

## PSYCHOLOGY

## Small Children Setting Fires Follow Biblical Reasoning

**D**ESIRE for excitement may lead 13- or 14-year-old adolescents into fire-setting, but when small children turn to firesetting, they are expressing their aggression toward a hostile world and their reasoning is "startlingly like Biblical teachings."

Firesetting is much more common among boys than girls.

These are among the findings of a study reported by Dr. Helen Yarnell, of Bellevue Hospital and New York University Medical School, to the American Orthopsychiatric Association meeting.

The study was made on 60 children seen chiefly during 1937-1938 who had a history of firesetting. This seems like a small number compared to the number of children under 16 years admitted each year to the psychiatric division of Bellevue Hospital—1,755 in 1937 alone—but Dr. Yarnell explained that no effort was made to include every possible case.

Younger children are rarely brought to the hospital just because of their firesetting activities and these are usually discovered only incidentally, so there may be many more such cases. Pyromania is not considered a serious problem with any of the children's courts and the New York Fire Department records for the six-year period 1933-1938 showed only 72

formal charges of incendiarism preferred against children under 16 years.

There seem to be two ages for firesetting: one at about six to eight years and another at 13 or 14 years, Dr. Yarnell found. There were only two girls among the 60 children she studied.

The six- to eight-year-olds generally had an unhappy life, deprived of the love and care of parents or other guardians, often shifted from one foster home to another, and showed other forms of anti-social behavior like running away, truancy and stealing. The fires they set were made in or around their own homes, caused little damage and were usually put out by the child himself.

"Children who set fires have suffered even more severely than the average neurotic child," Dr. Yarnell said, "and are those who find it necessary to use the magic power of fire to assist themselves."

"Though few of these children have had much religious training and cannot tell a single story from the Bible, they show a reasoning which is startlingly like Biblical teachings," Dr. Yarnell continued. "Anyone who is bad is doomed to destruction by fire which purifies them, and in the end everything is made over new and perfect."

*Science News Letter, March 11, 1939*

*Medical Association* in commenting on the subject in its current issue:

"If any of the committees can undertake to make a survey to locate such openings, a certain number of refugees can be absorbed with a minimum amount of disturbance to the rights of American physicians."

"The chief difficulties that have arisen in this situation come from the fact that some of the refugees are poorly trained or of low ethical standing, that some find it difficult to adapt themselves to American ways in the practice of medicine, and that many tend to settle in large cities already overcrowded with physicians."

"Perhaps the difficulties of adaptation can be overcome by well planned instruction. Only the coordinating committees already mentioned or groups of a similar character can aid in solving properly the problem of suitable distribution of refugees to places where they may be useful rather than a foreign body setting up irritation and forcing extrusion."

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## ZOOLOGY—ETHNOLOGY

## Tax Records and Payrolls Studied by Zoologists

**I**F YOU grumble, while you pore over your income tax return, that "they're taxing the skin off you," that will be only an echo of a possible taxpayer's plaint of 150 years ago, back in the State of Franklin, established shortly after the Revolutionary War in what is now eastern Tennessee.

Only the Franklinian citizen would have grumbled in the plural: he paid his taxes in skins. And if he added that the Governor and other state officials "had it pretty soft" he would have been literally right again. For they were paid not in pelf but in pelts—usually the beautiful soft skins of beaver.

## MEDICINE

## A.M.A. Asked to Establish Committee to Aid Refugees

**T**HE American Medical Association has been asked to establish a special committee to aid the refugee physicians. The request has come from six distinguished leaders of American medicine: Drs. David L. Edsall and George R. Minot of Boston, John A. Hartwell of New York, Warfield T. Longcope of Baltimore, Howard C. Naffziger of San Francisco, and Dallas B. Phemister of Chicago.

Thus far the only action taken by the A.M.A. House of Delegates has been a recommendation to the state boards of medical registration that citizenship be the requirement for license to practice. The right to regulate the practice of

medicine rests with individual states.

Requesting A.M.A. cooperation with the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Physicians, the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming From Germany and the Boston Committee on Medical Emigres, the six physicians point out that "in the field of general practice and in the specialties also numerous openings exist for which it is difficult to find qualified American physicians; for example, poorly paid full-time physicians and practices in rural communities."

Says the *Journal of the American*

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