The Asylum World.

"DURING HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE."

By L. S.

There are, perhaps, few subjects more fascinating to those who study mental diseases, their causes and effects, than an enquiry into the conditions of mind which have contributed to the filling of Her Majesty's House of Detention at Broadmoor with a large number of individuals who, though classified as criminals, are so only to an irresponsible degree. To the ordinary mind a mere judicial order directing that a person shall be detained "During Her Majesty's Pleasure," conveys little; it is only by visiting the home of those so incarcerated and examining the conditions of their life and surroundings that an idea can be formed of how such a sentence is given practical effect.

That Broadmoor is an asylum in the strict sense of the word cannot be denied, but it is necessarily far removed from the conditions of life of a Penitentiary, and nowhere is more thoughtful consideration bestowed upon the intellectual and physical capacity of the patients. Indeed, one cannot but be struck by the cheerful aspect of the place and the absence of anything approaching the prison element. Built upon the slope of a Berkshire hill, amid pine woods and leafy lanes, it commands a magnificent view far across the hills to Hindhead. From the windows it is difficult to see the walls which surround it, and, consequently, the inmates are not constantly reminded of the fate that has overtaken them, save by the heavy bars to the casements.

Broadmoor was not built until 1863, and before that date there was no special accommodation for criminal lunatics, who were kept in the usual gaols. Such old-fashioned treatment was wholly erroneous, and is now superseded by a humane and sympathetic realization of the actual mental condition of the delinquent and, beyond the necessary provisions for restraint within certain circumscribed limits, every facility for exercise and recreation is allowed and no possible means of improving the condition of both mind and body is neglected.

It need scarcely be said that under these circumstances, a visit to Broadmoor is unattended with other than pleasant experiences, for not only does it remove any preconceived ideas of harshness or severity of treatment of those for whom one cannot but feel deeply, but it is also most instructive as demonstrating what can be done with those so situated to ameliorate their condition and to soften and mitigate the consequences of a crime for which the judicial verdict has been that it was not possible to hold them responsible.

At Broadmoor are accommodated some six hundred and odd patients, both male and female. The asylum consists of two huge blocks of a cheerful red-brick; they are quite separate, and lodge the respective sexes, there being no communication between the two. The number of persons under detention is steadily increasing, and although provision already exists for over four hundred men and one hundred and fifty women, this accommodation no longer suffices, and measures are being taken to provide for some eighty more.

Broadmoor stands in some forty acres of ground and possesses certain features of its own which are not to be found in any other asylums. Entering the main male block, one finds long corridors, from which open day-rooms and little sleeping apartments. The former are bright and cheerful, looking out on to the wide expanse of garden and across over Aldershot and the Surrey hills. Here are billiard tables, rooms where the men can smoke and play a quiet game of cards, or books for those who care to read. The daily papers are supplied and are much appreciated by the inmates, many of whom take a keen interest in the current events of the outside world.

It must not be imagined that all the inmates of Broadmoor are what people call hopelessly insane. The wider one's experience of life, the more comprehensive does one find the innumerable factors which may operate to upset the balance of a brain, hitherto healthy, which, whether from heredity, disease, or exceptional over-excitement, is worked into a condition which may lead to the commital of a crime of which the individual would be otherwise incapable. There are in Broadmoor persons who are, to all intents and purposes, as sane as most of us,—for just as long as they are in the asylum—but turn them out into the world and throw the responsibility of ordinary life upon them, and they, sooner or later, become mentally bankrupt and helpless or dangerous. Take an instance, a woman, the wife of a labouring man, was, after a fairly long sojourn in the institution, released. Whilst at Broadmoor she naturally had everything provided for her, and had no responsibility whatever. The result was practically perfect sanity during her detention. Released to her husband's care, however, and the mere fact of having to provide his dinner every day, proved too great a strain upon her mental capital, and she had to return to what is, for her, a haven of rest.

Of course, all the inmates are not in the condition just described—a good number belong to the dangerous class, and require careful watching. The cases which come to the institution are not

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