

Health Bulletin *for* Teachers

Out of Old Fields, New Corn

“How’s our health?” is the question that naturally arises in discussing the preliminary findings of the medical examinations made so far under the Selective Service Act of 1940. This question is highlighted to an extraordinary degree by the fact that the findings of the World War draft examinations were the spur that quickened the tempo of the child health movement in 1918. To many public-spirited people the situation revealed by the 1917-1918 examinations was intolerable. Here were more than a million young men—about one third of the nearly four million called in the draft—who were unfit for general military service because of physical defects, many of which were preventable and traceable to the period of childhood. It made little difference that the majority of these defects did not interfere seriously with useful careers in civilian life, but only unfitted men for the rigors of military life. Not passable health, but “radiant and abundant” health was considered to be the birthright of every young American.

Men and women in those days thought they had finished the job which now must be done again, and believed in the peace which has now been broken. And so with the faith that the scientific knowledge then available might be applied to bring children to healthy manhood and womanhood, not primarily for the sake of success in war but for success and happiness in times of peace, the newly founded Child Health Organization of America working in cooperation with the United States Bureau of Education raised that early cry of “Health! Strength! Joy!” which, with bitter irony, has since been twisted to the purpose of misguided men who seem to value youthful strength and enthusiasm only as instruments for destruction.

Beginning in 1918, pioneer efforts to improve the health of school children were expanded into a nationwide program for the improvement of the school environment, for the provision of school health services, and for the transfusion of health instruction with a new and vigorous appeal to the children’s own interests. During the Children’s Year inaugurated in 1918 by the United States Children’s Bureau, infants and preschool children all over the country were weighed, measured, and examined by physicians and found wanting to an alarming degree. As a result, both in volunteer and official quarters, the machinery was set in motion for child health centers, well-baby clinics or conferences, prenatal and postnatal clinics, the expansion of public health nursing,