

THE REPORT OF THE FEVERSHAM COMMITTEE ON THE VOLUNTARY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

Lord Feversham in the following words prefaces the Report of the Committee on the Voluntary Mental Health Services which has been recently published, and is the result of over three years' work :—

"The increasing speed of life made possible by scientific progress is tending to produce breakdown and overstrain. What would otherwise be latent maladjustment of an unimportant kind is liable to become serious mental disorder. Mental ill-health costs the State a very large sum in the provision of services, but the greater loss to the community is the lowering of efficiency at a time when all members should be giving their maximum output. The time has come when a united effort should be made to deal boldly with this great problem. Just as the understanding of the requirements of physical health has improved social conditions out of all recognition in the past 50 years, so we need now to get a practical grasp of the everyday necessities of mental health."

An important first step, Lord Feversham explains, was the decision of a number of voluntary societies to come together to see what could be done by consultation, "but before this committee was formed no one really knew what was being done to cope with the evil, and the first task of anyone desiring to bring about reform was to map out this unknown territory." To that end the committee set itself to make a comprehensive survey of the work of the voluntary associations, their investigations eventually carrying them into a review of the whole field of law and practice in relation to mental health, the first one of its kind to be made.

The broad purpose of the Committee's recommendations is to secure a comprehensive mental health service in every area, and the greatest emphasis is laid in the report on two measures—(1) co-ordination of both statutory and voluntary services in each area, and (2) the amalgamation of the national voluntary mental health organisations into a new central voluntary body to be set up for England and Wales, to be called "The National Council for Mental Health."

The Council, it is suggested, would be formed by the immediate amalgamation of the Mental After-care Association, the Central Association for Mental Welfare, the National Council for Mental Hygiene, and the Child Guidance Council into a corporate body.

The Board of Control, the central statutory authority, states the report, is playing a leading part in promoting co-ordination. In its report for 1935 it stated: "The want of unified direction and a comprehensive central body able to view the problem as a whole has made the mental hygiene movement relatively ineffective in this country. . . . There are limits to the extent to which central departments can influence or, indeed, ought to attempt to influence public opinion. It is, therefore, all the more important that the present multiplicity of voluntary organisations should be co-ordinated if the importance of mental hygiene is to be adequately realised."

Helping the Individual.

The evidence, states the Committee's report, "justifies the verdict that the voluntary mental health services lack cohesion to such an extent that they do not give full value in return for the money, time, and effort which are being spent upon them," and emphasises the need for practical co-ordination "from the point of view of the needs of the people, not of the services now rendered

by the various bodies." The only policy which has a claim to far-sighted statesmanship, it continues, is complete amalgamation, which "means thinking in terms of the individual to be helped, and not in terms of the societies which have previously rendered services."

Three of the four central voluntary associations—the Central Association for Mental Welfare (Incorporated), the National Council for Mental Hygiene, and the Child Guidance Council—have expressed themselves in favour of amalgamation: the creation of a new organisation with sufficient authority to win recognition and public support, and sufficient status to secure willing recognition and practical help from the universities and teaching schools, and from professional men and women who give their services to mental health work in any capacity.

The Report traces the attitude towards mental disorder in the past and the gradual change of outlook in regard to it, the malady being regarded until comparatively recently by the public as incurable.

Defective Children.

The Committee estimates that there are about 105,000 children of from seven to 16 years of age who are mentally defective within the meaning of the Education Act, 1921. Of these, 35,000 may be regarded as educationally retarded only.

There is, the Committee states, a serious lack of mental hospital accommodation, even for certified cases.

Causes of Deficiency.

The position of mentally defective children is given much consideration. The major causes of delinquent behaviour are given as poor training, personality maladjustments, intellectual dullness, deprivation of reasonable outlets, lack of reasonable affection from parents, and environmental factors. Public education should, it is suggested, be carried out through a well-organised mental health service, with the object of giving parents greater understanding of the causes of delinquent behaviour, including the contribution made by their own emotional attitudes. Parents should, it is urged, also be taught to seek advice from a psychiatric clinic as soon as the first signs of delinquency appear.

The Feversham Report is extensive and of great value, and will repay study by members of the nursing profession in whatever branch of work they are engaged.

MEDICAL SCIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF ANIMALS.

Animals have been and are among man's greatest benefactors in regard to experimental medical science, and it is only poetic justice that they should benefit by every advance in medical knowledge. That principle has been adopted in the Municipal Veterinary Hospital at Novosibirsk, in Siberia, where the surgeon in charge (B. E. Krotkov) has instituted Roentgen ray apparatus and electrical therapy for the animals that are brought in for treatment. A new building has been specially built to house the apparatus, and there is no doubt that the results thoroughly justify the innovation. The use of Roentgen ray apparatus will reduce the element of error in diagnosing internal disease in animals, and help to overcome the difficulty arising from the four-legged patients being unable to explain where they "feel the pain."

Electrical treatment has been successfully applied recently in a case of thickening of the pastern joints in a horse, which commonly leads to lameness and complete inability to work. Eight applications of the treatment were sufficient to cure the animal of all lameness, and to reduce the swelling until the joints were almost normal.

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