

The Urgent Necessity for Helping Mental Convalescents.*

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The After Care Association, for the help of poor persons who have been discharged recovered from asylums for the insane, is to-day, at its annual meeting, celebrating its 30th birthday, and its active and useful career is fully acknowledged in the public mind as fulfilling a definite practical want in an efficient and (as the late Sir William Broadbent declared) in an economical manner. It is therefore natural and appropriate that it should find itself in the full vigour of its maturity enjoying the sympathetic hospitality of its fairy godmother; for on the occasion of its christening in 1879, at 39, Wimpole Street, Dr. Savage declared most happily and purposively that its main object was "to facilitate the re-entry into social and domestic life" of those who had suffered the greatest calamity which dire misfortune could visit upon any human being—a misfortune of such disabling and serious consequences that it involves an illness at least two-fold in its nature—*viz.*, a disorder of the body together with a mental malady, and from which convalescence is recognised to be indefinite and uncertain. In no other convalescence, it may be pointed out, is the work of redemption fraught with so many difficulties.

I cannot do better than quote a passage from a paper reported in the *Journal of Mental Science* for the year 1892, page 462, to indicate the overwhelming need for our After Care Association:—"Those whose need is sorest are patients who are young, but there are also middle-aged women without relatives or friends; some are wives, some are widows, others are single persons in various callings, such as governesses, teachers, nurses, shop-women, and domestic servants—employés of different kinds, who have been treated in asylums and are sufficiently recovered to justify their discharge, but have no relatives or friends to receive them, no homes to return to, no situations or positions awaiting them, although they are now both willing and able to earn their daily bread, if only such positions could be found for them. I have known clergy, doctors, barristers, officers in the Army and members of the Civil Service who have

become paupers owing to their insanity, and one frequently meets with governesses, nurses, artists, teachers, and students, among women—the female inmates of our pauper asylums—whose insanity has brought them into the rank of paupers through no fault of their own, broken down by circumstances which they were powerless to ward off, through sheer stress of work, domestic trouble, penury, privation, or poverty, who have no friends, relatives, nor homes. Many men and women of education and refinement have sunk from their former positions in society through competition, advancing age, disappointment, and failure, and these need help."

From the date of its inception, under the fostering care of the wise and beloved Henry Hawkins, until to-day, rarely has there passed a single annual meeting without the direct and stimulating presence of our Treasurer, Dr. Savage, in its support, and it is at his especial request, through our earnest and indefatigable Secretary, Mr. Thornhill Roxby, who for over 23 years has himself directed the affairs of the Society with such patient service and success, that I have consented to endeavour to represent to you the views of those who have an intimate, practical, and close acquaintance with the pressing need for assistance to those who more than any other class of sufferers require a helping hand and a sympathetic friend.

Perhaps I may be permitted to say that a long experience at two of the largest London asylums has convinced me that the Association is doing invaluable remedial and charitable work, and that an extension of its activity is only curtailed by its limited income. In work such as ours in the large asylums one cannot but be struck with the great number of men, women, and young persons who have drifted hither, often through no fault of their own, and whose ruined lives are paying the penalty for our civilisation, for is not evolution and progress not infrequently at the expense of those who cannot keep the pace forced upon them? While the eager hand reaches out to grasp the prize, it is plucked away by some other of the numerous competitors, and bitter disappointment is added to mental anguish and nervous overstrain. When the conditions of life become so complex as they are to-day, prolonged and strenuous effort and high self-control are essential to success, but the prize is to the strong and the race to the swift, and there will be many unfortunate competitors unable to conform to the exacting standard required of them—a standard which tends always to rise higher. Many, for this reason, must necessarily drift into mental ill-health and poverty, and it is the opportunity of this Association to

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