



***WILLIAM LEE  
HOWARD***

***CONFIDENTIAL  
CHATS WITH  
BOYS***

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# **Confidential Chats with Boys**

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **THE BODY AS A MACHINE**

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Any young man who understands the simple facts concerning his body and the laws of human energy, should be able to be as strong in body and nerves at fifty as he is at twenty-five years of age.

If he is strong in body and nerves at fifty he has the increased brain power of experience and work, and only think of the force he has then to utilize for the next twenty years.

This is a practical idea and not a theory or a statement of exceptional cases.

But if this is so, why have not our parents been able to be boys with us instead of old men at fifty? Because they did not understand; never had the plain points shown them; physicians have not always considered this side of boyhood development, and because physiology as taught in the public schools was not that physiology needed by youths and boys.

We shall not here bother with the old style and schoolbook physiology. I am going to present to you the simple, common-sense facts about the body and how it must be handled to get the best out of it.

If you have an automobile, the first thing you do is to understand it; its different working parts, how they are dependent upon each other, how much fuel is needed and how applied, what will make the engine run smoothly, what will injure it and what kind of usage is necessary to keep it

always in good running order, what will cause it to break down and become an old rattling thing and send it to the scrap heap.

The finest built machine is of no value if any of the parts which have gone into it are faulty; it will break down when a strain comes. It is just so with man; for when you really come to understand the machinery within you, you will realize that you are the most delicate and at the same time toughest piece of mechanism ever produced. Muscular power, brain force, will, mental ability, all depend upon the PHYSICAL condition of man—the parts and condition of the machine in him.

The higher power in us that makes the human body a mere medium for development we shall not here say much about, but so related is it to the body itself, that a poorly adjusted or diseased body will affect this higher power, the soul, the conscience, the morals of the man. That is, a diseased or weak body—not merely muscular weakness, but a general weakness due to neglect of nature's laws—will show a weak will, a lack of determination and a further falling away from a high moral standard—in other words make a failure of a man.

But why should this be so? Is man to be blamed for being physically weak, to be punished because he has not that full strength of body that others have? Yes; I think so. But suppose he inherits a weak body, inherits disease? Is he to be blamed for something over which he has no control? Not exactly that, for there *is only one disease you can inherit*, and that is a punishment for your parents' or grandparents' sins—or in most cases, ignorance.

When you thoroughly understand your own body, the little *tendencies* to weakness or predisposition to certain diseases can all be overcome. The distressing effects of venereal diseases seen in children whose parents have been ignorant of the facts you will be given in this book, have been a blessing to mankind, insomuch as you can all avoid them after the knowledge concerning them and your body is yours.

You see, what I mean is that you will possess knowledge your parents did not possess. In such a grand position the future men and women—your children—will be started right. And so will you if you heed and absorb what I shall tell you.

Big muscles do not necessarily mean strength, but to be strong one must have well developed muscles.

Seems an odd statement; doesn't it?

A man may inherit big bones to which are attached big muscles. The fibres of these muscles may be coarse, inelastic and under control of a slow motor—a sluggish nervous system. Just as you may have a big motor car, big frames and running gear, but under-powered.

Now remember that all real muscular power originates in the nervous system and brain. If the nervous system and brain are not in perfect condition, the full power of the muscles can never be utilized any more than you can get the full power out of your big car if the cylinders are too small or so weak in construction that you do not dare to run them at full speed.

This is one reason why men born with big frames and large muscles are not always the strong men. Frequently these men break down in the prime of life. Also during their

active lives they really never get all their power in use. I consider such men unfortunate in that they do not possess the knowledge of their condition, so they neglect in early life the necessary rules and habits which, if heeded would bring them to old age in full possession of their natural strength.

The weakling who realizes his failings and knows how to correct and care for them, is more often the strong and healthy man in middle and later life. This fact teaches us one of the great laws of nature; that is that we cannot for a day neglect our body; the born strong man does, he never watches or cleans his big machine—it goes to rust and wears out in parts.

These strong men as youths, from the mere fact of having big, hawser-like muscles controlled by a slow-moving force, do not have the incentive to build up active muscles nor the energy to train the nervous mechanism controlling muscular activity. The result is that such a man's muscles remain coarse fibered, fatty, bulky, and respond slowly to the motor centers of the brain. Moreover, they feel in such perfect health that they are careless about their habits and throw away a lot of energy that the man who is building up strength takes care of—saves for future use and material.

A youth who desires to build muscular strength goes about it carefully and slowly. Remember that all staying powers, brain or muscle, must be built up slowly. The tough and hardy oak does not grow like the weak poplar—quickly. Its growth is steady, regular and slow, but in the end it is powerful, long lived and richly reproductive. Make haste slowly is one of the fundamental laws of nature.

Brain and nervous system always come first in starting to build muscular power that is to last and be always at your command. The basis of power depends upon the rapidity with which the muscles respond to mental impulses. Properly developed muscles are finely-fibered, and react instantly to the impulse of the motor cells of the brain—the cells which tell the muscles to shoot out at once. Now let anything such as alcohol, tobacco, loss of sleep or immoral habits, fasten on the youth and all attempts to get the full strength out of muscles, no matter how big they are, will be useless. The reason is that the brain cells have been affected—they cannot act as they should and so the muscles cannot respond to the impulse. This is the cause of so many first-class boxers taking the final count. Success has made them careless; they neglect the rules of the physiologic game, they drink a little, smoke and indulge in other habits which affect their nervous system. They go on the stage breathing the foul and poisonous atmosphere while exhibiting, are necessarily late to bed and while still keeping up their MUSCULAR training neglect the fact that every day they are injuring their nervous motility. It is so little noticed that no attention is paid to the matter. But when it comes to a battle after such a career—even if careful training has been done weeks before the contest—the effect is shown, and down the champion goes before a less experienced boxer, one not so strong in the muscles but one whose full brain and nervous force has remained uncontaminated. Then, sad to relate, THIS champion goes the same way.



So you see that mere gross muscular structure is valueless—except it is needed for daily labor, where it exists as mere animal automatism—unless it is under the immediate control of a highly-organized nervous system free from disease and abuse.

So delicate is this nervous element of the body in getting the muscles to respond, that I have tested hundreds of athletes—including myself—by a very sensitive instrument which shows the response of the muscles to the condition of the brain cells. A youth who has lived a perfect life—physiologically speaking—is kept from one half of his night's sleep. The next day he is tested and there is a difference shown in the rapidity of muscular response. The difference in a tenth of a second in a blow makes all the difference between a champion and a loser, and this tenth of a second can be brought about by the loss of one night's rest. How must it be then when the youth has lost several, or been breathing foul air with heavily working lungs?

The extreme muscular development seen in those who pose on the stage and before the camera, while marvelous to the sight, is in reality of little practical use. Such muscles are not developed through normal exercises, but gain their prominence by being contracted and expanded through mental concentration on the muscle itself, not on any work that the muscle should be made to perform. Under this fad form of "physical culture" the levers which the muscles should lift and lower are kept immovable, the muscles themselves do no work, the fibers only being caused to swell and shrink.

Take the “development” of the biceps, for instance. This muscle is intended to flex the forearm, attachments being on the upper arm and shoulder and the insertions in the upper part of the lower arm, making a perfect leverage. Now, in this false “physical culture” system the arm is held semi-flexed and rigid and the muscle made to rise and fall, no tension being put upon its attachments. The result is a development of the center of the muscle, but a development of a mere shape, not the development of the power of lifting. The attachments are not developed or strengthened; they remain thin; hence, to the spectator in the audience, the center of the bulking mass of biceps looms up as a powerful organ of force—it is simply an artificial lump.

This false method of “physical culture” also squeezes out the little amount of fat that the muscle should bed in for ease and nourishment, and this further accentuates its size when illumined by a spot light against a black background.

Big chests do not necessarily mean big lung power, but one must have a capacious chest to have great lung power.

Another odd statement? Not exactly.

The average man does not use in daily work much more than half his lung power-capacity. There remain in the lower portion of his lungs thousands of little air cells, which stay practically closed in ordinary breathing. When a man is called upon to run a long distance he soon finds himself in distress, has “a stitch in his side.” This slight pain is caused by the effort made by the air to get into these closed cells. It is the forcing open of these reserve cells that produces the “stitch in the side.” When these cells become active and

take up the extra air needed, the distress ceases and the man gets his “second wind.”

Now, it can readily be seen that the greater the chest capacity the greater the reserve force. As it is in the muscle of the “physical culture” man so it is in the chest development of the same class—an unnatural condition. These latter possess, by constant deep breathing, forcibly inhaling and exhaling, a large chest. But there is no reserve force; all the cells are constantly filled. The chest development is good to look upon, but we must remember that the owner of such a chest has no reserve power—no extra breathing space to call upon when most needed. He has reached his limit at the start—a condition fatal to athletic work. A condition injurious to the man’s future health, for there are many times in illness and in emergencies when he will need some reserve force to fall back upon. It is like taking a journey and spending all your money at the start—when you need some, it is not there.

Athletes are healthy, not because they are athletes, but because all healthy individuals are athletes; not necessarily competitors in games or strivers after honors, but persons who enjoy outdoor living and breathing the fresh red-blood giving air.

But there are so many mistakes made by youths and boys who strive to become athletes before their body machinery is properly adjusted, that much harm has been done by overtraining and a misunderstanding of what really constitutes a healthy man.

Americans have absorbed much of the energy in the world, but not all its wisdom. Too many of our athletic

instructors at the schools have tried to turn out athletes instead of strong men and women.

When we read in the daily papers of the collapse of a celebrated athlete, or the breaking down during training of a young aspirant for honors on the cinder path, we naturally surmise that fundamental knowledge of the physiology of the muscular mechanism of the human body is either submerged by the overpowering desire to make a record or is totally absent among certain trainers and their pupils.

The want of wisdom concerning man and his body is the cause of many sad conditions existing to-day among formerly strong and healthy young men. A comprehensive idea of the physiology of growth, of the physiologic and chemic relations of strength and endurance to age and condition, would be of great value to a large number of old individuals—not old in years, but old in vessels and tissues—who strive to put an unusual strain on their weak arteries, as well as to the youth whose central nervous system is often permanently injured by over-exertion in attempting to make records placed by carefully trained and intelligent athletes.

Let us take those Marathon runs as an example. Two years ago I witnessed the real Marathon—that is, the great one in this country—the Boston event. This run is a nerve-racking, lung-pulling one of twenty-six miles up many steep and long hills. Among the large number of contestants were a boy of about sixteen and a man somewhere in the forties. [\[1\]](#) To allow such starters was a great mistake—especially in the boy's case. There were physicians at the start to examine into the condition of the runners, but what doctor

could tell off-hand of the past habits, inherited faults in the bodily mechanism or system of training these various contestants possessed? There was only one reasonable course to take—that is, to withhold their sanction to the starting of those whose years had not fully developed the bodily functions, and of those whose habits had brought a strain on the valves of the heart.

[1] Since my criticism and explanation in the magazines, the Committee allow no youths under eighteen years to run in the event.

If we were all Indians, having been placed at birth out in the open and lived without clothes until puberty placed a loin cloth on us, accustomed every day to run and tramp, developing the different organs of the body harmoniously and gradually until they all reached their full power and held in reserve extra power, then these runs of twenty and more miles would not injure us. But, as it is, they are of no benefit and in many cases injurious. Young men who spend hours indoors, who have worn clothing since birth, been prevented from using the greatest breathing organ next to the lungs,—the skin,—who train for this event and then step back to our civilized life of houses, furnaces, trolleys and clothing, are not fitted for these great strains on organs which have been unused to them.

The human body is a wonderful piece of mechanism, which not only renews itself constantly, but whose strength and endurance and capacity for more work increase with increased use up to the point at which use becomes abuse. At what time and under what pressure this danger-line is reached depends upon the individual. However, the