

**Medical Matters.**

**THE NEW ASYLUMS.**



DR. R. H. STEEN, Assistant Medical Officer to the New County Asylum at Chichester, gives some interesting notes on modern asylum construction in a paper published in the last number of the *Journal of Mental Science*.

The demand for asylum accommodation has become so great, that, "within the last five years, six new asylums have been completed and opened; seven existing institutions have been recently completed and eight others are at present making extensive additions; seven new asylums are in process of construction, some of these being nearly finished, others partially opened; and preparations are being made for the construction of ten new asylums."

The paper then deals with the methods adopted by authorities when they wish to build an asylum, and rightly deprecates all methods in which no expert advice is taken. The Medical Superintendent should be appointed before the Asylum is built; this mode of procedure would save the authorities much expense in the matter of subsequent alterations and other details.

The requirements of an asylum are tabulated so well that we reproduce them here verbatim:—

(1) The main features of the building must be a combination of a Home and a Hospital. Neither of these two factors should predominate in excess to the detriment of the other.

(2) Compactness is essential. This heading is subdivided as follows:—

- (a) Compactness for administration.
- (b) For distribution of supplies.
- (c) For supervision by superior officers.
- (d) For mobilisation of patients; for example, for religious services, entertainments and working parties.

(3) Provision should be made for efficient separation of the sexes.

(4) Special designs are required for special varieties of patients; for example, for the sick, the aged, and those requiring special observation.

(6) Provision for the safety and comfort of

the patients must be made. This is subdivided as follows:—

- (a) Safety from injury to themselves.
- (b) Safety from injury by fellow-patients.
- (c) The security of those dangerous to the outside community must be maintained without hampering the freedom of the quiet and harmless.

(d) Hygienic safety; for example, the asylum must be built on a healthy site, not in the centre of, but near, a town; with good water supply and sewage arrangements, and suitable methods of heating, lighting, and ventilation.

(e) Safety of buildings. These should not be of more than two stories in height, and adequate protection should be made against fire.

(6) Sufficiency of accommodation should be provided, not only for present need, but also for future requirement.

(7) Suitable provision for the staff of attendants.

(8) Provision for private patients.

(9) Initial cost must not be excessive. The cost of future management, as well as that of construction, must be borne in mind.

These are principles that should be borne in mind from the making of the first plan until the asylum is in full working order. Adherence to these principles under expert advice would have avoided the unnecessary expense of providing accommodation for suicide by hanging in every one of the single rooms of an asylum shortly to be opened.

**THE HEAVIEST BRAIN ON RECORD.**

A German physician has recently published a short account of a brain weighing 2,850 grammes (about 85 ozs.) The possessor of this ponderous organ was no great mathematician, no great naturalist, no great physician, but an epileptic idiot. He is described as being of exceptionally short stature (about 4 ft. 6 in.), but otherwise fairly well developed. He was of very low intelligence, and up to the time of his death (21 years) would amuse himself with a child's toy. The fact in question will doubtless be widely quoted as destructive of the popular idea as to the association of large brains with great mental talents. It is, however, well known that the quantity of white matter in the brain may be very great without its owner evincing any remarkable talents; and on the other hand, that the greatest men of all ages have possessed comparatively small brains.

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