

# THOUSANDS SEEK "THE HOUSE WITH THE BLUE FRONT"

A LITTLE group of people were talking earnestly. "Well, then," said one at length, "it is to-morrow morning at the house with the blue front, at 117th Street."

The others nodded. It was evidently enough for them.

This was the first time the phrase, "The house with the blue front" had been heard. Was it not enough to fire the soul of any reporter? What mystery might lurk behind a blue front? How apt would be the choice of such a color by criminals who needed an assignation place easily recognizable by conspirators coming from a distance! In a house with a blue front the murdered body of a man from the mountains of the Balkans or some similarly remote spot might be found, and a Sherlock Holmes might gather the ash of the murderer's telltale cigar.

The next morning at the appointed hour the reporter was, naturally, on the spot. Hurrying down the street, there came the sound of an inquiry from a woman, poorly dressed and eager-faced, who carried a child in her arms and asked:

"Can you tell me the way to the house with a blue front?"

The man to whom she spoke answered at once that it was right around the corner. And well he might, for blue is not a color habitually chosen by New Yorkers for a house front.

Some curious purpose had dictated the choice of a color so unusual as that which jumped at one the moment the corner was turned. The blue was the blue of an afternoon sky. The white curtains at the windows had a little edging of blue. Looking through the open door, there was seen to be a border of blue around the lower part of the room, with white above, and on the floor there was linoleum of blue and white. Nobody could pass such a place without stopping to look. It gripped you by the arm and held you while you pondered its purpose.

And what was it? As a matter of fact, there was in the cellar no corpse halling from foreign parts, and the public is not only admitted to the house with the blue front, but earnestly invited to come. What is more, in spite of its unusual color, it has already several duplicates in the city, and before the Summer is over there will be in Manhattan alone seventy or eighty such patches of cerulean. In other words, not to "put too fine a point upon it," as the estimable Mr. Snaresby in "Bleak House" used to say, the house with the blue front is a new milk station for mothers and babies.

The name sounds like the title of a murder story, but it is quite the other way around. The inmates of the houses are working more hours a day than anybody but "dyed-in-the-wool" enthusiasts could work to reduce infant mortality this Summer, and the houses are painted blue because it is a fine, striking color, calculated at first to attract the attention of casual passersby and then to serve as landmarks for mothers.

This is the way it is expected to work. Take a mother who has strenuously refused to rear her offspring along scientific lines. She gives it tea, coffee, strawberry shortcake, and pickles. One day alarming symptoms develop. The mother, whom we wish the reader to picture as hitherto a monument of obstinacy, experiences an instant change of heart, seizes the baby, and rushes to the street.

"Tell me," she cries, "the nearest way to the house with the blue front."

The chances are 100 to 1 that somebody can give her the information instantly, and she rushes where she knows help in the form of a trained nurse awaits her, and baby is saved, with what we may describe as the cheers of the populace.

Of course, being merely an imaginative presentation of the blue front's dramatic



Waiting for the Milk Distribution.

possibilities, this is not primarily the function of the milk station, but, then, on the other hand, selling milk is also only a part of the work of such a place. The blue front milk stations are meant, indeed, to furnish good, pure milk that can safely be drunk by the feeblest baby stomach, but it has another function even more important than that, and this is the education of the mothers who come to the place.

The battle for the lives of children in New York is about to be fought more fiercely than ever. Already this city stands far ahead of any other on the continent in the care it gives its little children, and this year the New York Milk Committee of 105 East Twenty-second Street has undertaken to give a demonstration to the city of the reduction that is possible through maintaining a large number of stations where good milk and better advice are always ready for any one who comes to seek.

It is submitted that it costs \$50 to bury a baby. It has been demonstrated that babies can be saved at a cost of \$-0 a year for each baby. The New York Milk Committee says—and really it sounds very sensible: "All things considered, we might just as well save babies as bury them, seeing that it does not cost any more."

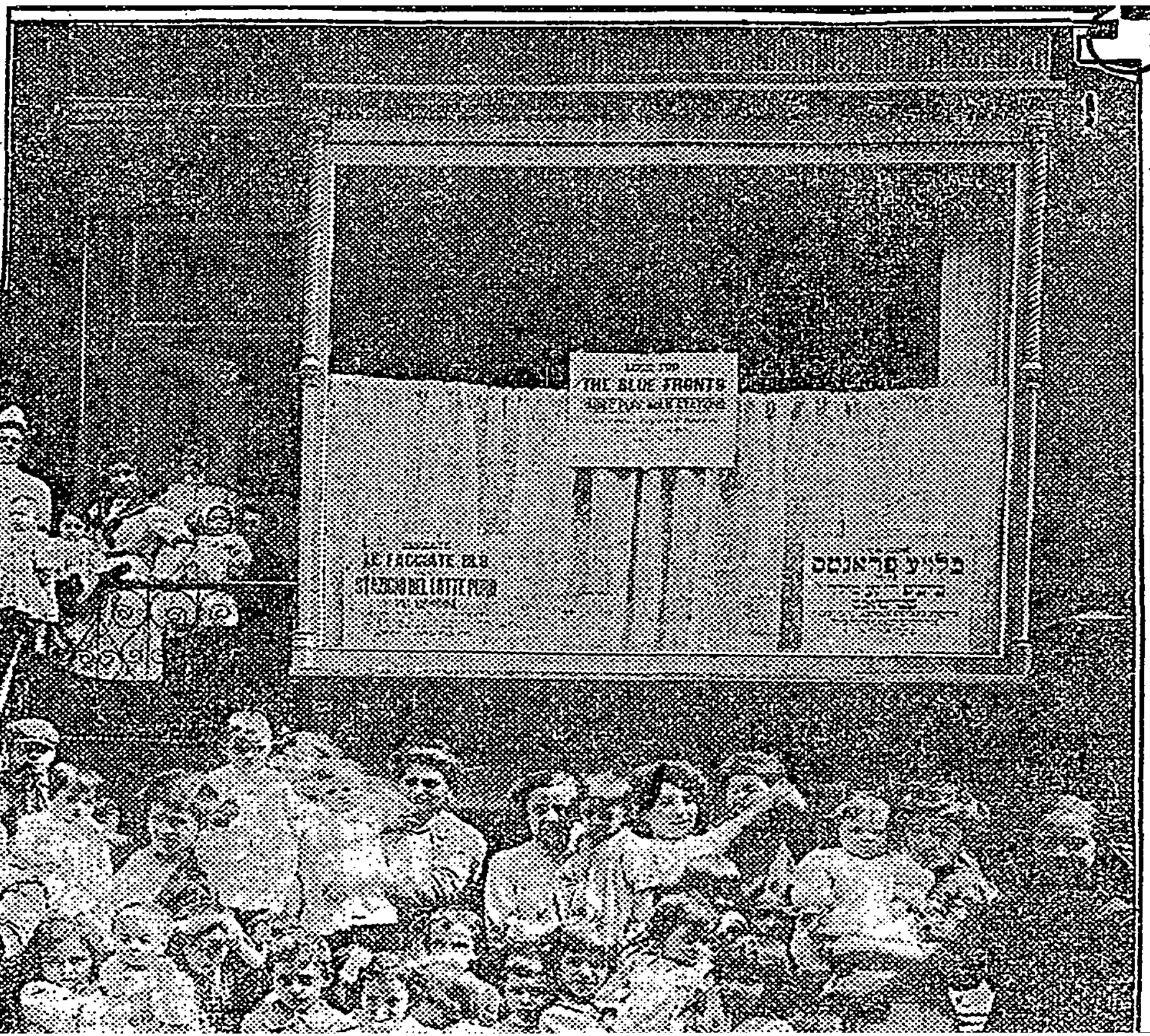
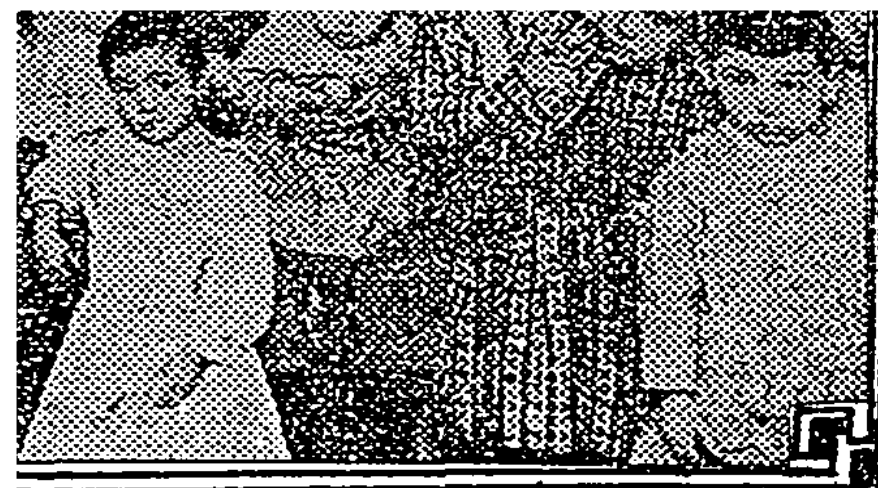
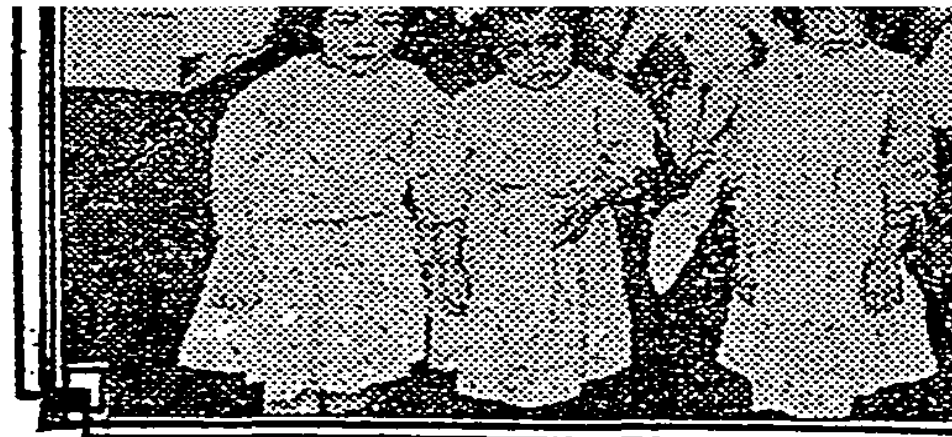
The odd thing is that it has taken us some time to get the point of this. It does seem pretty clear when it is pointed out, but we have been floundering after it for a long time.

Even last Summer, when New York had the lowest death rate among the large cities of the country, over 1,000 babies were buried in two weeks. The number of babies born during the year equaled the population of New Haven, and one-eighth of them died in the course of the twelve months. And yet other cities made a far worse showing than New York.

Ours is the banner city in the country for children and we have a Department of Health which, in this respect, is out and away the most energetic to be found anywhere. All the same, a great many babies died that might have been saved.

They did not die because the Department of Health did not know how to save many of them. It knew perfectly well, but that costs money, and the average taxpayer has not yet grasped the fact that has come home to many individuals that \$50 for saving a baby is a better way to spend money than giving \$50 for burying a baby. But this year as many of these deaths are going to be prevented as possible, and the New York Milk Committee is to make what is intended to be a striking

## Milk Stations of New York Now Strikingly Marked So That Any Mother with an Ill Child May Find Help Quickly



The House with the Blue Front—One of the New Milk Stations.

ing demonstration of what can be obtained by a great big campaign against the deaths that hide everywhere for the little nites.

The experiment is being made in close co-operation with the Board of Health, but the department has the money to open only ten of fifteen stations throughout Greater New York, and the Milk Committee is going to carry out a tremendous campaign with sixty stations right here in Manhattan. The death rate has got to fall this Summer, for methods tried and proved to be the best are used inside the blue fronts.

The value of the milk stations, says an expert on the question, lies about 25 per cent. in the milk and 75 per cent. in the advice given. It used to be the custom to prepare the milk for babies according to a set formula, such as such for children under three months old, and such and such for children a year old, &c. This worked well enough for the "average" child, but unfortunately the majority of children are not "average" at all. The New York Milk Committee is taking a new system altogether.

It is a very simple matter to teach a

woman to prepare milk for her own child. At every milk station there will be a nurse to do this. She will show any amount of patience that may be necessary in wrestling with the idiosyncrasies of each individual family, and not one mother will come away from the milk station without having an idea as clear as possible of the way in which the baby should be fed and cared for.

Under the old system, when the milk was all prepared in little bottles, there were a dozen details that the mother neglected at home. The bottle was put down in a dirty place, the nipple was taken off, and cockroaches and similar lively insects would creep in. The mother did nothing about it, because she had not been made to understand how important to health cleanliness was.

The Milk Committee makes her understand this, and sees that the good done at the station is not undone by ignorant carelessness. The nurses will work in the homes, too, so far as possible, by following up special cases.

There are doctors who will visit the station at stated times and who will prescribe for every baby that comes. Not

child has some disease that requires special attention from a clinic. Not every baby who comes to the station miserably undersized and puny is suffering from malnutrition. When, however, it is malnutrition from which they suffer, it is singular to see the lines in their charts.

Every baby that comes has a chart. Along the middle runs a line indicating the normal weight for a baby under a year. It goes in a long, slanting upward line. When the babies come in, little dots are put to register their relation to the line, and in practically every case these dots are a pitifully long way below the normal. A baby that should weigh fifteen pounds will weigh but eight or ten; then it gets its clutch upon the milk bottle from the station, and presto! the line goes up so suddenly toward the normal that it is almost perpendicular.

It is startling to see the instant improvement that follows the visits to the milk station. What ails the child usually is nothing in the world but starvation. It is a useful thought to take home and ponder evenings when there is nothing else to do that hundreds of babies starve to death every year in New York City.

It is an interesting and not too involved matter to study the different causes from which babies die. They may be grouped in three classes. First, congenital debility; then intestinal diseases, then respiratory and tubercular diseases. From these three causes nearly all babies die. In New York in 1908 only 124 babies out of every thousand died of

congenital debility. That means babies die because they have not a fair chance at the start—they come into the world so ill-equipped for the struggle that they surrender perhaps before the first month has passed. Forty per cent. of the deaths, roughly speaking, come under this head. Intestinal diseases, also roughly speaking, accounted for 30 per cent. The other diseases, chiefly respiratory and tubercular, carried off the remaining 30 per cent.

Looking over this list, it is not hard to see the immediate point of attack. To have a baby born right is a much more difficult matter than to keep it right after it comes here in good condition. So, obviously, the congenital debility section would be the hardest to deal with.

Of the two remaining sections the intestinal diseases seem, even to the unscientific mind, the most preventable, as well as the most common single cause of death. Against this weak spot, then, the fighters in the campaign against infant mortality turned their guns, and they have already materially reduced the death rate. They have found the way, but there remains much that might be done.

This section is to be reduced by the Milk Committee campaign this Summer. It is clearly here that the most marked showing will be made. But, like many other important movements, the showing which is obvious to the outsider is not that of which those behind the scenes are most proud.

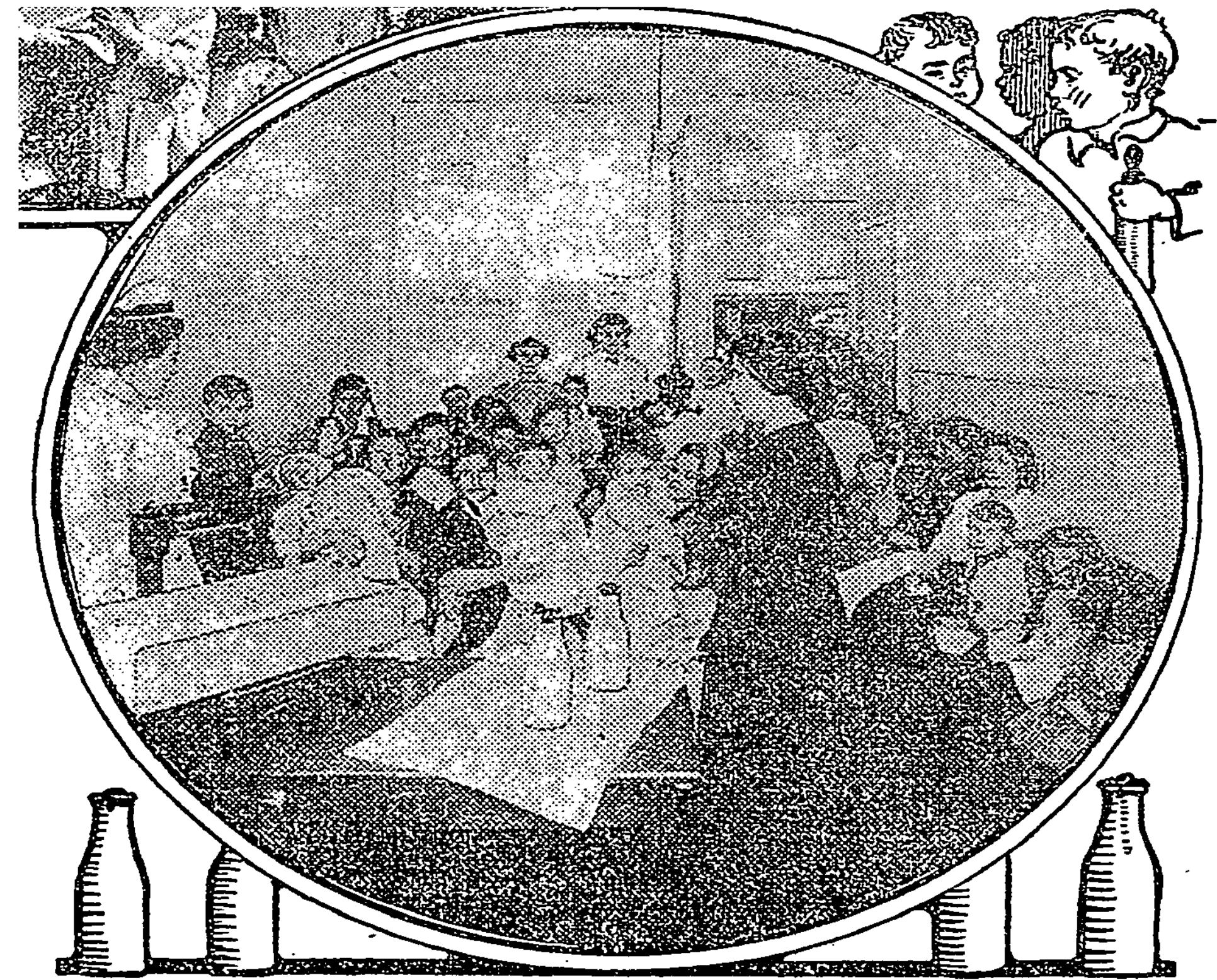
The Milk Committee knows, and the Directors of the Department of Child Hygiene in the Board of Health know, that the great thing to be done now is to attack that 40 per cent. of congenital debility, in other words, to get the babies born with a fair chance.

The education of the mothers at the milk stations will do something for the babies in this way. If a baby is born puny and perhaps dies, it might be possible, by telling the mother how to take better care of herself, to save the next one. It will not always be possible, because a poor woman with the best will in the world cannot pick and choose her lot even for the sake of her child, but she can certainly do better under skilled medical advice than she can do alone.

Then the milk station will furnish milk for mothers, as well as babies, and by enabling her to continue to nurse her child, (because 90 per cent. of the babies who die are bottle-fed babies,) will feed two people with one quart of milk, an achievement considerably passing that of the man who makes two blades of grass grow where one grew before.

In France not only are mothers provided for by public restaurants, so that before the children come and while they are babies the mothers have plenty to eat, but they are forbidden by law to work for a month before or after the children are born, and they receive a pension from the State for that time. We have not reached that point yet, and we may never need to reach it, but we have got to attack the congenital debility cases, and the Milk Committee is going after them as hard as it can this Summer.

It cannot go very hard, of course, because it will take a great deal of money to do that, and it has not yet all the money it needs even for this milk campaign, but if it makes a great success of this Summer's work, if infant mortality falls again this Summer, as it has been falling steadily every Summer since the Board of Health Department of Child Hygiene started to fight for the babies, then it is hoped that the city will take over the milk stations, and the Milk Committee, free of that expense, may be able to turn its attention to the details of working out some scheme that will benefit the mothers and insure their bringing into the world the kind of citizens that the world needs.



Weighing a Baby and Educating Mothers in the Care of Children.

only do they prescribe the diet necessary for the child, but they are able to set the mother on the right track if the

allments other than those under one of these three groups. The largest number of deaths occur from