

CLINICAL PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE

by Kay McDougall

THE nineteenth child guidance inter-clinic conference, organised by the N.A.M.H. was held at the London School of Economics on April 5th and 6th. It met to discuss clinical problems in children of primary school age. Earlier in the year there had been some concern that this would prove a less popular topic than the first five years of childhood or intriguing adolescence, but in the event the conference turned out to be one of the best child guidance inter-clinic conferences, with papers of high quality and sufficient time to discuss them.

Psychologists' conference

One result of the choice of topic, and doubtless of speakers too, was that there was a high attendance of psychologists. In fact this was very much a psychologists' conference, and in this it was just a little different from any of the previous inter-clinic conferences. It could also be, of course, that the psychologists are taking increasing responsibility in the child guidance services in any case, quite apart from the subject of this particular conference.

Friday evening opened with a paper from Dr. J. H. Kahn, Consultant in charge of the Mental Health Service, County Borough of West Ham and Medical Director of Crawley Child Guidance Clinic. He has written on different aspects of child guidance work, and particularly on School Refusal, and he spoke to the title: "A Wider Concept of Deprivation". Acknowledging the basic damage resulting from early maternal deprivation he pin-pointed other personal and social deprivation which the child meets as he grows and enters the school community. Dr. Kahn also illustrated the need to meet deprivation and come to terms with it.

The 400 members of the conference; psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, child therapists and other professional members of child guidance clinic staffs then broke up into small discussion groups, and although the time in this first session was mainly spent in testing-out and evolving some group feeling, deprivation made a good jumping-off ground, being a matter on which everyone has views. Friday evening finished with a buffet supper and social gathering in the Senior Common Room. This is always a session for meeting old colleagues, comparing notes on new and old jobs and generally bringing oneself up to date on births, deaths and marriages.

S.Q. and I.Q.

Saturday morning began with a paper from Dr. Kellmer Pringle, Senior Lecturer in Education and Deputy Head of the Department of Child Study, University of Birmingham (whom we have since heard has been appointed the first director of the new National Bureau for Co-operation in Child Care).

She has been concerned with research on junior schoolchildren and her paper was on "The Assessment of Social Competence—its Clinical Value". Dr. Kellmer Pringle described an investigation of 250 primary schoolchildren, using the Vineland Social Maturity Scale and discussed the significance to clinical diagnosis of discrepancy between Social Quotient and Intelligent Quotient in certain cases. The paper was illustrated by some vivid case histories.

No attempt has been made in this report to outline the contents of these papers. They were both worthy of further careful study and will be printed in full in the official conference report which will be published by the N.A.M.H. during the summer at 4s. per copy.

Group discussions until lunch followed the paper and during the lunch period there were film showings and an exhibition of toys.

Final session

At the afternoon session four speakers: Dr. Mildred Creak, Consultant Psychiatrist, Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond St., Mr. D. Evans, Senior Psychologist, West Sussex C.G. Service, Mrs. P. Nursten, Psychiatric Social Worker, Shipley and Harrogate Child Guidance Clinics, and Miss O. C. Sampson, Lecturer in Education (Child Guidance) at the University of Manchester, commented briefly on particular aspects of the two papers and Dr. Kahn and Dr. Pringle then elaborated on these points and also answered selected questions from members of the conference or from the groups. This form of final session seemed to be an improvement on previous years when reports back from the groups have been known to get repetitive. Proof of the interest and stimulation arising from the papers was shown by the considerable number of questions submitted in advance; many very technical and searching. It was only possible to pick out eight or ten representative questions but the replies to these made a most rewarding afternoon.

Less parochial

As there was no immediate report back from the groups everyone is dependent upon their own experience, and what they have picked up from others, for their impression. The group leaders will be reporting back on the discussions for the final conference report, but what did seem to be generally agreed was that the groups were able to get discussion focussed around the papers more successfully than has sometimes been the case before and that there was not so much of the rather parochial kind of discussion with anecdotal illustrations about the difficult psychiatrist or impossible head teacher in our town. The fact that the groups went well added to the general atmosphere of satisfaction on which the conference ended.

The next conference will probably be around the problems of adolescence, but suggestions about future conferences were invited by the Chairman and will be welcomed by the planning committee.

CHILDREN'S BILL

THIS Bill is unusual in having been presented first in the House of Lords. It reached its third reading in the Commons on 27th February. The debates have been characterised by the high level of discussion, the give and take between the government sponsors and those putting forward amendments, and its non-party character.

The principal point of difficulty is the question of raising the age of criminal responsibility. The Government wishes to raise this to 10 years old and not 12 as suggested in the amendment, because of the problems which arise in dealing with the offenders under the age of criminal responsibility. If they are brought before the court on a civil charge as in need of care, protection or control the child is deprived of the need for "proof beyond reasonable doubt" as in a criminal charge. The government spokes-

man suggested that at 10 years old the child who had committed an offence would be ready to face the full rules of evidence.

Local authority responsibility

One of the most important effects of the Bill will be to place on local authorities responsibility for carrying out preventive work and for making advice available to families. They are enabled to do this through voluntary bodies if they wish to do so. The schedule of the Act puts the responsibility on the Children's Department and the question arises whether this is desirable or whether it would not be better to leave the position more flexible. If the responsibility were placed on the local authority as a whole it could decide which department could best carry it out.