

THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF NURSES.

The thirty-first meeting of the Council of the College was held at 39, Portland Place, W.1, on Saturday, March 23rd, at 2 p.m. The President, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, was in the Chair, and the following Members were present:— Miss M. Breay and Miss S. A. Villiers, Vice-Presidents; Miss M. G. Allbutt, Miss A. M. Bushby, Miss I. Macdonald, Fellows; and Miss E. J. Haswell and Miss K. M. Latham, R.R.C., Members.

Before commencing the Meeting, Miss Villiers expressed the pleasure of the Council at having the President with them again to preside at the Meeting, and the President in reply thanked the Council for the work they had done during her absence.

After Prayers had been read, the President, standing, and wearing the Decoration of the Reconnaissance Francaise, which had been presented to her for her work in France during the war as Hon. Superintendent of the French Flag Nursing Corps—a Corps of thoroughly trained British Nurses which worked under the direct authority of the French War Office—said she felt sure that the Council would wish to express its regret at the death of Marshal Foch, the illustrious Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies, who was to be laid to rest at the Invalides at Paris with great International honours.

The Secretary was empowered to draft a letter to Madame Foch to be signed by the President, expressing to her the gratitude of this organisation of British Nurses (the British College of Nurses) for the incomparable service rendered to the world by Marshal Foch, and for his sense of humanity which, once victory was assured, impelled him to refuse to risk another life.

A rising vote of sympathy was recorded and the following telegram was sent to Madame Foch:—

"The Council of the British College of Nurses desires to convey to Madame Foch its deep sympathy on the death of her illustrious husband, Marshal Foch, and also to express its gratitude for the genius and heroism which saved the most sacred of all causes, the liberty of the world.— Ethel G. Fenwick, President, 39, Portland Place, London."

Upon the suggestion of Miss Bushby, it was agreed to send a laurel wreath.

Minutes.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were confirmed.

Business Arising out of the Minutes.

A letter had been received from the Under Secretary of State, Home Office, Whitehall:—

Home Office, Whitehall,

MADAM,

March 7th, 1929.

With reference to your letter of the 28th ultimo, I am directed by the Secretary of State to say that as it now appears that the matter which your College wish to bring before him relates to the position under the criminal law of persons who have suffered from Encephalitis Lethargica, he will be glad if they will in the first instance submit a written statement for his consideration.

I am, Madam,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) HAROLD SCOTT.

The Secretary,
British College of Nurses.

A written Statement to be sent to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs was approved as follows:—

STATEMENT PRESENTED BY THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF NURSES TO THE RIGHT HONBLE. SIR WILLIAM JOYNSON-HICKS, BART., M.P., SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS.

The Necessity for Protective Legislation in Cases of Encephalitis Lethargica.

In response to the request of the Secretary of State for Home Affairs to be furnished with a preliminary Statement in writing of the points which the British College of Nurses desire to bring before him on the subject of Post Encephalitis Lethargica, the Council of the College respectfully desire to draw his attention to the following points.

1. The urgent necessity for protective legislation for those who have suffered from Encephalitis Lethargica, on account of their helpless condition.

In the interesting Report by Dr. Alan C. Parsons, M.R.C.S., of an Inquiry into the after histories of persons attacked by Encephalitis Lethargica (Reports on Public Health and Medical Subjects No. 49, Ministry of Health) the author points out that: "The number of post encephalitis cases which at present come to certification is relatively small and in many of these cases certification is only possible after a lengthy and miserable period of progressive mental or physical deterioration. Moreover, it is one of the striking features of the disease that it may completely change a victim's whole character and outlook on life and leave his intellect intact and even alert. There is not unnaturally, perhaps, considerable reluctance on the part of Medical Practitioners to certify such patients."

2. The importance of keeping unfortunate sufferers from the after-effects of this disease, including changes in conduct and disposition, under expert observation, guardianship and care.

They are not responsible for their actions, nevertheless if they commit offences which bring them within the arm of the law they are charged, and if convicted are punished, as ordinary criminals, whereas they are a most pitiable class of sick persons deserving sympathy and help, instead of being sent to gaol and branded for life as criminals, through no fault of their own. Moreover, the punishment of children may include whipping, and for adolescents between 16 and 21 corporal punishment is also available under certain statutes. Sentences of hard labour are also possible. In the view of the Council of the British College of Nurses the possibility of the imposition of such sentences in cases of persons suffering from post encephalitis lethargica is intolerable, and an offence to the public conscience.

In his Report for 1926 (37.IV) Dr. G. B. Griffith, Medical Commissioner of Prisons, states that during the period April 1st, 1925, to March 31st, 1927, there were 72 cases (65 male and 7 female) of post encephalitis noted among remand or convicted prisoners. Dr. Griffith remarks that about two-thirds of these 72 cases might possibly have been dealt with under the Amended M.D. Act of 1927, but that in the remaining third of the cases the attack of encephalitis did not occur before the age of 18.

(Under the Mental Deficiency Act of 1927, Mental Deficiency is defined as: "A condition of arrested or incomplete development of mind existing before the age of 18 years.")

3. That whereas provision is made for sufferers from this disease up to the age of 16 years, there is no adequate provision for either sex over this age. The Council of the British College of Nurses is aware that recently it has been decided to provide wards for men and women at the Northern Hospital, Winchmore Hill, but it believes these to be of an experimental nature.

Dr. Parsons states that: "As a result of the first two Conferences on Mental after-effects of Encephalitis Lethargica held at the Ministry of Health on December 5th,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)