

## The Second Line of Defense

THE first reaction to war is often a craving for personal sacrifice. People are impelled to quit their usual occupations in order to render some immediate, some extraordinary service to their country. In England the navy was endangered by the rush of coal miners into Kitchener's army. For months munitions production in France was crippled by the withdrawal of skilled mechanics from the factories. In New York newspaper editors, whose specialized ability is worth hundreds of recruits, plead for enlistment as hospital orderlies. Our heightened emotions make it difficult to realize that successful war now demands an intensification rather than a dis-jointing of normal industrial and social processes.

One of the most stirring manifestations of patriotic ardor has been the rush of women to the colors. By tens of thousands they have offered themselves for every emergency service from back yard agriculture to the naval reserve. Short of the trenches there is nothing that men can do that they are not keen to do also. Had women been available for military enlistment, who can doubt that they would have made men look like slackers by their rush to arms.

But it is in the second line of defense that women can give the most effective war service—the line where after the actual provision for their fighting men the efforts of all the belligerents are concentrated—the line that protects their children.

Last week Dr. Josephine Baker, Director of the New York Bureau of Child Hygiene, told a club of women who were anxious to place their lives at the service of the country, about the needs of the city's children. Before the discussion could begin, a woman rose at the left of the audience, another at the right; scattered through the hall they sprang to their feet.

"Madam President! Madam President! Was this meeting called to discuss the feeding of children or preparations for war?"

"I want to nurse wounded soldiers!"

"But what are we going to do for our country?"

When Dr. Baker said that it was her duty to go on with the work of caring for the children, there were exclamations of protest.

"Of course," one woman insisted; "but what will you do to help win the war?"

They did not seem to grasp the significance of what the war has already done to our American children.

Medical examination has discovered more than one hundred and sixty thousand children in New York's secondary schools who "show the stigmata

of prolonged undernourishment." For these borderline cases continued underfeeding will mean permanent bodily impairment. There are other tens of thousands who have not been getting enough to eat—some two hundred thousand in all. This is the largest number of hungry children ever recorded by the Department of Health, and it has appeared not in a time of panic or abnormal unemployment but in the midst of what has been assumed to be general prosperity.

It is no answer to say that there have always been thousands of children going hungry to school. Neither does it help the children to charge their condition to parental neglect. Such evasions are unpardonable at all times; they are especially dangerous now. For there is no doubt that the evil of undernourishment among our city children, aggravated as it has already been by the European war, will be intensified by our participation in the conflict unless we take extraordinary precautions. In spite of the unusual demand for labor there has been a large and steady decline in the buying power of wages, so that families with father and mother, older brothers and sisters all at work, have found it increasingly difficult to feed the children properly.

Many people are under the illusion that the wage-earners have been reaping a golden harvest. In its April Bulletin the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics prints a comparative table of wage increases and the increased cost of food as reported by the principal trades in forty-eight of the leading cities for the past ten years. During that decade weekly wage rates rose 16 per cent; retail food prices 39 per cent. Of these increases, 5 per cent in wages and 14 per cent in food prices followed the outbreak of the war. In addition to this gross disparity, food prices made a further advance of 23 per cent during January and February of 1917, while wages advanced from 10 to 15 per cent, and this in a few industries only. To the increase in the cost of food must be added the increase in the cost of shoes, clothing and rent. Statistics on these items are difficult to assemble, but the New York Times reports that rents in some parts of New York have risen from 10 to 15 per cent during the past year—enough to absorb a large part of the average increase in wages.

These are the principal reasons why 160,000 children in the New York schools bear the stigmata of prolonged undernourishment. Their parents have not had money enough to buy the necessary food. What is true of New York must also be true of the forty-eight cities covered by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. If the wage-workers respond to Mr. Gompers's appeal to make the continued acceptance of exist-

ing standards a matter of patriotism, the pressure upon the children, our second line of national defense, will grow steadily heavier as the war goes on unless the women take effective steps to protect them. How can this be done?

Not by inventing new and untried activities, but by the extension and reënforcement of the existing machinery. New York City, especially, has developed a system of child conservation which, as a system, is the equal of the best that war has created in Europe. The first school nurse was employed by the city almost a generation ago. To-day, the Bureau of Child Hygiene employs more than three hundred nurses, one hundred and eighty-seven medical inspectors, ten dentists, two surgeons, fifty-eight nurses' assistants and almost one hundred men and women of other ranks. It operates fifty-nine infants' health stations for the feeding and medical supervision of babies and the instruction of mothers. It coöperates with scores of day nurseries, settlements, clinics and hospitals. And in recent years, its work has been reënforced by the School Lunch Committee, which with the aid of a municipal subsidy sold over two million penny portions of food last year to ten thousand children at thirty-four school kitchens. As a result of all this work, the infant death rate fell from 200 per thousand in 1898, to 125 in 1910 and 93 in 1916—the lowest in the country. The death rate among children under five years has undergone a corresponding decrease. But the morbidity among children of school age—that is, the proportion in a subnormal state of health and physical resistance—has apparently increased. This is principally due to the fact that the service of the school lunches has not kept pace with the decline in the purchasing power of wages. And the lunch rooms ought now to be run throughout the year, instead of the school months only. The danger is that at this time when the need of the children grows daily more acute, it will be difficult not only to extend the present service, but to keep it intact.

There is already a shortage of trained nurses. This will be aggravated as our army is mobilized into action. Europe is calling for doctors; our army will call for them in increasing numbers. The trained assistance needed to operate the school lunch rooms will be in growing demand. The infant health stations and the school kitchens will need volunteers. As soon as the woman's registration bureau of the Mayor's Defense Committee is in effective operation, Dr. Baker plans to institute a six weeks' training course for women qualified to replace or supplement her present staff. If the women of the city had been alive to their opportunity, this auxiliary service would be in training now. Stewpans and nursing bottles are so re-

pellently unromantic! Unless the children are to bear an increasingly disproportionate part of the war's burden, every infants' health station, school lunch room, day nursery, settlement, kindergarten and Sunday school must be organized in coöperation with the Bureau of Child Hygiene and run to capacity, at least for the duration of the war. It is for the women to say whether the end of the war shall find our children broken in health.

## Overplaying the News

NEWSPAPER readers who are accustomed to take all Washington dispatches literally must be wondering why the government has made no provision for quartering the prisoners we shall take. That, apparently, is the only circumstance connected with our going in which has not been anticipated, discussed, and quite adequately prepared for. Other developments have been coming rapidly. It was only two days after the declaration of war that most of our journals reported that definite arrangements had been made for the full coöperation of the British and American fleets. Since then it has been announced that a censorship bill, drafted by the War Department, was about to be made law; that the General Staff had prepared its plan for raising a new army, and had sent it up to Congress; and that the War Department had ordered three million trench bombs, with a complete outfit of gas masks and grenade throwers. In the face of so much already accomplished, who will say that the quartering of prisoners was not a matter to be forehanded about?

To people who live in Washington much of this information comes as a surprise. They wonder how so much that is important has missed them. They go to Secretary Daniels, and ask if it is possible to indicate in any general way the nature of the arrangements for naval coöperation—and he denies (April 9th) that such arrangements have been made. They go to the Army censor—Major McArthur—and inquire whether the censorship bill as drafted by the War Department follows the outlines of the British act—and are told (April 12th) that the War Department has drafted no censorship bill, and has at present no intention of drafting one. They go to the military committee at the Capitol, in search of the bill which raises a new army and which, on April 6th, the General Staff was about to submit to Congress—and they find, as late as April 16th, that no such bill has yet been introduced. Of the trench bombs and the outfit of gas masks they can not learn so authoritatively. They are matters of military detail, and not open for discussion on a wide scale. Sceptics can only note that