

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,968. Vol. 80.

JULY, 1932.

Price Sevenpence

EDITORIAL.

NERVOUS CHILDREN.

Charitable appeals for numerous good causes appear daily in the Press, but the letter which was recently inserted in *The Times*, signed by Lord Harewood, Chairman of the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases, and Drs. E. D. Macnamara and Emanuel Miller, will, we most earnestly hope, arouse not only the sympathy but the conscience of the public.

The letter headed "Nervous Children" is not merely an appeal for financial support but outlines the constructive efforts to be made to investigate and treat a most pitiable group of suffering children including those whose mysterious disease (*encephalitis lethargica*) wrecks not only their physical but moral fibre. Lord Harewood, in alluding to certain aspects of the increase of juvenile crime, states:—

"At the beginning of the new school year a special unit is to be founded at this hospital for the treatment of certain types of children, such as the 'nervous child,' the educationally retarded, the juvenile delinquent, and the child suffering from the varied *sequela* of *encephalitis lethargica*. In the development of psychotherapeutic medicine and educational psychology much insight has been gained into the nature of mental illness, in so far as its cause is frequently found to lie in the years of childhood, and into the fact that certain behaviour disorders of children may be related to disturbance in bodily health.

The establishment of this unit, comprising four weekly clinics with a staff of qualified medical psychotherapists, lay psychologists, and the all-important trained social worker, has a double significance. It should help towards the administration of the Children and Young Persons Bill at present before Parliament; by its establishment in a hospital—especially in a hospital for the treatment of nervous diseases and disorders—its utility should be greatly enhanced.

All patients will first be examined by one of the physicians for the detection of physical or organic illness, and all the ancillary diagnostic and treatment departments of the hospital will be available on the spot for such consultation or treatment as may be necessary in each case. In addition, the special ward for children in the hospital in Regent's Park provides facilities for the admission of selected cases for observation."

This special and earnest appeal to "child lovers" to support this pioneer development should meet with a very generous response. If only the public could come into touch with, and see for themselves,

the heartrending tragedy of moral delinquency as the result of nervous sickness amongst innocent children, a far more determined effort would be made to protect and do justice to these victims, who may in ignorance be punished for crimes they have not the moral force to resist owing to the process of moral deterioration.

Deeply shocked and horrified by personal observation of these stricken children and the tragic grief of parents, it will be remembered that we urged the Council of the British College of Nurses, in 1929, to petition the Home Secretary in office to receive a deputation on the subject. We were invited to forward a Memorandum to the Minister of Health, who is not responsible for moral delinquency, in which we pointed out that magistrates ignorant of medical science had the power to convict offenders and condemn them to prison, whose delinquency might be the result of disease. The Minister evinced no sympathy with our urgent appeal, and "did not consider that any advantage would result from receiving a Deputation from the College." We therefore sincerely welcome not only the scientific but humanitarian attitude of the Chairman and Governors of the West End Hospital for Nervous Diseases.

The work of the newly organised Unit will, we feel sure, result in the amelioration of untold suffering.

DISEASE AND DELINQUENCY.

Sir Robert Armstrong-Jones, Chairman of the Committee for Inquiry into the Care of Mental and Nervous Delinquents, informs the Press that the Magistrates' Association, a fellowship of all magistrates and composed of men and women justices throughout the country, has for some time been deeply concerned about the apparent increase of juvenile delinquents, as it is now becoming widely recognised that many of the propensities of falsehood, depravity, cruelty and crime are the result of disease due to disorders of the nervous system.

This highly expert expression of opinion should have the effect of inspiring women, especially trained nurses, with determination to study the question of juvenile delinquency in its relation to disease much more earnestly than they have done hitherto, so that they may have the necessary knowledge to instruct others.

What is being done to interest women members of Parliament—the women police, prison nurses and warders in this question of such vital importance to the community? We fear very little. We hope the British College of Nurses, which took the initiative four years ago will organise instruction on the subject, it could not undertake more useful work.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)