

The "Difficult" Child

MORE ABOUT MENTAL HYGIENE

(From Public Health Department).

In our previous article on this subject, from the Health Department, a leading Psychiatrist pointed out that mental abnormalities and illnesses—like sicknesses—are treated most successfully in their early stages.

This is a foundation truth which cannot be emphasised too strongly. Much of the mental instability and lack of balance in later life is due to faulty training and irregular or unwise habit formation in early childhood.

Thus the "difficult" child more often than not is the product of his parents' un wisdom or neglect. The result may not be definite insanity, but lack of wise training in childhood may be (and often is) the cause of mental and emotional instability throughout life.

In the solution of these problems of childhood, the Psychiatrist, the Psychologist and the Social Worker, can all play a part, for the treatment of the child must have regard to his physical and mental state, his mental and educational abilities and his environment.

Nearly twenty-five years ago an organisation was founded in the United States whose objects were to improve the care and treatment of patients in mental hospitals, to explore the possibilities of preventing mental illness, and to form a meeting ground for all—both inside and outside the medical profession—who had to deal with mental sickness, with the object of following combined lines of research, and of providing expert opinion and information.

The general objects of the Mental Hygiene Movement have been very well summarised by Professor Ernest Barker, a former President of the American National Council, when he described it as "an effort to conserve and improve the minds of the people, to secure brains so naturally endowed and so nurtured, that people will feel

and so nurtured, that people will feel better, think better, and act better than they do now."

Since the establishment of the first Council for Mental Hygiene in the United States, similar bodies have been instituted in all leading countries. The Victorian Council for Mental Hygiene was established in 1930, and has already a creditable record of achievement. A Council has recently been established in New South Wales, the objects of which are similar to those which have been undertaken in other Councils. Particulars and forms of application may be obtained from the Honorary Secretary, Dr. W. S. Dawson, 143 Macquarie Street, Sydney.