

The Midwife.

THE EARLY SYMPTOMS OF NERVOUS DISEASE IN CHILDREN.

The early symptoms of nervous disease in children was the subject of a lecture delivered by Dr. David Forsyth, F.R.C.P., at the Royal Society of Medicine, 1, Wimpole Street, on Monday, February 14th. The lecture was the fourth of the Advanced Course on Infant Care, given under the auspices of the National Association for the Prevention of Infant Mortality.

The lecturer said that of the psychical side of child life very little had been known till the last four or five years. It is now known that most cases of neurosis in adults are attributable to some kindred disturbance in childhood. When it was understood how the condition came about, it was far easier to cure. Such conditions were more easily cured in childhood, and obviously it was easier still to prevent them.

It was most important to detect the earlier symptoms, and to note when a child was developing off the normal lines. There was no sharp line of demarcation, as in all healthy children nervous symptoms would be present on occasions, but it was when they became accentuated or practically always present that the condition became serious.

The commonest symptoms were muscular movements. The child is unable to sit still, always fidgeting in some way or another, or the face, shoulders or arms would twitch, the child being quite unable to control the movement. Timidity was another symptom, and night terrors a common experience. A kindred symptom to this was somnambulism. Severer forms were epilepsy and asthma, palpitations, and irregular pulse.

Nervous children were often irritable and passionate, or were moody and depressed. They are generally affectionate, and often are of more than average intelligence. Later on shyness and self-consciousness were manifested. It often became a question as to whether these conditions were due to heredity or environment. It was most likely that they were acquired, and that the child of neurotic parents, though born sound, would succumb to the neurotic atmosphere in which it found itself. The key to the understanding of neurosis in children was the understanding of the emotional life. It must be remembered that the control of the emotions which the adult should possess must not be looked for in the child.

The emotions of love, jealousy, hatred and fear were the key to a great number of nervous conditions in children.

The child is born without affection, but will gradually come to associate its mother with all

pleasant things, consequently love of its mother is one of its strongest factors. Trouble may arise from the longing of a child to monopolise affection. Jealousy of one or another parent may be present and cause a mental conflict in the mind of the child who feels that this is wrong; or it may be jealousy of another child, especially is this liable in the case of a first-born towards the second child. The lecturer instanced the case of a little girl of two-and-a-half years in New York, who jammed the head of a one month's baby between the cot and the wall. The child never was brought to shew any sense of having done wrong, she was merely pleased to get rid of the interloper. Another detailed instance was given of a boy of six years old who was acutely jealous of the next child when it was born. After the death of the younger child, the circumstances of which were never explained to him—he merely missed her from the circle of the nursery—he became morbid and suspicious. It was found that he was connecting his jealous wishes that his sister might be removed with her disappearance, and conceived the notion that other people also were accusing him in their minds. The boy was brought as a patient to Dr. Forsyth, who elicited the cause of the trouble, the boy for the first time speaking to any person about what was to him the mystery of his sister's disappearance, though her death had taken place a year previously. The lecturer gave other interesting instances bearing on the subject.

Previous to the lecture the Secretary announced that Lady Barrett (*née* Willey) would give her interrupted lecture on March 17th. She also pleaded for the starving mothers and babies in Belgium.

SAVING THE BABIES.

"Good mothers are a nation's best assets," as Napoleon once said; and of all the institutions for turning out such mothers, the National League for Physical Education and Improvement, and its Department, the Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres, have probably done the most active work of late. With a declining birth-rate and a rising infantile mortality rate, it is now even more necessary than before the war to secure that the babies who are born should be kept strong and well, and there is no doubt but that the rapidly increasing Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres are doing valuable work in this direction. The Association was instrumental during the first 16 months of the war in starting no fewer than 154 new Centres for the instruction of mothers and the medical inspection of babies, and many more are in process of formation all over the Kingdom. Much good was also effected

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