

Mr. Kavanagh:

. . Referring to the attached, Mrs. La Malle would like to have you review the first five or six sheets. She says it will be necessary for her to get a wire off this afternoon to the Nurses (Miss Cates and Miss Fitzgerald). It seems that J. Fred Johnson showed them the letter he received from Dr. Frankel, which by the way was written by Mrs. La Malle over his signature, and this naturally upset them. She says if we will telephone her (526) she will come right down to see you before she sends the wire.

F. T. F.

March 10-1951.

has tended to give the impression that the health of American youth is inferior today to what it was 20 years ago in spite of all our efforts to improve it. However, neither the situation, the purpose, the means of measuring health status, nor the physical standards are the same today as they were in 1917-1918.

The very progress which has made it possible to give better health protection also enables physicians to give better physical examinations. Diagnosti techniques and instruments and tests for detecting objective signs of defects in structure and function have been vastly improved. The very insistence on the right of youth to be "well born," well nourished, adequately protected against communicable diseases, and free of remediable defects has tended to raise the standards of physical and mental fitness. We have become "allergic" to malnutrition, dental caries, preventable diseases of every description even though we have not yet found a way to apply universally known methods of dealing with them. Finally when the Selective Service Act of 1940 was passed we were not at war as we were when conscription was put in force in 1917. There has not been the immediate urgency for man power that makes expedient the sifting of men through a coarser screen than is used in less hurried times. Undoubtedly thousands of draftees who were accepted in 1917 would be screened out with dispatch in 1941.

Better facilities for detecting defects, more rigid definitions of fitness for military service, less urgency in supplying men fit to fight, have undoubtedly combined to increase rejections for certain defects, and for others to indicate only slight improvements that we might reasonably expect to be far greater on the basis of national morbidity and mortality rates. It has been pointed out that national vital statistics give a much truer picture of the nation's health than do the preliminary statistics of physical defects brought to light in the selective service examinations. The death rate is lower now than it has ever been Before, and longevity is at its peak. In the interval between the two

drafts the mortality rates for the diseases that are particularly hazardous for infants, school children, and adolescents have all declined. There is no question but that there has been marked improvement in the health of the civilian population with a vastly greater chance for young people to win through to adult life than was the case 25 years ago.

Let us not forget, however, that it was physical defects at a period when health should be at its best and not the death rate which aroused the crusaders of 1918. It was to equip for life, that led us then to start working for healthier boys and girls. It does not help us much to know that the young men of today must pass more rigid tests and meet higher standards than did their fathers; that on the whole they are taller and better educated, and stand a good chance of living longer. This is the year 1941, not 1918. We are judging and being judged by the standards we have helped to establish. And by these standards preventable and remediable defects and diseases, notably those of the teeth, eyes, heart and blood vessels, bones and muscles, and ear, nose, and throat, are still all too common among American youth.

On the other hand if we have failed to achieve dramatic and universal improvement in the young men of one generation as compared with those of the preceding generation, there is no reason to be discouraged. "Our knowledge is [redacted] the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds." It is continually growing, continually bearing new fruit. As the generations succeed one another, new methods are tried out, new facilities are made available, new information is spread, old prejudices and superstitions are overcome. With each generation we begin afresh, with well-tried knowledge constantly growing, with workable machinery constantly being improved, with a few spectacular triumphs to hearten us. What we have done, what we have yet to do is

the theme of this year's Health Bulletin for Teachers.

2 lines

For oute of olde feldys,
as men sey,
Comyth al this newe corn
from yere to yere.

Hoyt's
13 : 13 (col 2)

Chaucer, The Parlement of Foules.

REFERENCES

Public Health Reports, United States Public Health Service, Washington, D. C. "Summary of Defects Among Men Drafted in the World War," issue of January 10, 1941; "Physical Disqualifications Under the Selective Service Law," issue of May 9, 1941.

"Relationship of the Health of Civilians to Efficiency of the Army," James C. Magee, M.D., ScD, American Journal of Public Health, November 1940. American Public Health Association, New York, N. Y.

"Physical Fitness of American Youth," Statistical Bulletin, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, June 1941.