

The Renaissance of Voluntary Enterprise in Medicine

By Margaret Lowenfeld

The author of this article is chiefly known for her work as a psycho-therapist. At the Institute of Child Psychology, of which she is honorary director, and in private practice, she has exceptional opportunities for studying the child mind and of judging how each individual child should be trained. Very few schools in this country have been built for the individual training of the child during its most formative years. but it is to be hoped that in the near future schools will be established affording opportunities for meeting these individual needs.

In all organised society there must be the few who govern the solid background of ordinary citizens pursuing their daily lives.

Britain is particularly favoured in the wide variety of individual types of her people, and education has now accepted as a basic principle the wisdom of providing differing types of educational curriculum. The question of selection is a very serious one; children conform over-easily to a dominant, pattern, and if prestige is attached to it make the most earnest endeavour to succeed within that pattern—or else they rebel against it, and rejecting the whole emerge from school uninterested and culturally illiterate.

This is not essentially perhaps the fault of the school. The battle has already been lost by the time the child reaches eleven.

Small children show great variety of type and characteristics, and the day is long past when the child was looked upon as a tabula rasa upon which the adult wrote what he would. All modern work on children is agreed that it is in the years up to five that the foundations of future character are laid, a fact known to Roman Catholic educators from very early days. This is the time when, if circumstances are suitable, it is possible to discern differences of temperament and aptitude and when it is possible for a child to discover its own possibilities and lay the foundation for «future self-confidence and productivity.

The circumstances must however be such as make this possible. In the past nature took care of this, and contact with streams and flowers, animals and growing plants, gave the child that variety of experience upon which real contact with life is based. All this is denied to the greater majority of modern children. Whether they are rich or poor, water is a substance that comes from a tap, milk from a bottle, light and heat from something controlled by a switch in the wall. Music too comes now, not from a friendly grown-up at a piano, but from a switch. Nothing can be experimented with, all is fixed. mysterious, immutable. How in these circumstances can a child find itself?

But democracy is based upon people who have found themselves: who have their roots deep in nature and have made their terms with reality. The discipline

which works with children, or with adults for that matter, is the discipline of reality, the contact with the compelling forces of nature, not the often inconsequent commands of human beings. A child needs to try the stability of natural law and discover for himself the nature of the elements, as this child of four is doing in a modern playroom:-

Play with water.- Partly filled a jam-jar with water and fetched two celluloid fish to put in it. Filled up the jar with water and was interested to find that the fish floated and that they came up again if pushed down. Then filled the jar with sand until the fish were buried. Fetched a handful of coloured sticks to float in the world tray and pushed them about in the water. Fetched a tin lorry to float it in the water, but lost interest in it when it did not float. Filled up various containers with water. Found a fitment belonging to the tap and was interested and rather surprised that the water ran through instead of staying in it. Fetched a chair and splashed water over it.

To do this he needs the provision of suitable circumstances in which by himself he can experiment with them.

Children are very individual. Some like noise, some hate it, some like playing with their fellows, some working out their own problems on their own initiative. Some are keenly responsive to beauty, some indifferent to it ; some good with their hands, some clumsy and un- skilful,' some children like drawing and painting, others prefer to "mess" with sand and water; some are responsive to colour and some indifferent to it; most children are all these things at one time or another and rarely long at any of them. But for sound education provision should be made for all these things. The pathetic part of so much education is the lack of interest children show in school subjects, and the foundation for this is laid in the early years when school comes to mean carrying out activities prescribed by grown—ups, most of which come as an intrusion into the child's own world of interest and adventure.

On the other hand the teacher's point of View has also to be taken into account. Classes are already too large and work too heavy for any further burdens to be laid upon them. Work needs to be made easier, not heavier, and nursery-school buildings so designed that part of the work is accomplished by their construction. This is an easy goal which can be satisfactorily accomplished by sound planning.

Let us then consider what is necessary to achieve this end, taking each point in turn:-

1. Water—All those who work with children in natural surroundings know the fascination water has for children. This is sound and carries the seed of future interest in science and experimentation and should be given full scope. At the same time this must so be planned that it makes no further work for the adult staff.

This can easily be achieved by provision of taps at a convenient level in a separate part of the room over a floor which slopes slightly to an outside drain. A low barricade of cement or other material separates this and the children playing on it from the rest of the room. In the Institute of Child Psychology and the clinics designed by it. this type of arrangement has been found successful and greatly appreciated by children of all ages, and with the addition of very simple equipment of

jars and tins can provide children with the opportunities they need for experiment and joy in the amusing characteristics of water.

2. Mess—Digging in the garden is mess in the drawing-room—lack of opportunity to explore the smearing qualities of substances leads too often to dislike of kindred activities such, for instance, as cooking. Sand is clean dirt and if available in suitable trays within reach of water, gives children an essential foundation of tactile experience.

3. Variety—A group of 30-50 children can be induced to do the same thing at the same time but they rarely want to, or not for long. Nursery schoolrooms (and playgrounds) should be so constructed that instead of presenting to children and teacher a rectangular space they should, in their construction, suggest the breaking up into smaller groups doing different things.

Thus, in addition to the “water and mess” corner there should be possibilities for those periods of hammering and destructive noise needed by most children at some time in their week to be exercised without disturbance to the rest; and a quiet corner for the quiet child. This quiet corner can also be the place where “precious things” can be studied and admired.

Experiment is a necessary part of every child’s life and adventurous nursery-school head—teachers have already found that, if scope is allowed for it, children will combine together spontaneously and not by command of the teacher (and command however gently given is still command) in the design and carrying out of projects expressive of their own desires. These will be crude, doubtless, but if suitable long, low cupboards are available whose tops can form bases for “piers and walks” (if the goal be the construction of a “seaside with ships”) and sufficient crude material be available, scope for all kinds of activities is provided.

It seems unnecessary to say, rooms should be sunny except that sad experience shows that nursery schools are still built facing north and with uniform asphalt playgrounds. Buildings designed to cater for the needs of small children could so distribute their bulk that outdoor play-space is broken up into manageable units and the possibility created for the protection of the shy child, and the one liking small groups on the other hand, and equally give scope to the rowdy, boisterous different type of child.

The Renaissance of Voluntary Enterprise in Medicine (Cont.)

by Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld

In every age the struggle for progress towards a sound society crystallises around a different issue: for example, the struggle for religious freedom, or for the right of all citizens to take part in the government of their country. In our time and in our profession the struggle lies between the power of the bureaucrat as the exponent of the tremendous forces of regulation and standardisation, and that of the human spirit as reflected in free initiative and individual human relationships which will permit and encourage flexibility and spontaneity in the organisation of the medical services to the community.

The position held by the is that the maintenance of health and the treatment of disease are complex phenomena in which human relationships play an essential part, relationships that is between individual human beings and not between an individual and a system. For such relationships to be effective and acceptable the power must exist on both sides, that of the patient and that of the physician, to create spontaneous modifications of the established system where this becomes oppressive or unsuitable. In any sound social system such power is an essential expression of life against the deadening force of mechanical organisation, just as sound organisation is essential as a check to erratic and irresponsible individual behaviour.

In the years before the war and in the movement which gave rise to the concept of a National Health Service, a broad basis of national organisation was lacking in these essentials. In 1955 what we have to fight for is the maintenance of human relationships, of flexibility of organisation, and of the right of the patient to play a decisive part in the conditions of his own treatment. There are encouraging indications of vigour in all respects.

The Institute of Child Psychology

Founded in 1928, this Institute was a pioneer in the provision for children of outpatient treatment in which a number of aspects of the patient are dealt with simultaneously. At its peak point in 1931 (before the world financial depression reduced it, with so many others, once more to its original limitations) the Institute provided treatment for children suffering from disturbances of their emotional life, chronic psychological disorders, and those unable to adjust themselves socially at home or at school or who had educational difficulties. This treatment combined paediatrics, educational and clinical psychology, and psychotherapy, a specially designed form of physical activity, and furthermore added to the work of the social worker a psychiatrist with experience in the treatment of adults and a gynaecologist interested in the minor gynaecological ailments of married women which form the background to so much family strain.

Presented in 1937 with freehold quarters in 6 Pembridge Villas, the Institute was faced in 1948 with the situation that, if it were taken over by the N.H.S., it could obtain no guarantee for continuance of its work nor for freedom of administration. It, therefore, decided to remain a 'non-included body.' Its courage has been justified. The Institute receives for study and treatment children suffering from disturbances of physical, emotional, educational and social health, maintains a close relationship with general practitioners, and carries on active research into methods of investigation and treatment. Private patients can also be seen by members of the clinical staff at the Institute. The old hospital tradition of voluntary service is maintained by its medical staff but a financial arrangement made with the NW. Met. R.H.B. covers certain medical and clerical expenses. After a long uphill struggle from 1946, when the premises requisitioned for six years during the war were given back again, the I.C.P. is now re-established, and has the happiness of seeing the point of view for which it has stood for so many years, the interaction of emotional and

physical factors in childhood and the need for a combined medical and psycho-therapeutic service, becoming slowly recognised.

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme

In the sphere of hospital treatment very stimulating progress is being made. The British United Provident Association reports a subscription income of £935,000 for 1954, with an increase in 1955 estimated to be well into the second million, representing the demand of an increasing section of the public to have private treatment when ill and to maintain their personal relations with their medical advisers. Other Associations with similar aims show corresponding progress.

Encouraging as these signs are something more is needed to establish such enterprise, not only in the metropolis but all over the country, and further steps towards accomplishment of this aim are being taken to assist in the provision of adequate hospital and nursing home services of a good standard for paying patients throughout the United Kingdom. The increase throughout the country in membership of Associations such as the B.U.P.A. shows that the numbers desiring private treatment are considerable.

The report of the Governors of the Kingston and Maiden Medical Foundation shows a similar determination on the part- of the public to have their own hospital. £5,200 is coming in yearly, nearly £15,000 gross has been accumulated. an excellent house in a convenient position bought, and the Foundation expects to have completed alterations and equipment and to open with a minimum of 10 beds in 1956.

The progress of these voluntary enterprises, covering the wide ground they do, offers most encouraging evidence of the growth of a sound public demand to secure freedom and elasticity in some of the most important aspects of medicine.