



## BETTER CHILDREN

In 1920 I had undertaken the consolidation of a number of organizations devoted to health and welfare of children into the American Child Health Association, of which I was the president. Dr. S. J. Crumbine was director with Courtenay Dinwiddie and Dr. George Palmer as his assistants. Our Board of Directors included such devoted souls as Doctors Philip Van Ingen, Samuel Hamill, Thomas Wood, Linsly Williams, together with Grace Abbott, Mrs. William B. Meloney, Clinton Crane, Edgar Rickard, Edward Flesh, and Aida de Costa Root.

We carried this work forward during my whole term as Secretary of Commerce, during my term in the White House, and on to the year 1935—a total of thirteen years. Securing the money to support the work proved a great burden. The income of the old associations which we consolidated did not exceed \$50,000 per annum and was precarious at that. We succeeded in raising the available funds as high as \$600,000 per annum—a total of fully \$5,000,000 in the thirteen years during which I directed the Association. All this would have been impossible without the steadfast zeal of Edgar Rickard, who also saw to it that the money was well and properly spent.

We held our first great national convention in October, 1923, at Detroit, where we had a thousand delegates from the official and non-official organizations all over the nation. In opening this meeting I said:

The growth of the American Child Health Association is the direct result of a national realization of the sad deficiency in the protection of child health.

The disclosures in the army draft, under which 30 per cent were defective in face of the fact that more than 90 per cent of our children are born with normal physical possibilities, gave to many of us a resolution that . . . we

would make further effort toward the determination of these causes and their remedy. Military service is not the purpose of a nation—but it provides a cross-section that must give us national concern, for the physical and moral well-being of the nation marches forward on the feet of healthy children. . . .

I am able to report . . . the inauguration of the most important project that has yet been undertaken in the field . . . the systematic determination of the shortcomings in child health protection, community by community . . . and the demonstration of remedy. . . .

There were thousands of devoted workers, hundreds of local organizations, many well developed community services for children in existence throughout the country. Our major purpose was to support and spread them. Our activities developed along four lines: expert assistance; stimulating public demand for better care of children; educating the children on health, and educating their parents on certain fundamentals of nutrition and public health service. On the nutritional side, the major problem was not poverty but ignorance. Probably 30 per cent of the American children were improperly nourished—malnutrition rather than undernutrition.

We made an exhaustive survey of eighty-six cities of 40,000 to 70,000 population, in thirty-one states, and published in 1925 an appraisal of the findings. The report produced a spectacular explosion. The survey showed that forty-one of the cities had no full-time health official and that half of the part-time officials they had were without a medical degree. Sixteen cities had not even a nominal board of health, and forty-one had fewer than three sanitary inspectors. Half of the cities had no reliable birth or death records on children. Twenty-eight different procedures were in use for release from quarantine of diphtheria and scarlet fever patients. In thirty-seven cities vaccination was not compulsory, and 44 per cent of the children were not protected against smallpox. Eighteen cities had no facilities to hospitalize contagious diseases. Twenty-one did not even have clinics for diagnosis and treatment of venereal disease. Fifteen were without clinics to diagnose tuberculosis. A large majority had no maternity hospitals. Seventeen had no medical inspection in the schools, and in thirty-five the inspectors devoted less than two minutes to each child. Scarcely any of

the cities had a "follow up" system to correct defects. In twenty-one there was no health instruction in the schools. Four had an unsafe water supply. Only eight cities pasteurized their whole milk supply. Forty-seven pasteurized less than half of it. Four cities had no playgrounds outside the school yards. In forty others the play facilities were wholly inadequate.

We set up a standard for city conduct based upon the best work in the eighty-six cities. Then we published in the press the ratings of each city. There were heated mayors and town councilmen in the delinquent communities, but their press rubbed it in hard. The report became an issue in the elections of many towns. Our published plan for ideal community organization became a bible for many a belligerent mothers' society.

We joined in securing the funds to set up the ideal health activities for children in three typical rural counties and ran them for three years as a test. This experience proved that without Federal or state aid, or both, backward rural counties did not have the economic strength to attain the standard which we had set. Some years later I translated this conclusion into legislative proposals to Congress.

One of our dramatic measures was the establishment of May Day as Child Health Day. Beginning in 1924 and continuing through the next decade, we organized parades of children. They carried banners demanding protection for their health. Each year saw an increase in the number of communities observing this celebration. I secured Presidential proclamation of the day, and finally the passage through Congress of a bill legalizing it. The Communists had previously appropriated the ancient festival of May Day for their demonstrations; and I took special satisfaction in giving them this particular competition.

For many years we supported a radio program—"Cheerio," by Charles K. Field—for the benefit of shut-ins.

We of course opposed child labor and advocated a constitutional amendment to stop it. We advocated better school facilities in backward areas. We published volumes of expert studies for the benefit of social workers and health officials, and millions of pamphlets for the inspiration of the public. Among the latter was my "Child's Bill of

Rights" which had very wide circulation. In 1931, I expanded and revised this document, and I embody the full text in a later chapter.

When I entered the White House I continued and expanded these activities. But after my term expired, I was no longer in a position to secure the funds to keep the Child Health Association running, and in 1935 it went out of existence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a list of my statements on child problems see the Appendix, under the heading Chapter 14.