

The Crusade for Good Health

Report of an Address by Dr. Jas. W. Robertson

Chairman of the Executive Committee
Canadian Red Cross Society

Many people wonder why the Red Cross did not stop its work when the war ended. That was what it did after the South African War and it was expected to do the same after the Great War. The officers of the Canadian Red Cross did not intend to go on. They were eager to be demobilized, glad to think that having done their bit during the war they could with good conscience accept release from Red Cross duty and step back into the routine of private life. But the Red Cross was not to be allowed to stop. It was destined to take on the new obligations of a peace-time program, even before it had completed its war work.

Revealed by the War

The war had made vividly clear some things which a quarter of a century of peace might not have revealed with so much impressiveness. The war had given us a revelation, for it may fittingly be called a revelation, of the relative worth and ability of the ordinary man and woman. During the war the ordinary soldier, seaman and airman stuck to their duties and did them with a courage and endurance which have never been surpassed. The spirit of the race had not decayed. But the war had revealed also the shockingly poor physical condition of a great proportion of the men of the Empire. In the alleged progress of civilization, in the organization of industries, in the development of big business for creating and controlling wealth, regard for the intrinsic worth of human life—of men and women in good health living and working under wholesome conditions—had been to a large extent neglected. Think of the significance of this: During the last year of war, from the 1st November, 1917, to 31st October, 1918, the number of men called up to the army in Great Britain was 2,425,184. A summary of the results of the medical examination of them shows the following facts: of every nine men, three were fit and healthy, two were in infirm health, three might be described as physical wrecks, and one as a chronic invalid with a precarious hold on life. Since that was the physical condition of the men at their most vigorous age, what would be the condition of health among the women and children? In other countries, the examination of the men called to the colours revealed conditions somewhat similar. In Canada, of the 361,605 draftees under the Military Service Act, the medical examination found 181,229 of them, or about