

"Suffer Little Children . . ."

HAVING BEEN PRIVILEGED TO ATTEND the first ever Prize-giving of the Nursing Staff of the Fountain Hospital, Tooting Grove, London, we were delighted to receive an invitation from Miss E. A. Bell, the Matron, "to come and see something of our work."

A chat over lunch on the subject of the mentally deficient child made us eager to meet him and to see how he lived.

Meeting Sister after Sister and talking with them made us repeat to ourselves, "And the light of Heaven shone from her eyes."

The Fountain Hospital was built in eight weeks to last only 15 years during a scarlet fever epidemic, with accommodation for 384 beds in 16 wards. When the 15 years were up, fever cases were nursed in the Grove Hospital opposite, and the Fountain Hospital was unoccupied for several years.

The Metropolitan Asylums Board re-opened it in 1912 for mentally deficient children; it was taken over by the London County Council in 1929, and transferred to the National Health Service in 1948.

In July, 1944, three wards, three residences and part of



Happy times in the playground.

the staff quarters were totally destroyed by a flying bomb, and the rest of the Hospital severely damaged.

After the remaining buildings had been restored accommodation was then provided for upwards of 600 children.

There is to be found in this small "village" a Nurse Training School, Medical Library and Lecture Room, Pathological Museum, Laundry, Needlerooms, Hairdressing and Chiropody Departments, Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy Departments and Engineers' Workshops.

As it is planned that St. George's Hospital will one day take over the site of the Fountain and Grove Hospitals, only the minimum of extensions can be undertaken.

The children are housed in small communities under a Sister who must be trained to be a teacher as well.

We visited many classes in progress where the children were learning to make or do things according to the extent of their brain power. Each child lives in a world of his own, which on the whole as far as one could judge, was quite a happy one. They were all very pleased when we applauded their attempts to build up bricks, thread beads, or figure something from plasticine.

In the Spastic Centre, the children were making grand attempts to control involuntary moving limbs.

We were sorry to have just missed a dancing class of patients from 12-14 years old; they were just being dismissed to go and work on their garden when we arrived at the classroom.

For two of the boys, the watering of the spinach was attacked as though it was their lives' work, and Teacher just prevented us from a drenching when she found they had decided to fix the hose to the tap close by!

We visited the sick wards, where one little child, with lined face like an old man, seemed to be particularly ill. Next to him was a dear black baby who looked as normal as a healthy baby could look.

On and on we went, then saw some of the little ones nodding in their small chairs round their small table waiting for tea.

One little girl escorted us to the door of her ward, and then seeing the door open fled back to hide her face in Sister's apron—a haven of safety from a cruel world.

We visited the children's zoo, where we found monkeys, pigs, budgerigars, doves, pigeons and tame rooks. Also we were informed that most of the cats in Tooting seemed to find their way to the hospital grounds.

Families of the patients are encouraged to visit their children, and on a Sunday parents and friends come armed with sweets, fruit, cakes, etc., which are joyfully received by little hands. At the close of the visit the children are quite happy to clutch Sister's apron and wave the visitor off until the next visiting day comes round.

A good deal of this splendid work is retarded because of the acute shortage of staff. Parents do not encourage their daughters to train in mental work, but we wonder if they realise just what they are missing?

We know they must be women of outstanding ability and charity, who will realise there can be very few cures effected, but they have charge of their patients for many years watching over them and helping their stumbling feet to pursue a straight course.

Their playground was equipped with all the amusements to be found today; the swings were in full sail, the slide becoming more polished every minute, and the paddling pool being used sometimes feet and sometimes head first. Upon enquiry, we learned there were very few accidents while playtime was in progress.

The hospital owes much to the Physician-Superintendent, Dr. L. T. Hilliard, and to the Matron, Miss E. A. Bell, for their ceaseless work on behalf of these mentally afflicted children.

Miss Bell was awarded the 1951 Fellowship by the World Health Organisation, when she visited Denmark, Sweden and Finland for her field of study of Mental Health.

Thus ended an afternoon of mixed emotions, spent amongst afflicted children and the heroines who watch over them so selflessly.

M. R. A.

Recovering Silver from X-Ray Films.

THE MEANS BY WHICH something like 500,000 ozs. of silver, worth over £150,000, can be recovered from used X-ray film each year, have been indicated to hospital authorities in England and Wales by the Ministry of Health. Silver recovered will be returned to the X-ray film manufacturers, so helping to overcome the shortage of this metal—a dollar import—which is essential in the making of X-ray films.

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