

## THE THOUGHT IN THE BALANCED BODY

An address given before the University of Wisconsin Track Team at Madison, Wisconsin, February, 1927\*

\*The writer has been an active track coach for twenty years. He established the first State Intercollegiate Track and Field Meet in the State of Minnesota, and at the time of his resignation from active coaching was, in point of years of service, the dean of all the track coaches of Minnesota. This speech should be read, therefore, not as a visionary dream of an idealist, but as a normal, natural plan of technique, to be immediately and practically applied in any crisis that demands the use of one's physical powers.

I am always happy to speak before a group of track men, because track athletics, if correctly performed, not only bring into play the effort of each little individual himself, but, through him, bring into action all the pent-up physical, psychic and spiritual forces in the universe. This is without question the greatest value which track athletics, as well as every other form of athletics, bring to men. Psychologists tell us that man ordinarily uses only twenty-five per cent of himself. When a man is face to face with the great moments of his life he must find a way somehow to bring into play all of himself — he must draw on all the hidden reserves of his nature. Every contest in a track meet presents such a moment. To succeed in most things a man finds it necessary to do the best he can. To succeed in an athletic contest a man must often (and this sounds like a paradox) do better than he can.

Indeed track athletics often place a man on a vast wind-swept horizon above which the little individual is silhouetted in all his helplessness, weakness and incompleteness. Such a background furnishes an ideal moment for a man to seek after God lest happily he may find Him. It is not a time to pray for success, neither is it a time to pray to do one's best — prayers of such kind are often futile and worthless. It may not be even a time for prayer at all — in the commonly accepted meaning of that term. **BUT IT CERTAINLY IS A TIME FOR A MAN TO ACKNOWLEDGE HIS UNION WITH HIS MAKER AND LEAN BACK UPON THE POWER THAT SUCH UNION CAN GIVE HIM. IT IS CERTAINLY A TIME WHEN A MAN SHOULD THROW OFF, IF HE CAN, ALL THE UNNECESSARY DEBRIS AND IMPEDIMENTA OF FEARS, ANGER, PREJUDICES, MEANNESSES, ENVIES AND DISCORDS THAT HE CAN AND MAKE OF HIMSELF AS CLEAR A CHANNEL AS POSSIBLE FOR PASSING ON THE POWER AND GLORY OF GOD.**

For this is one of the times in a young man's life when he should say, if he knows how, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory and the majesty."

I always like to tell athletes how man, made after the image and likeness of his physical father, is dependent upon the physical heritage handed down from his physical fathers before him, but how he, also, being made after the image and likeness of his Spiritual Father, can use also the spiritual heritage which has been handed down to him from the Father who is in heaven. In moments of crisis a man often finds that the physical heritage is not nearly so valuable as the spiritual heritage. So often have I found that to be the case that I must record a few instances of it here and now.

I had one boy on my track team named Bob, a dandy chap, very desirous to prove himself worthy of the team, but whose work all the season had been very mediocre. One day during a meet in which he was running last in nearly all his races I saw him sitting apart, morose and unhappy, blaming himself bitterly. Several days later just before the next meet I took him aside and asked him what was the matter. He said he was disgusted with himself, and had come to the conclusion he was never going to amount to a row of pins in track. I said I thought he was

taking himself far too seriously. "You act as though you think the fate of the entire team depends upon your own individual running. It certainly doesn't. We can get along without your running if you find you can't run. But we can't get along without your spirit of enthusiasm and good will. Now forget yourself entirely in the meet tomorrow. Go around and pat the other fellows on the back. Spread sunshine and encouragement to all. And when time for your race comes get down on your marks with a feeling of sheer joy in your heart for the opportunity for self expression it gives you. Run for the joy of it, dash down the stretch for the love of it. Don't give a hang about winning."

I shall never forget the 220 next day. It had to be run around a curve and the track was in poor condition. Moreover, the runners had to face a stiff wind blowing up the straightaway. But I shall never forget the way he came around the bend twenty yards ahead of his nearest competitor, his face raised with a glorified, joyous expression upon it. When the time was announced, breaking all local records — and at least three full seconds faster than he had run it the week before, he could hardly believe it. "But it is a curved track," he protested, "and the wind was against me."

"Never mind," I said; "three watches caught you. They ought to know."

Time after time I found that when my boys began slumping until they ceased to have any hope of winning for themselves and finally decided to keep on with the squad merely out of desire to help the morale of the team by not quitting, I found that they began to win races. Conversely when honors and plaudits began to come to them until the steady stream made them conceited or self-conscious, they were almost invariably in danger. These extra outside urges, which at first may have furnished a temporary stimulus, very shortly became mere impedimenta. In other words, the more unself-conscious and unself-seeking my athletes were, the clearer channels they became for the great inner powers of the creative spirit to flow through them.

I found it rarely necessary to speak to the boys of the existence of a God and the value of faith and prayer — nearly all of them consciously or unconsciously took all this for granted. But I found it very worth while to call their attention to the necessity of banishing selfish thoughts, anger thoughts and fear thoughts which serve to block the channel for the clear expression of their own natural simple faith. One of the striking things about an athletic field is that it is like a battle field in one respect: It presents moments when equal respect is given to a man for his religious belief without questioning whether he belongs to the Catholic, Protestant or some of the "impatient" modern creeds.

Boys who learn how to play the game with complete unselfishness, and with love in their hearts for their teammates and sheer joy in the sport itself, learn lessons that I am sure will serve them all the rest of their lives. The most striking lesson my boys used to learn during each season was that without knowing how or why, when they did possess this spirit, they were always in the pink of condition for their event. Some of my boys discovered also, that when a man is "in tune" he could trust the natural, instinctive impulses that welled up within him. For instance, my half-miler, the president of the college Y.M.C.A., told me that whenever he started a race with love and joy in his heart, and without thinking of winning, he always found himself starting his sprint at exactly the right time and in the right way to win his race. Strange to say, this impulse to sprint often came at times which were quite contrary to the orthodox technique, but whenever he let himself be governed by this inner direction (no matter whether he passed his opponent on the curve or on the straightaway) he invariably won his race. Once at a state meet when he found himself about to sprint thus, he let his little calculating self-thought enter in and check-mate the impulse, thinking that in so important a race he should let the orthodox standard of racing govern him. The result was that he lost first place by about six inches, which he could easily have erased if he had started his sprint when his inner impulse commanded him.

I am aware that athletes from time immemorial feel these impulses, and all agree that they come only when they are "in tune." As a natural result, therefore, nearly all athletes are either very superstitious or very religious. And now I should like to make a distinction which too few of our church members are as yet ready to make: Athletes — as well as other folks — are superstitious if they stress the results; they are religious if they stress the "getting in tune."

I have found that athletes do not have to be urged to trust to the Unseen; they have to be urged, rather, to carry this trust far enough. I have no use for what is commonly called "taboos" or "hunches," which are the mere surface water of the psychic realm taking their rise from the shallow surface levels of superstition; but what I do respect are the inner inspirations which take their rise from the deep artesian wells of the Spirit which is within. So let me take my stand like Paul on Mars Hill and try to convert your superstitions into true religion by discouraging the tendency to look for signs and hunches, and in its place encouraging "getting in tune." And the best way to get in tune is to "love mercy, do justly and walk humbly with thy God." A great athletic coach should tell his boys to rejoice not that they are winning races but that they are in tune with the Infinite. For the greatest coach of them all said when his great team of seventy chosen athletes of the spirit returned from their first great track and field meet in northern Galilee elated at the victories they had won, "Rejoice not that the devils are subject unto you, but rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven."

In conclusion, let me sum up the whole secret of putting power into athletics in two brief maxims:

#### I. IF YOU WISH TO TRAVEL FAR AND FAST, TRAVEL LIGHT.

When you take off your street clothes for your light athletic costume, take off, also, all your envies, jealousies, hates, unforgivenesses, selfishnesses and fears. Cleanse yourself out. Don't sweep things under a rug so that you can take them out and wallow in them whenever you feel like it, but open the window and cast them so far away that they won't be coming back again to bother you.

Did you ever hear of a bicycle making good time that had sand in the bearings? Neither can men travel fast in a sand storm. But dust and sand in the eyes and mouth of a runner are as nothing compared to these things that I have been talking about, resting like lead in a man's heart and spirit. Happy is the man who can free himself of this load.

But can it be done? you may ask.

It certainly can!

Several years ago the athletic world was startled by the marvelous feats of Red Grange in making four touchdowns in twelve minutes against the University of Michigan. The same year the University of Minnesota had lost most of its games against institutions that were not considered the strongest. When Illinois came to play Minnesota everyone naturally expected a score of 40 to 0 in favor of Illinois. Instead the game ended 27 to 7 in favor of Minnesota. Very few people know the inner secret of that victory. Let me reveal it to you.

The Thursday evening before the game the Minnesota team met at the home of one of the players and determined to bury all their petty jealousies, discords and rivalries. The team happened to be split wide open at the time from jealousies between national fraternities. They tossed overboard all the useless ballast they had been carrying through the early season's games. Just before the meeting broke up, one of the men said, "Fellows, we have tried everything else

so far; suppose we try prayer," and then he haltingly led them in a short prayer. With the useless ballast all safely thrown overboard and the seal of permanence put upon the act through a simple act of prayer, they entered the game the next Saturday a completely new team.

No wonder they traveled far and fast that day...for they were traveling light.

## II. IF YOU WOULD TRAVEL WITH PERMANENCE AND POWER, TUNE IN!

Tune in to what?

### A. TUNE IN TO LOVE:

Find your center in Love. If there are not some persons in all your circle of acquaintances that you can love, you are certainly in a bad way. Don't love them merely for what they can give to you, but rather for what you can give to them. Find someone you could serve whether he or she ever gives you back anything in return. If you have found such a friend, you have found a window that opens upon God. Then trust that love and let it be for you a little shrine where you can go and find peace when all the world seems going against you. After you have found the love of man whom thou hast seen, try in the stillness of your room to find the love of God whom thou hast not seen.

### B. TUNE IN TO PEACE:

When you have thrown the wrong things out and have found the right center within, you will find Peace. Peace is merely the sign of the perfect harmonizing of the outer with the inner, the sign that the door is wide open within you for the strong outflowing of power. Here is where prayer will help. Do not pray for victory; pray for peace. Prayer does not create miracles, but the peace and poise which prayer produces create the miracles. Prayer is like training to get into condition — a condition of peace. Jesus, that great athlete of the spirit, had trained so steadily that he was always in condition. Take him as your model and follow him.

### C. TUNE IN TO JOY:

Joy is like the lightning, and he who has found his center in joy will find he can run like lightning. Joy is electric. It fills one with power from the smallest brain cell to the tip of the little finger. The quickest way to kill joy is to enter a contest with the sole, sheer desire and purpose of winning. The quickest way to find joy is to enter the contest with the sole, sheer desire of enjoying every part of the process of the contest. Work can be converted into either play or drudgery. It is play if one enjoys every moment of the game. It is drudgery when the only satisfaction is in the reward at the end. When a thing is ended it is dead, it belongs to the past. When a person is immersed in a thing, it is alive, it is a thing of the present. The secret of finding joy in track athletics is to live in the present. Pay no attention to the future. Give yourself to life, not to death. Start every race with the intention of enjoying thoroughly the thrill that comes with the crack of the gun, the thrill of moving arms and legs, the exhilaration of rising in the air in the jumps, and the rhythmic motion of running around curved tracks. Run for the love of it, jump for the sheer joy of it, and no matter how far ahead the other fellows get, keep this love and joy in your heart and carry on at a good swinging pace, and you will get there.

Prayer, then, is dropping all fear and anxiety for the outcome, trusting all to God. God is the only ruler, the only power, and out of the goodness of His infinite heart He will see that all is well. Let the athlete paste under his uniform, or better still, inside his heart, these quotations:

"God is my strength and my power." "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty."