable, and form a model deserving of universal imitation. But the supply of pure milk to a town is not the only requisite for the prevention of infant mortality, for, by want of cleanliness, by carelessness, or by foolishness on the part of mothers, the child may become ill and die, however good the milk supply may be. Here again, however, you have drawn up a code of instruction



for mothers which will tend to lessen infant mortality and increase the health of the children. It is becoming generally felt that the compulsory attendance of children in schools, whilst no doubt good for their minds, is by no means an unalloyed benefit for their bodies. For in the crowded classrooms, sick and healthy become mixed up and brought into such intimate contact that epidemic diseases become more widely and rapidly spread than they might otherwise be. Moreover, the confinement for many hours a day lessens the strength of those who are already sickly and weak. In order to prevent these evils, people are now beginning to recognise that compulsory medical inspection of schools ought to be necessarily consequent upon compulsory attendance, but this the people of Sheffield have already recognised, and it has been amongst the first of the cities of this country to take up the testing of eyesight of children. This is a most important matter, because on it depends not only the power of the child to learn, but the presence or absence of those headaches which make many a child's life one of continued torture, and for the relief of this awful pain, I believe, the children of Sheffield owe a debt of gratitude not only to the Corporation but to my friend, Dr. Snell, through whose lectures to the teachers it originated years ago.

Compulsory attendance for so many hours a day in a room where a child must sit, often in a constrained position, instead of playing about freely in the open air, is injurious to the child's body and prevents the free development of the muscles of the heart and of the lungs which it might get by playing in the open air, even if it should be in the slums of a great city. To counteract this injurious effect to some extent the Board of Education has decided that a certain amount of physical training is necessary, and I am delighted to see that Sheffield not only does this, but has made provision for education in swimming. Swimming is one of the exercises that not only tends to develop every muscle in the body but to increase the power of the heart and lungs, but it gives a certain amount of moral training. It increases self-reliance, and how often do we see also that swimmers distinguish themselves by the generous way in which they throw aside all thought of self and risk their



own lives to save those of their fellows. Swimming is an exercise not only useful for children at school but for older lads and young men, and enables them to spend not only with pleasure, but with much advantage, time that might otherwise have been heavy on their hands, and which they might otherwise have been induced to misspend in the streets or public houses. But swimming cannot occupy the whole of a man's time, he must have other occupations as well, and gymnasia and volunteering may combine with swimming to fill up a young man's leisure to the best advantage.

I have enumerated some of the things in which Sheffield has already shown an example to this country, but I think it very probable that many of my hearers will say that I show a remarkable amount of ignorance in regard to what Sheffield is doing, and that Sheffield is really doing ten times more than what I have mentioned. But if this be the case with me, what must it be with others? I have made some inquiries as to what is being done in Sheffield, but what will be the condition of those who have made no such inquiries? The great majority of people in this country are absolutely ignorant as to what Sheffield has done or is doing in order to prevent infant mortality and raise up a strong and healthy race. Now, although we are told that we should not let our right hand know what our left hand doeth, we are also told equally emphatically that we ought to let our light shine before men so that they may see our good works. Now, this is what Sheffield should do by supporting the League. It should let other people know the example that Sheffield is setting and get them to follow it. There are any number of good men, good women, and good societies all working for the benefit of the people. They are working in Birmingham, Liverpool, London, Manchester, and all over the country, but they do not know what the others are doing, and from want of this knowledge they are wasting time, they are wasting energy, and in the meantime infants are dying and weaklings are growing up. One of the great objects of the League is to make all these people, all these societies, known to one another. The League does not intend to interfere with the action of any



one of them. Its object is that of getting them mutually to help and to co-operate. The old fable of the bundle of sticks illustrates what I wish to say so clearly that, although I have already made use of the comparison when speaking elsewhere, I should like to use it again. You all remember the story of the old man who, on his deathbed, handed to his family a bundle of sticks and asked each one in turn to break it. They found it impossible. The old man then asked them to break the sticks singly. This they did with ease. "Now," said the old man, "you are like the bundle of sticks, so long as you are united, no one can break you, but singly you will be easily destroyed." The League is not an additional stick to the bundle, but it is the band which will tie them together.

Now, what are the objects which the League has before it?

The objects of the League are numerous, but for the sake of convenience they may be shortly summed up on the fingers of one hand thus—

- (1) To save the babies.
- (2) „ help the children.
- (3) „ train the youths.
- (4) „ instruct the parents.
- (5) „ lessen the drink.

The second question is, What does the League intend to do in order to attain these objects?

Before answering this question positively, it may be well to state what the League does **not** intend to do.

It does **not** intend to interfere in any way with any society which is already working for these objects.

On the contrary, it hopes to help each and all of them in the work they are already carrying on by making them known to each other, so that they can render mutual assistance and extend the good work done by those societies already in existence to other places where it is wanting.

Having given this explanation of what the League **does not** intend to do, we may now consider what it **does** intend to do.

- (1) To save the babies. The mortality amongst children (13952)



under the age of 5 is enormous, and under the age of 1 it is simply appalling. This awful mortality is due—

- (1) To the weakness of mothers.
- (2) „ ignorance of mothers.
- (3) „ carelessness of mothers.
- (4) „ imperfect milk supply.

(1) The weakness of mothers prevents them from suckling their offspring. The ignorance or carelessness of mothers makes them feed their infants on food which is unsuitable for them, and in consequence they either die, or their health is impaired and their strength enfeebled.

But even when mothers are neither ignorant nor careless they are often unable, especially in towns, to obtain pure milk, however desirous they may be of doing so.

In order to lessen the weakness of mothers, and give them a chance of suckling their children, the League desires that every woman about to become a mother should become known to it, in order that measures may be taken to give her rest—or at any rate only easy work, without strain—for at least a month before and a month after her confinement. Information of the expected confinement may be obtained either by the woman herself giving notice at the nearest office of the League, or by the medical man or midwife to whom she applies for attendance doing so. At first it would be most likely the latter; but as the League and its objects become more widely known, the woman herself would probably give the requisite information. The required rest before and after confinement might be obtained in many cases by the aid of district nurses or voluntary helpers, who would do the heavier work for the mother. In some cases, however, where the earnings of the mother form an essential part of the income of the household, it may be necessary to subsidise her. The funds for this purpose would require at first to be obtained from voluntary contributions, but later on, when the necessity of some provision of this sort becomes known to the working classes themselves, the necessary money might be subscribed by themselves, in the same way as strike funds are maintained at present.



As soon as the expected confinement is known to the League a lady visitor in the district will be notified, and she will visit the prospective mother and give her the information required about the mother's own health, the care she should take, the risks she should avoid, and the preparation in the way of baby clothes, &c., which she ought to make, helping her if necessary, or arranging with other women of the mother's own class in life to help.

As soon as the baby is born, notice should again be given at the nearest office of the League, and again a visitor would go to the mother and give such advice and assistance as might be needed.

At Huddersfield the Mayor, Mr. Broadbent, has initiated a remarkably ingenious, generous, and successful scheme for obtaining early information of a birth by offering a reward of one shilling to the person who brings the first news of it to him. He has also put a premium on careful nourishment by offering a gift of one sovereign to each baby on its attaining the age of one year. It is to be hoped that similar generosity may be found in other large towns, and, at any rate, that immediate registration of every birth may be obtained.

It is obvious that the lady visitors who are to instruct the mothers must themselves be well instructed, and provision must be made for this either by the agency of the National Health Society, or by others.

In order to secure pure milk it is necessary that the suggestions which have been conjointly drawn up by the Health Committee of the Sheffield Corporation and the Committee of the Sheffield District Cowkeepers and Dairymen Association should no longer be simply suggestions with which every cowkeeper and milk seller ought to comply, but should be enforced as laws with which they must comply, and that not in Sheffield alone, or in Manchester alone, or in Liverpool alone, but throughout the whole country. By the example which Sheffield has set in this matter the whole country is benefited, and by aiding the League its example will be more widely known. But may not Sheffield also benefit by the aid of the League? I believe that the excellent regulations



of which I have spoken cannot be enforced over the whole area from which Sheffield draws its supplies of milk, and therefore many of the inhabitants run the risk of disease from infection from which they would be exempt if these regulations were passed into law, binding upon those concerned with the supply of milk throughout the country at large. This is a question which naturally is of vital importance, and it has been occupying the attention of the League for some time. The League has now before it a series of proposals drawn up by your able officer of health, Dr. Scurfield, with the co-operation of Dr. Hope of Liverpool, Dr. Niven of Manchester, and others, that a Bill be drawn up for the purpose of extending the local Acts which confer special privileges upon Sheffield, Manchester, and Liverpool to the whole country, and to insert other provisions which shall secure the purity of milk everywhere. Here we see where the League comes in. Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool by themselves might be unable to obtain the powers requisite to control the whole district from which the milk supply of each is drawn, but if they are united by the bond of the League with each other and with every town and rural district in the country, legislature may be effected, and, by combined action, benefits obtained in which every town will also participate.

Another object of the League is to secure universal medical inspection and examination of school children. Here, again, as I have said, Sheffield has shown the way, and the League brought the subject before Mr. Birrell at a deputation on February 27th, which was introduced by Mr. Compton Rickett and Sir Henry Craik. Mr. Birrell intimated his sympathy with the objects of the Deputation, and the subject having been again brought before him by the Manchester and Salford League and by the British Medical Association, he practically decided to adopt it in his Bill. What the future of this Bill will be no one can at present tell, but even supposing it were wrecked, the medical inspection of schools only requires combined action in order to secure its enactment by the Legislature before the end of the year, and this combined action we trust may be brought about by means of the National League. The



question of the proper feeding of children in schools is also one that should engage the early attention of the League, and it will use its efforts to secure that children shall be properly fed, while at the same time the burden of feeding them should be thrown upon the parents and not upon the ratepayers. The extension of cookery schools and classes of cookery for mothers will form another branch of activity of the League. Other objects of the League's activity will be the provision of playgrounds, general training in physical exercise, the instruction of parents, and the abolition of slums. Several of these questions I have already entered upon at considerable length in an Address which I had the honour to give in Sheffield about the beginning of this year, so that I will not detain you further now, but will again insist "that it is more blessed to give than to receive," and that Sheffield should not only set an example to be followed by the whole world, but give its aid in enabling others to follow its example, and for this reason I trust that a National Branch of the League will be established in Sheffield.



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