

Turning Spotlight on the "Forgotten Child"

With Nearly One-Sixth of the Nation's Child Population in Families Dependent Upon Emergency Relief, Welfare Agencies Call for a Solution of Their Grave Problem



Wandering boys getting ready for bed at a Salvation Army Shelter at East St. Louis

Cradle and nursery and those who, like *Topsy*, "just grewed," are under the nation's spotlight, and the picture tugs at the heart-strings of child-welfare workers. There are, according to official count, 7,400,000 children under sixteen, or about one-sixth of the total child population, in families dependent on emergency relief. Three million boys and girls are out of school and unemployed. Thousands, helpless and homeless, are on the march.

Drifters all, they are the ones for whom official Washington and child-welfare agencies the country over have expressed the greatest concern. Much has been done in reopening schools, in establishing 2,000 FERA nursery schools, and in providing work and educational facilities for the CCC. Much more remains to be accomplished if youth is to be properly prepared for the great trial of initiative and ambition to come when civilization moves further into its new field of endeavor.

The problem was laid before the recent National Conference on the 1935 Needs of Children held under the auspices of *The Parents' Magazine* in New York City. Nearly a thousand representatives of national, State, and local child-welfare organizations attended. Before them Katharine F. Lenroot, Chief of the United States Children's Bureau, made one of her first public appearances since taking office.

● **Plight of Children**

Speaking of the 7,400,000 children thrown more or less on their own feeble resources, she asserted their right to expect, during 1935, that steady progress would be made toward a more widely diffused prosperity, and toward a greater security through provisions against unemployment, old age, and hazards of life.

"With the average amount of relief per family per month as low as \$8.23 in the State with the lowest average, and reaching only \$42.36 in the State with the highest average, it is obvious," she said, "that the health and welfare of these children are in serious jeopardy. These children have a right to expect that Federal, State, and community relief policies of 1935 will provide more adequately for essential items in the family budget."

“Forgotten Child”

Of the millions of young dependents, more than 700,000, said Miss Lenroot, are children whose fathers are dead, or whose parents are separated. “Forty-five States,” she reported, “have provided for widowed and dependent mothers with children, but less than half of the counties in the United States authorized to appropriate money for this purpose are actually doing so. The children in this relief group must be absorbed into the greater security of the mothers’ pension system as rapidly as possible.”

● **Work for Youth**

The picture is relieved by the successful efforts to provide for youth with the CCC, and by the transient-service programs developed by the FERA. Miss Grace Abbott, former head of the Children’s Bureau, now Professor of Public Welfare in the School of Social Service of the University of Chicago, also raised her voice for “the forgotten child.” Since she was kept home by illness, her address was read by Mrs. Clara Savage Littledale, Editor of *The Parents’ Magazine*.

Miss Abbott stressed that juvenile delinquency has become a grave rural problem, and that the rural infant death-rate is becoming larger than the urban. “To take rural children out of the ‘forgotten’ category,” said Miss Abbott’s paper, “we should ask Congress to enact, in 1935, another Federal law for the promotion of maternal and infant health, that Federal grants in aid of education and mothers’ pensions should be made. In the States much needed State and county-wide services should be initiated or strengthened.”

● **Child Labor-Law Plea**

Again child-welfare workers heard a plea for ratification of the Federal child-labor amendment, which needs sixteen more State indorsements to become part of the Constitution. Dr. John L. Rice, New York City Health Commissioner, put the question:

“Of what use are all our efforts to preserve the health of children through their early years if, during the important adolescent period, they are suddenly thrust from school life into an eight-hour day of confining work in factory, office or store?”

“Temporarily, under the codes, children are not working in our industrial establishments under sixteen years, and are not working in especially hazardous occupations under eighteen years. The purpose of this amendment is to enable Congress to pass a law which will make permanent these child-labor standards.”

Doctor Rice disposed of the impression that the amendment would prohibit a child from helping his parents with the chores by saying, “this is absolutely not the aim of the amendment,” and by quoting Senator Wagner as having said that Congress would pass child-labor laws which would provide a happy medium between undesirable labor and the useful chores which might properly be expected of children.

Another who favored ratification of the child-labor amendment was Homer Folks, Secretary of the New York State Charities Aid Association. He said, too, that “the New Deal had made good in its campaign promise, and found the ‘Forgotten Man.’”

"Forgotten Child"



Homeless youths who drift into New York from various parts of the country playing games in the recreation rooms of the Children's Aid Society's home for newsboys

It has found also that the "Forgotten Man" "nearly always has a wife and from one to six children who have been even more completely forgotten than the man himself."

Now, said Mr. Folks, "child welfare permeates the whole range of changes which the New Deal has undertaken. The greatest opportunity of the New Deal may be to show that the welfare of children dominates many situations which now result in the appearance of bitter conflicts between grown-ups. It is not difficult to resist a demand made by organized groups of workmen in their own behalf. It is far less easy to stand out against the necessity for a reasonable standard of living for the forgotten wives and children of these men."

● **A Bright Contrast**

Asserting that there were "still many spots where child labor is abused," Courtenay Dinwiddie, of the National Child Labor Committee, declared "we propose to fight until they are wiped out."

Tho the present plight of the nation's schools seems disheartening, to-morrow's mirror shows a bright contrast. Dr. John K. Norton, Chairman of the Joint Commission on the Emergency in Education, said the downward trend had been checked and that improvement is forecast.

"I believe," he went on, "that the 1935 State Legislatures and the Federal Government will ultimately see their duty to the nation's children and will perform that duty. 1935 will mark the beginning of a revival of interest in education similar to that which a century ago, in the face of almost insuperable obstacles, created our free and democratic system of public education. Out of this renaissance will come schools and colleges adequate to cope with the pressing problems of our dynamic civilization. By 1940 I expect to be able to say that, so far as education was concerned, the depression was a great success."

An important feature of the conference was the presentation to Miss Abbott of *The Parents' Magazine's* 1935 medal "for outstanding service for children."