

The Children's Clinic

What it is, what it does, and what it needs

The Object of the Clinic

The object of the clinic is most easily and quickly grasped by reading a brief summary of the histories of some of the children who have benefited; is for example:

JANE

A graceful, attractive child of nine began quite suddenly, one Christmas, to pilfer from school, and rapidly went from bad to worse. Pilfering was followed by truancy, lying and all kinds of untruthfulness, until her mother, in despair, brought her to the clinic.

The child came from a very respectable and satisfactory home. There was only one other child, her little sister aged two. Jane's father had died when she was three, and a stepfather appeared two years later. One of Jane's cousins also had a stepfather, but this one brought his step-children pennies, little toys and apples, even including Jane in his affection. Jane's step-father did none of these things, he was devoted to Mary, Jane's little half-sister, and seemed to forget that Jane existed at times. Added to this, they had just moved. Next door to the house where they used to live was Jane's little friend Lucy, and torn away from her, Jane felt that the world held nothing more that was worthwhile.

All these miseries come out during the play at the clinic, and were explained one by one to Jane's mother, who was quite unaware of any of them. Jane's conduct steadily improved, and by July (four months after admission), she had won a prize in her school, and marked for good conduct. She has ceased to steal, and has become entirely reliable and trustworthy.

TONY

A boy of eleven was brought to the clinic by the physician from a children's hospital suffering from fever. He is an extremely nice-looking child with exceptionally good manners. An only child, his father, an artist at work on a contract abroad, his mother, a careful very tried parent with a high standard for herself and for the child. The fits had begun three months ago and had been very severe; causing Tony in one instance to fall down a flight of stone stairs. His temperament was explosive and resistant to all forms of discipline. It had been impossible to find a school at which he

could attend successfully. His character was a mixture of irresponsibility and contempt for women caught from his father, together with all the characteristics of an Army sergeant. Bullying in particular with anyone he could control. After three weeks at the clinic the intervals between the fits began to lengthen and after one fit, one month after admission, disappeared altogether. The boy learned to understand his own character and to bring the different sides of himself into harmony with each other. He is now doing well at his old school where the headmaster reported him "happy and doing well."

George and Ethel

One day there came to the clinic two children, George and Ethel, both six years old. George was the only son of a nervous and devoted mother. He had been to school and had wept nearly all the time. Nothing would comfort him and his mother, was distraught. He was nervous and shy, crying at night and miserable by day, could not be separated from his mother and wept at the sight of strangers.

Ethel was the elder of two girls – a young and hearty mother and a kind affectionate father. She, like George, wept nearly every day, started when spoken to and was terrified of the dark. Her face was pale, her body thin, and there were hack rings under her eyes. Said a visitor looking at both children, "That one (pointing at George) must be a truly psychologically able, and this (touching Ethel) poor girl, looks so startled at us and is frightened already.

But under Clinic work, the reverse conditions appeared, George was found to be suffering from a digestive failure that caused a perpetual irritation of his nerves. An alteration of diet: the regulation of his life and the addition to it of the factors he was lacking turned him from a whining and miserable child into a laughing, truculent and striking boy. Sugar and alkali had worked the miracle for him.

Ethel, on the other hand, as her stay at the clinic lengthened, showed up layer after layer of fear and struggle, the thinness and pallor of her body being the result of the torment of her mind. Her bluff and hearty mother, having no outlet for her practical emotions, had found it impossible to allow Ethel to grow out of her babyhood in which everything had to be done for her by her mother, and the violent revolt of the child's nature lay at the root of her fears.

When she first came to the clinic, she sat listlessly and was unable to carry out any task calling for concentration. On her discharge, she produced pictures, put together from paper, definitely above the standard for a child of her age.

Now for examples of what might have become of these children had they remained untreated,

The following are genuine cases:

(1) Dealt with under Probation Act when a child of 12, when nearly 19 dealt with under Probation Act for theft, three months later 3 consecutive sentences of 2 months imprisonment for a number of thefts; three months after release 2 months imprisonment for theft.

Then aged 13, twice bound over and once fined for stealing coal, when aged 15 fined for football in streets when aged 17 bound over for sleeping-out, and four months later 6 months imprisonment for stealing a bicycle. When aged 19, three months imprisonment for stealing coal, and immediately after release 6 months imprisonment for stealing wine, cigarettes etc.

(2) At the age of 10, four strokes of the birch for theft; at the age of 14 bound over for theft, aged 16 fined for stealing a bicycle etc., immediately after release bound over for breaking into a counting house, at age of 20, two months' imprisonment for theft and one month for assault two months after release another month's imprisonment for assaulting police; also five other convictions for gaming, no lights on bicycles, committing nuisance etc.

(3) Aged 16, bound over for stealing, three days later put on probation for larceny from the person; a month later fined for stealing purse and money, a week later fined for football in the streets two months later three months imprisonment for stealing a purse and money; four months later - when he was still under 17, another three months' imprisonment for stealing handbag and money.

Numbers Requiring Treating

It is estimated among the Care Committees of London that about ten per cent of the children attending school are in need of assistance of the kind provided by the Children's Clinic, the Child Guidance Council etc.

On a conservative estimate, this means a total of some 77,000 child are attending elementary schools in the London area, who would benefit by advice and help along these lines. The same is true of all other cities of large size.

Boys and girls numbering 2,368, from 16 - 21 years were, in 1927, committed to prison for various offences. The cost of maintenance of these youngsters for one year is 2,300,000. Of there, 1,897 were sentences of one month or less, 1,283 had previous convictions.

History of the Clinic

The Children's Clinic was opened in October, 1928, at 12 Telford Road 9.11. under the name of the clinic for Nervous and Difficult Children.

The work was carried on in two small rooms, with an outhouse an annexe adapted as a laboratory and a large cupboard store-room for toys. The staff consisted of two physicians and a lay helper trained in general science.

By March 1929 the work had grown beyond the capacity of these quarters, and bigger accommodation was found at the "Quest", 85, Clarendon Road, W11 to which the Clinic moved, and began work on March 20th., under the name of the Children's Clinic for the Observation and Treatment of Nervous and Delicate Children.

Since the opening of the Winter Session 1929, the quarter at 85 Clarendon Road have proved themselves gradually to be wholly inadequate. These rooms are only rented in a building designed for the accommodation of children's clubs; therefore, all trace of the work of the Clinic has to be removed from the rooms at the end of each afternoon session. This involves the creation anew of the necessary atmosphere for the work at the beginning of each session, which throws a very severe burden on the lay staff.

The number of applications has already grown far beyond the scope of the present quarters, and it has been necessary to institute a waiting list.

How the work is done

Children's Room The centre of the work of the clinic is the children's room. The Clinic is open for two afternoons a week. All the children under treatment attend for the whole of these two periods, and work together in the children's room. In this room, under the supervision of psychologically trained doctors and lay-workers, play materials are used, which are specially chosen to bring to light the children's difficulties, Mothers' Room. There is no waiting room at the clinic.

Each child on arrival goes straight into the children's room and each parent into the Mothers' Room, where they form an informal club and discuss questions such as : "Should children go to the pictures?" "What time should children go to bed?" etc. **Medical Examination.** A very careful physical examination is made of every child on his admission to the Clinic, and all necessary treatments are either carried out by physicians at the clinic or children are referred to suitable hospitals or practitioners. Diet and hygiene are taken into careful consideration, and every endeavour to assist mothers until rectification is made.

Posture & Nervousness

It has long been accepted for adults that the posture and habitual physical actions - can be correlated with temperament and mental outlook. The same to a lesser degree is true of childhood. Rhythm and movement are powerful factors in the re-orientation of the child.' Full use is made at the clinic of these, and every child during his attendance at the Clinic takes part in rhythmic exercises and free movement.

Biochemical Department. One of the bases of the work of the Clinic is the belief that physical and mental conditions are invariably associated. The Biochemical Department, under the general direction of Dr. Edgar Obermer, exists to study correlations between biochemical findings and the nervous conditions of childhood.

Parents' Department. In many instances the nervous sufferings of the parents themselves is the source from which the difficulties of the child arises. In this case, little can be done for the situation, unless psychological help can be given to the parents, but in many cases, it has been found possible to do this.

In every case, the family situation and home surroundings are carefully reviewed by the senior physician and social workers. Close co-operation is maintained with other bodies working for the welfare of children.

As the work in the children's room develops and difficulties - art brought to light, interview with the parent and child, and where possible, with the schoolteacher, enable these difficulties to be dealt with one by one.

Results

The proportion of children who are discharged cured is most encouraging. Indeed, the Clinic has clearly shown that by combining an attack on the situation from the medical, social, and psychological angles, a solution is reached in a large proportion of cases, and for no case can nothing be done.

Ultimate Objective

The aim of the Clinic is to be:

- A curative centre where large numbers of children can be taken and helped.
- A demonstration centre of the principles of the work.
- A training centre for the students and lay helpers for this type of work. A practice and learning ground for doctors to train for this type of work.
- A centre for record and research where all results gained can be conserved and built up : into a firm foundation for future work.

- A teaching centre for social workers, teachers. etc. who need to understand neurosis in children. A library and literary centre for suitable work on the subject.
- Already all but the last of these objectives are in the act of being reached, although admittedly, the safe on which they have been attained falls far short of that which it is ultimately hoped to achieve.

Funds

There lies the barrier in the way of progress, the fence which limits the scope of work. The rooms at present in occupation will barely accommodate the children now under treatment, together with the students and workers, The waiting list of children badly needing treatment grows daily. Several other towns all over the British Isles have asked for similar clinics to be started in their midst; but in all for our actions to advance, there is a limitation of a lack of funds.

Many hours of voluntary work has been spent on the clinic by a small band of helpers, but this will not pay rent for larger quarters, or buy the urgently needed materials for the children's room, and for keeping records.

A few hundred pounds used to extend this Clinic, not only adds to the number of children who can be rescued from terrors, fits, delinquencies, any of the like; but at the same time establishes the certainty of being able to open similar Clinics in the near future.

A little money spent in this way will save much more which otherwise has to be taken to maintain prisons and corrective institutions.

Clinic for Nervous and Difficult Children
12 Telford Road, Ladbroke Grove, W.10

All children are difficult sometimes, but some children are difficult all the time. Some children seem always to be catching something and never to be quite well. Some children are nervous and find life and school too difficult for them. Some children have distressing habits.

This Clinic, which is in charge of a Physician, exists to help mothers in these kinds of trouble with their children, and also to help the children themselves.

TUESDAYS 10 a.m.
THURSDAYS 2 p.m.

The sum of 42,000 is needed to meet the work in equate surroundings, and ensure its future progress and future.

