

1919

**RECONSTRUCTION**  
*and* **THE CANADIAN**  
**NATIONAL COMMITTEE**  
**FOR MENTAL HYGIENE**

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**and THE CANADIAN**  
**NATIONAL COMMITTEE**  
**FOR MENTAL HYGIENE**

# The Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene

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## INTRODUCTORY

**W**ITH the great war at an end Canada finds herself faced by problems of reconstruction that require the same kind of skill in their solution as did those which confronted her in August, 1914. It is true that in the early days of the world-conflict our Dominion was called upon, without warning, to meet unprecedented demands. It was no small matter for a peaceful nation such as ours to undertake suddenly the responsibility of raising and equipping a large army, and of making industrial and economic adjustments to meet the needs of the case. What Canada has accomplished during the four years of war is now familiar to the world, and we have the satisfaction of knowing that our work was well done, and that Canada had the glory of contributing in an eminent degree to the success of the Allies. While we may be, and are, justly proud of our achievements in the war, we must not forget that the difficulties we have yet to meet and overcome are in many ways as great as those which confronted us at the beginning.

A casual survey of our present situation reveals intricate problems on every hand. In the realm of industry, for instance, munition plants and manufacturing concerns engaged in the production of war equipment must now produce articles needed by a nation at peace. If proper and adequate readjustment is not made, unemployment on a large scale confronts us, and the problem will be made more intensive by the return of our soldiers from overseas. Closely related to the industrial problem is that of finance. During the war we were able to borrow large sums from our own Canadian people, from England, and from the United States. We must now begin to pay back our debts, and this obligation, together with needed expenditures for

the development of manufacture and agriculture, creates a situation that will absorb the attention of our shrewdest financiers.

Extremely important as are the problems of industry and finance, those connected with the health of the nation are equally so. It is a well-known fact that we as a people have been somewhat negligent concerning matters pertaining to the physical and mental welfare of our citizens. In the days of prosperity it was deplorable enough to have a high infant mortality, to have the cancer of venereal disease, and to suffer from the presence of encroaching mental disease and mental defect. In these days of reconstruction, however, health must be put at a premium because without it we will be quite unable to carry the tremendous load that has been placed upon our shoulders. Thus it becomes evident that our policy of reconstruction will be entirely inadequate unless it embraces a broad health programme.

To meet the demands of the situation, matters pertaining to public health must receive the thoughtful consideration, not only of specialists, but of the public at large. We must be conversant with the fundamental facts relating to the prevention of disease, and we must do our share in promoting all agencies and movements which have as their object the conservation of health.

One of the most important aspects of the public health problem has been designated Mental Hygiene. Up to the present this particular field has had few workers in Canada and has not touched the imagination of our people with its significance. **In the following pages there is given a short account of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene and the part it is endeavoring to play in reconstruction.**

## THE COMMITTEE'S WORK FOR RETURNED SOLDIERS

**A**MONG the soldiers returned to Canada from overseas, more than five thousand suffered from mental and nervous disorders. The Canadian Army Medical Corps, in co-operation with the Invalided Soldiers' Commission, has endeavored in every possible way to furnish adequate treatment for these cases. Many difficulties have arisen in connection with this work, and the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene, since its organization in April, 1918, has been doing what it could to assist in the solution of the problems presented.

After a study of the situation, it was realized that it was necessary, in the first place, to secure efficient treatment in suitable hospitals, and, secondly, to institute a follow-up system after patients had been discharged from hospitals or Militia, as improved or cured. Because of the large number of military cases requiring treatment, it has been found necessary to utilize civilian hospitals for the insane. If the latter organizations had been well equipped and adequately staffed, serious problems in connection with treatment would not have arisen. From present information, however, it is evident that some of these institutions were not up-to-date, were under-staffed, and unprepared to afford much more than custodial care. In view of this situation, the Committee deemed it advisable to urge that all hospitals caring for military cases be inspected by a competent psychiatrist familiar with the modern, scientific treatment of the insane. Such an inspection would bring to light the present status of hospital

care, and recommendations could be made for needed reforms.

The Committee waited on the Invalided Soldiers' Commission, and were successful in securing the consent of the latter body to appoint an inspecting psychiatrist. The Invalided Soldiers' Commission further invited the Medical Director of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene to accompany their official on his first tour of inspection, and to collaborate with him in compiling a report on hospital conditions throughout the country. It is believed that there will follow improved conditions for the treatment and care not only of military cases, but also for civilians.

For the supervision of discharged cases, the Committee suggested to the Invalided Soldiers' Commission that trained social workers be employed in various parts of Canada. This recommendation has been adopted by the Commission, and in the future, trained social workers will visit discharged men, and help by offering advice concerning occupation and personal hygiene. With such a system in operation, it can confidently be expected that relapses will become less frequent, and soldiers previously disabled by mental disorders will be materially helped in re-adjusting themselves to civilian life.

The Invalided Soldiers' Commission is looking to the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene to provide training for the social workers employed. To meet this need, the Committee is arranging a course of supervised field work and instruction in co-operation with special departments in Canadian universities.

The Canadian Army Medical Corps, on the recommendation of the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene, has decided to employ a social worker in Montreal and one in Toronto. This was done as one result of a practical demonstration made by the Committee. One of the Committee's workers was attached for two months to the College St. Military Convalescent Hospital, Toronto. She proved invaluable to the Medical Staff by securing personal and family histories of cases under hospital care.

In addition to the activities outlined above, a careful study has been made by the committee of over two hundred cases of so-called "shell shock." This was done because of our ignorance concerning certain aspects of that condition. In other words, the Committee felt obliged to contribute what it could to the general knowledge already obtained in this field. The observations and conclusions arrived at will be made the subject of a pamphlet, and should prove helpful to those engaged in the medical and social treatment of military patients.

## THE COMMITTEE AND IMMIGRATION

Probably no single question in connection with reconstruction is of more importance than that of our post-war policy of immigration. Prior to the war, Canada received annually a large influx of peoples from other countries, and this has proved both good and bad for the Dominion. In order that we might successfully develop agriculture and industry, it was necessary to invite immigration on a large scale, and the splendid progress of Canada has been due in no small measure to the adoption of such a policy. Unfortunately, however, thorough-going discrimination



was not used in the selection of our immigrants, and so it happened that many who were physically or mentally unfit were admitted to this country. As far as mental cases from such sources are concerned, the Committee for Mental Hygiene has discovered that, in some of the provinces, at least 50% of the feeble-minded and the insane of our asylums, have come to us from countries outside of Canada.

Such a condition of affairs as outlined above must be rectified at once. Canada must not be burdened, as in the past, with newcomers of defective physical and mental make-up, and the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene is giving the subject of immigration thoughtful consideration.

Since June last, one of the members of the Committee has reviewed the literature pertaining to the subject, and is now compiling a report that should be of great value to the Federal Government in shaping a sound policy for post-war immigration. In connection with the presentation of recommendations concerning the best method of making mental examinations of newcomers to the Dominion, it is probable that the Executive Officers of the Committee will carry out actual experiments under Governmental sanction. It may be necessary to visit some parts of Europe, with the hope of evolving a practicable plan of inspecting prospective immigrants and their families. In addition, immigrants will be given a mental and physical examination during their journey across the Atlantic, and a study will be conducted to discover a suitable method of inspection at our Canadian ports of entry. It goes without

saying that these proposed investigations will prove of inestimable value. In the past, our immigration laws have been more or less comprehensive, but difficulties have arisen in carrying our statutes into effect. The Committee will, therefore, devote its attention to the question of an efficient method of rejecting from this country mental and nervous undesirables. This can best be done by making a study at first hand, basing the recommendations on actual experiences.

## PROVINCIAL SURVEYS OF THE COMMITTEE

One of the most useful functions of the Committee in connection with reconstruction consists in making Provincial surveys of the feeble-minded and insane. One such investigation has been conducted in Manitoba. The Public Welfare Commission of the Manitoba Government invited the Committee to make a detailed study of all Governmental, educational, and charitable institutions dealing with mental abnormals, and requested, in addition, recommendations concerning an adequate method of dealing with the problems investigated.

In the near future, a full report of the Manitoba situation, embodying numerous recommendations, will be available for the Public Welfare Commission. When the Legislature meets in February, 1919, the Commission will take in hand the presentation of this report, and it can be confidently predicted that many reforms will be instituted. Indeed, after a conference with Parliamentary leaders and *men of affairs in Manitoba, it seems probable that this western province will institute a more progressive and*

enlightened policy concerning the treatment and care of mental abnormals than any other province in the Dominion.

While Manitoba will naturally profit most by this report, there is little doubt that certain sections will be of great value to all Canadians interested in social betterment. Chapters dealing with adult crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, illegitimacy, pauperism, public schools, social service, mental clinics and immigration will be of general interest. The Committee will utilize such chapters in connection with their publicity and educational campaign.

The work in Manitoba has proved of such value that it is probable that surveys will soon be instituted by the Committee in other provinces. In the past, there has been no organization in Canada to undertake the collection of facts and the presentation of recommendations to Provincial Governments concerning an adequate policy of treating and caring for mental abnormals. No doubt, our failure to keep abreast of the times in dealing with the problems connected with mental abnormality was due in some measure to the fact that Provincial Legislatures were not conversant with their local situation.

## MUNICIPAL SURVEYS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee is preparing to conduct studies of mental abnormality in centres of population and rural communities throughout Canada. These investigations will prove helpful in solving such problems relative to

reconstruction as those enumerated in connection with Provincial surveys, viz., crime, juvenile delinquency, prostitution, the spread of venereal disease, illegitimacy, unemployment, pauperism, alcoholism, and public school administration. Up to the present, a valuable body of facts has been collected in one city, where members of the Committee studied 4,347 cases of suspected mental disturbance.

### COMMITTEE SUPPORTED BY VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene is supported by voluntary contributions, and up to December, 1918, public-spirited Canadians have contributed \$50,000.00 for the work. The donations consist of pledges spread over a period of three years, and thus make possible an annual budget of approximately \$16,000.00. There is urgent need, however, for the employment of more workers, and to cover the necessary expenditures, a budget of \$30,000.00 is required. Doubtless, when the activities of the Committee become generally known, their value will be so appreciated that financial assistance will be given by an ever-increasing number of generous citizens.

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