

THE RED CROSS AND THE EPILEPTIC.

"The problem of epilepsy is difficult and varied; it is not a single disease, but rather a common term for all kinds of pathological states which may be due to heredity, accidents, diseases, intoxications, parasites, etc. The lot of the epileptic can be made infinitely more bearable by medical care and vocational education. So every epileptic ought to be individually studied and trained."—Dr. René Sand.

Only during the last generation has the problem of the epileptic been studied systematically from its many angles. In the past, the epileptic has been dealt with or ignored as an individual, and the community has not realised how vast this problem is, how numerous are the sufferers from epilepsy, and how much can be done by administrative provisions and skilled medical care to ease the hard lot of the epileptic child or adult.

At its annual meeting in 1930, the Norwegian Red Cross appointed a committee to study this problem and to report on the best solution for it. This committee soon came to the conclusion that one of the most urgent needs at the present time was for an institution in which epileptic children up to the age of 16 could be housed, trained and generally cared for. The committee was the more hopeful as to the results to be obtained from such an institution as experiences in America have recently shown that in childhood, under favourable conditions, up to 30 per cent. of epileptics can be cured.

Looking about for a suitable site for the proposed institution, the members of the committee learned that in 1912 another philanthropic body had acquired an estate in the neighbourhood of Oslo with a view to turning it into an institution for the care rather than the cure of epileptics many of whom are insane. This estate, Solberg, was taken over by the State in 1920. Its many acres and nearness to Oslo made it exceptionally suitable for the institutional treatment of epilepsy, and the Red Cross Committee recommended that a children's institution for the cure of epilepsy should be established in the grounds of the Solberg estate in order that this juvenile unit should become part and parcel of a comprehensive scheme of institutional treatment for epileptics of all ages.

How common is epilepsy at the present time? It has been calculated that in the Scandinavian countries two per 1,000 of all the inhabitants are epileptics, that in Norway alone there are more than 5,000 epileptics, and that from 10 to 20 per cent. of all epileptics require hospital or institutional treatment. In other words, Norway alone requires a minimum of 500 institutional beds for this class of patient. In 1937, only 68 such beds were available in Norway. It will thus be seen that the Norwegian Red Cross has taken the initiative in a field in which there was a crying need.

At present some hundred epileptics requiring institutional treatment are housed in the Norwegian State asylums. This is a most deplorable arrangement, for experts agree as to the hardships inflicted on epileptics by herding them with the insane. There are indeed many epileptics who, though neither insane nor mentally defective, require institutional treatment because they are liable at times to violent outbursts of temper finding expression in acts dangerous to themselves or others. Such epileptics may also suffer from temporary loss of consciousness, which calls for institutional treatment, but not the branding of insanity entailed by confinement in an asylum.

The mind of the epileptic must be understood if the provision to be made for him is to meet his requirements. He is often irritable and quarrelsome. It is therefore essential that epileptics should not live in too close contact with each other. On the other hand, if they are to be under skilled medical supervision, they must come within

one and the same institutional scheme in order that the medical care provided may be of the best. To scatter small homes for epileptics all over the country would mean that none of them could be under a doctor who had specialised in diseases of the central nervous system.

In the development of institutional treatment for epileptics, the Scandinavian countries are at present exchanging their experiences in this field and learning what has been done in other countries such as the U.S.A., England and Germany. Denmark, it would seem, has already gone a long way towards solving its epilepsy problem, and has already two institutional beds for this disease per 10,000 inhabitants. The largest Danish institution for epilepsy is "Filadelfia" with 445 beds. Its staff includes seven doctors, two of whom are specialists in diseases of the central nervous system including mental disease. Large as it is, this institution does not admit patients under the age of 15, nor those suffering from congenital imbecility, the last-named class of patient being held to be better fitted for admission to an institution for the mentally defective. At "Filadelfia" the patients are sorted out according to their intellectual gifts, and work is given them, from such occupations as carpentering, shoe-making, tailoring and book-binding, etc., to more elementary and automatic tasks fitted for those with a comparatively primitive mentality. The institution is provided with laboratories, a radiological equipment, an operation theatre and all the other requirements of a modern hospital.

In its work on behalf of epileptics, the Norwegian Red Cross is once again showing how effectively a voluntary institution such as the Red Cross can fill in the gaps in the activities of the State and local authorities. On the one hand, there is the Norwegian Government, which has recognised the value of the Red Cross by promising it a free site for the contemplated building. On the other hand, there is the initiative, the careful planning, and the organised appeal to the public which has already contributed more than 50,000 kroner to the Norwegian Red Cross for this specific purpose.

(Communicated by the Secretariat of the League of Red Cross Societies.)

THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOCIETY.

REFUGEES OF THE SPANISH WAR.

Major-General Sir John Kennedy, in his report (dated February 27th last) for the British Red Cross Society on the situation of the Spanish refugees in France, pays tribute to what the French Government, the French Army and the French Red Cross Society have done. The task before the French Red Cross Society, which is normally linked with the war machine, was made still more difficult by the political situation.

France expected 50,000 refugees. Already 300,000 have arrived and more are coming.

Sir John Kennedy visited a civil hospital and two improvised hospitals in Perpignan, a former war hospital in Toulouse and two ships transformed into hospitals in Port Vendres. These hospitals have to care for 11,000 wounded and many sick and more should be brought from the internment camps. Besides the wounded there is tuberculosis, typhoid, venereal and other disease. There is serious congestion. Doctors, surgeons and nurses are working under conditions of extreme difficulty. The control of M. Rucart, Minister of Health, is very capable. The French authorities need not criticism, but help with supplies of beds, blankets, linen and shirts as well as more accommodation especially for isolation cases and for convalescent patients. He is of opinion that the best immediate help would be the despatch of a fully equipped British hospital ship.

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