

AMERICAN YOUTH IS HEALTHY

An Expert Discusses Physical Education In The States

DESPITE the schisms which, from a distance, sometimes appear to be rending the fabric of American life, the youth of America is a strong and stable democratic influence.

This is the opinion of Philip Smithells, Superintendent of Physical Education for the N.Z. Education Department, who has had more opportunity than many people of meeting and working among young Americans. In 1938, on a travelling scholarship, he toured 7,000 miles through the U.S.A., studying the training of

173 colleges in the U.S., ranging from small colleges to great institutions such as Yale, Harvard and Princeton.

The Payne-Whitney Gymnasium at Yale demonstrates the seriousness with which the subject of physical education is tackled. The eight-story building houses ten gymnasiums, two huge swimming pools, a running track, 28 squash courts, a whole floor devoted to wrestling, two floors for boxing, massage and remedial rooms, rowing tanks and locker rooms for 2,600 students.

Not As in the Films

Significant, Mr. Smithells points out, is the fact that this enthusiasm for health and fitness is spontaneous and democratic.

But to gain any idea at all of American youth, Mr. Smithells also points out, you have first of all to forget every college boy film you have ever seen. They simply aren't true.

Take the attitude of young Americans to world affairs—an important subject in these days of lease and lend. In spite of the diversity of races and backgrounds, there appears to him to be a remarkable unanimity of outlook. This is apparent most of all, perhaps, in their objective interest in the rest of the world, particularly Europe. They seem well-informed on facts and policies, and from their distance they often see contemporary events more clearly and in better focus than do the youth of Europe. Though their own democracy may have some weak spots in it, and they realise this, they believe absolutely in its principles.

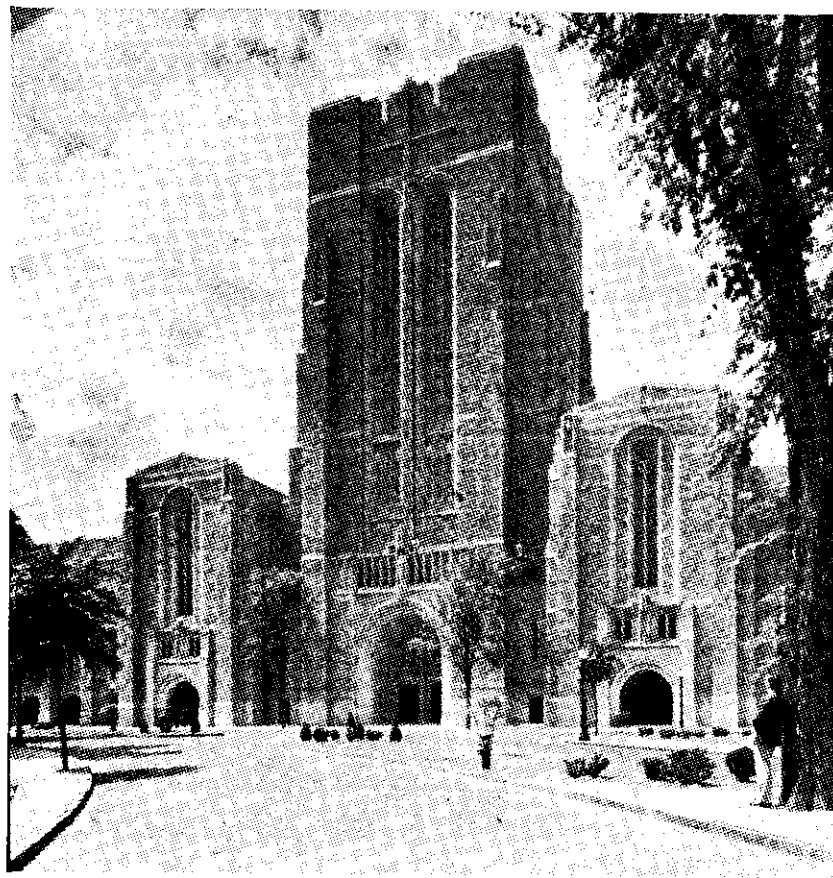
"Fed Up" With Graft

Another healthy sign Mr. Smithells noticed was that American youth is "fed up" with graft in politics and commercial life. Their whole attitude shows a militant desire for a better country and a better world, not so much in terms of "isms," but in basic values of life such as the liberty of the individual, co-operation, service, and international friendship. And these are the values on which they believe society must eventually be re-founded.

Undoubtedly, says Mr. Smithells, sport and general physical education play a large part in inculcating this healthy state of mind.

The American conception of the part sport plays in education is interesting. Whether at primary, secondary or university level, the American physical educationists have two main aims in their sport. The first is that every child shall learn some form of exercise, though excellent in some special form is the last thing required. The second is that every child shall learn, apart from the more active games, some form of exercise which will have a "carry-over" value.

Games of violent bodily contact can be played for only a few years, and, as



THE PAYNE WHITNEY GYMNASIUM AT YALE UNIVERSITY
"A demonstration in seriousness"

an English doctor observed recently, nothing is more depressing than the decayed athlete, grown fat, dwelling on his past glories. American physical education takes care to stress also the value of long-term-investment sports such as tennis, golf, archery and volley-ball.

Summer Camps

Another health activity which is playing its part in developing and broadening the youth of America is the summer camp. Every summer literally millions of young people spend most of their vacations in pleasantly situated camps where they take part in organised outdoor recreation, camp and woodcraft and light courses of nature study. The camps are heavily staffed, many training college and university students adding to their income this way. Nearly all colleges insist that physical education specialists spend several vacations at such camps as part of their training.

The youngsters who attend return home bronzed and fit, the more agile for their regulated exercise, richer in mind for having had such close communion with nature and the more sociable for having adapted themselves to group living under simple conditions.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION ROUND THE WORLD

Philip Smithells' Career

PHILIP SMITHELLS took his first lessons in physical education at Bedales in England, a progressive co-educational school which employed Swedish and Danish trained teachers. He was at Clare College, Cambridge, where he took honours in English and

Economics and was one of the founders of the Cambridge Education Society. A co-founder was Norman Lloyd-Williams, now second-in-command of educational activities at the BBC, who is married to Noni Wright, a New Zealand actress.

Leaving Cambridge, he took a special course in physical education at Loughborough College, and then spent five years at a Norfolk public school, teaching physical education, specialising in remedial work—and English. From there he went to Exeter University College as director of physical education. During vacations he studied further courses in his subject in Denmark and Sweden, and wrote chapters in two standard textbooks on physical education.

In 1938 he gained his travelling scholarship to America, being the first English specialist to go there officially. Returning to England, he next attended an international educational conference at Zurich in 1939. At this he was chairman of the physical education section. Subsequently he was present at the Ling Centenary at Stockholm, a festival in honour of the founder of scientific physical education. Sixteen thousand delegates were present from 22 nations, the greatest feast of physical education ever staged.

The English Are Progressing

The Swedes and Danes, Mr. Smithells noted, still lead the world in physical education, but the English, who have modified the Scandinavian systems to suit their own problems and traditions, have made big steps in the last 20 years.

Since he has been in New Zealand Mr. Smithells has given frequent broadcast talks from the National stations. He has been heard in the "This Changing World" series of talks in the Educational Session.



Spencer Digby photograph

PHILIP SMITHELLS

"... Forget every college boy film"

physical education teachers and general methods of physical education in colleges. He met hundreds of typical young college men and women, worked and lived among them, and gained what must have been a thorough insight into their lives.

He admits that such generalisations are very often rash, and explains that America expresses itself in cults more often than in movements, but on the whole the statement is valid, he told a representative of *The Listener*.

They Take It Seriously

In his own specialised department of education, Mr. Smithells quotes remarkable examples of the vitality and general awareness of American youth. Physical education, for instance, has graduate status and is taught to that stage in