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Editorial.

A HOSPITAL FOR MENTAL DISEASES.

An important step in the treatment and nursing of mental disorders is marked by the generous offer of Dr. Henry Maudsley, to the London County Council, to contribute £30,000 towards the establishment in London of a hospital for mental diseases.

The reasons which induced Dr. Maudsley to make this offer are explained by him in the letter which conveyed it to the County Council, in which he said:—

“As a physician who has been engaged in the study and treatment of mental diseases for more than half a century I have been deeply impressed with the necessity of a hospital, the main object of which would be (1) the early treatment of cases of acute mental disorder, with the view, so far as possible, to prevent the necessity of sending them to the county asylums; (2) to promote exact scientific research into the causes and pathology of insanity, with the hope that much may be done for its prevention and successful treatment; and (3) to serve as an educational institution in which medical students might obtain good clinical instruction.

“It is believed that many cases of acute insanity, in which recovery usually occurs within a few weeks, or under three months—notably, cases of puerperal insanity—would be cured, and the persons thus saved from much of the prejudice which is sometimes a lasting injury to them when they have been sent to an asylum; and it is hoped that, in a small institution, with several medical and other attendants, the patient and apt application of individual treatment, mental and medical, would bring about recoveries which might not take place in large asylums in which multitudes are

congregated and such individual treatment is almost impracticable.”

It is proposed that the hospital shall be for 100 patients suffering from recent insanity; that 60 or 75 of these shall be of the poorer class, and the rest private patients.

Those suffering from mental disorder, and their relatives, have reason to be deeply grateful to Dr. Maudsley for his generous offer. In cases of acute bodily illness patients are at the earliest possible moment admitted to a hospital and there receive skilled medical treatment and nursing care, so that the disease from which they are suffering may be taken in hand before it has obtained complete hold of the patient, when the chances of early and even ultimate recovery would be greatly lessened. Yet when the disease is one which affects the most delicate organ of the body—the brain—there is no special hospital in London on the lines suggested for the relief and treatment of mental disorders in the early and curable stages. Sufferers from these complaints must go on in the majority of cases from bad to worse, until they can be certified as insane; that is to say, until the disease has taken a thorough hold upon them, when they will be admitted to an asylum and their treatment commenced. Surely it is time that the paramount importance of treatment and nursing in the early stages of acute mental disorders is realised, so that recovery in at least a proportion of cases may take place without the necessity for sending the patient to an asylum at all. Dr. Maudsley has expressed his belief in the necessity for the establishment of hospitals for this class of case in the most practical form. We hope advantage to the fullest extent may be taken of his offer.

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