

PUBLIC HEALTH

# Attack on Old Age Problems Launched by Health Service

## Conference Called by Surgeon General Included Representatives of Medical and Other Sciences

THE federal government is taking an increasing interest in people of this nation who are getting old.

Social security, with its economic benefits, was the first step. Now comes an attack on the health problems of old age, launched by the U. S. Public Health Service at a conference in Washington.

This conference of the National Advisory Committee on Gerontology, called by Surgeon General Thomas Parran, was the first of its kind ever held in this country.

The committee includes not only physicians but, among others, a botanist and a zoologist. Plants and animals other than man grow old, and the men who have studied the aging process in these other forms of life may be able to help with the study of the aging process in man. Some of the troubles of old age are due to specific illness and others just to the process of growing old. Both parts of the problem must be studied, if the federal health service or any other agency is to help old people live more comfortably and efficiently.

Efficiency in old age may soon be as important as comfort, because our nation is rapidly becoming a nation of older persons. In the future, they may have to take more and more part in the work of the country. If they are not needed for work, they will need to be efficient at

managing their own lives and the problems brought by increased leisure time.

A research unit to be concerned entirely with problems of aging has been organized at the National Institute of Health under the direction of Dr. Edward J. Stieglitz. Before starting its work, this unit plans a survey of work already done on the problem.

Members of the National Advisory Committee on Gerontology are:

Dr. L. R. Thompson, Director, National Institute of Health, U. S. Public Health Service; Dr. Anton J. Carlson, Physiologist, University of Chicago; Dr. Charles L. Christiennin, Medical Director, Metropolitan Life Insurance Company; Association of Life Insurance Medical Directors of America; Dr. Robert E. Coker, Zoologist, National Research Council, University of North Carolina; Dr. William Crocker, Botanist, Boyce Thompson Institute of Plant Research; Mr. Lawrence K. Frank, Sociologist, Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation; Dr. A. Baird Hastings, Biochemist, Harvard University; Dr. Ludvig Hektoen, Pathologist, Consultant, National Cancer Institute, U. S. Public Health Service; Dr. Winfred Overholser, Psychiatrist, Superintendent, St. Elizabeths Hospital; Dr. Clarence Selby, Industrial Physician, General Motors Corporation; Dr. William D. Stroud, Clinician, Philadelphia.

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The same prediction curve indicated a maximum population of the United States to be reached some time after the year 2100, and to become stabilized between 196 and 197 millions. The new curve flattens out earlier and at a lower level. The ultimate maximum population is indicated at 184 million.

However, Prof. Pearl and his associates confess, it will be necessary to wait ten years in order to determine which of their two prediction curves comes closest to fitting actual facts.

"We hope to make a statement on the point in 1950," the article concludes.

Prof. Pearl died on the morning of Nov. 17. His surviving co-authors, who hope to be able to carry out his final promise, are Dr. Lowell J. Reed and Dr. Joseph F. Kish.

*Science News Letter, December 7, 1940*

PSYCHOLOGY—SOCIOLOGY

## Boosting American Morale Fairy Godmother Job

TO BOOST American morale, sociologists must turn to fairy godmother tactics of considering inner wishes—in a very practical and sociological way. So it appears from the latest investigation into causes of high and low morale reported by Delbert C. Miller of the State College of Washington. (*American Sociological Review*, December.)

The feeling of being successful in achieving one's own goals is a better index of morale than actual conditions of social and physical surroundings, Mr. Miller points out. This psychological angle, he declares, must be taken into account in social reforms.

As six outstanding social psychological factors that affect the rise and fall of an individual's morale, Mr. Miller cites these:

1. Financial plans for old age.
2. Job satisfaction.
3. Family members' approval of job.
4. Job advancement on merit basis.
5. Personal feeling that things are going well.
6. Leisure enjoyment.

Important for giving a lift to the individual's feeling of well-being and getting somewhere in life, are such sociological conditions as regular and adequate income, working hours that allow for leisure, a job that satisfies.

"The impulsive reformer," he declares, "may be surprised to find how slight his success is in pleasing people who have been given more or better material comforts but whose wishes for security, response, or recognition are denied."

Mr. Miller has studied morale in 951 former university students.

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POPULATION

# Population of United States May Be Lower Than Expected

THE curve of increasing population in the United States may flatten out sooner than expected on the basis of past censuses, and the stationary population figure finally attained may be lower than earlier predictions indicated.

This conclusion was reached through study of the 1940 census by the late Prof. Raymond Pearl and associates, of the Johns Hopkins University. His statement

is published posthumously in *Science*. (Nov. 22.)

In 1920, Prof. Pearl, with Dr. L. J. Reed, based a prediction curve on the census of 1910, and on all previous U. S. censuses since 1790. This indicated that the 1940 population of this country should be more than 136 million. Actual count shows a population somewhat short of that figure: 131 million.