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**EDITORIAL.**

**ASYLUM NURSES AND THE WAR.**

As we go to press the Annual Meeting of the Asylum Workers' Association is being held, and the annual report shows that the mental nurses and attendants are fully alive to the obligations which the present war has imposed on every patriotic member of the community. Up to May of last year over 2,000 Attendants in Asylums in England and Wales had joined the colours, and, since that time, practically all the remaining workers of military age under the various Asylum Authorities have presented themselves for attestation.

This fact is interesting because it undoubtedly points to the employment, in the near future, of women nurses in increasing numbers to attend upon male patients in asylums, a system which has many powerful advocates, and when put into practice has proved very satisfactory. Although its adoption in this country has been slow, in Scotland its success has been demonstrated beyond question, and it is even claimed that patients who are excited and difficult to manage when cared for by male attendants are quiet and tractable when cared for by women nurses.

The question has, on more than one occasion, engaged the attention of the Central Executive Committee, who have not so far considered the matter one calling for definite expression of opinion on their part, though they have encouraged discussion of the subject.

While it is certain that the services of male attendants will always be required for a percentage of cases there appears to be no reason why the large proportion of nursing in asylum wards should not be undertaken by trained women. This is of considerable importance at the present time as men can thus be set free to serve their country in other directions.

The war has affected the work of the women as well as of the men working as nurses in Asylums (though by no means to the same extent), as a number of the women nurses are serving under the Red Cross. The Central Executive Committee of the Asylum Workers' Association state that they cannot speak too highly of the self-sacrifice, and devotion to duty which on all hands have been displayed by Asylum nurses during the present times of stress and anxiety. Several Asylums have been converted into War Hospitals, and many of the Attendants and Nurses have been retained for military service; the former enlisting as Orderlies in the R.A.M.C., and the latter becoming Nurse Probationers. The admirable manner in which they have acquitted themselves in their various spheres of work, and the rapidity with which they adapted themselves to the novel conditions, are, it is claimed, striking evidences of the efficiency of the training of modern Asylum staffs.

The rôle of the mental nurse is by no means an easy one, and, indeed, men and women of the very highest type are needed to fill it. A physical injury or illness is for the most part easy to see, or to understand. Disease of the brain in its various manifestations demands not only skilled care, but also calls for comprehension, patience, and self-sacrifice in the highest degree, and while in many instances the unfortunate condition of the patient evokes sympathy; in others the form which the disease takes occasions symptoms calculated to repel it.

The mental nurse needs to look beyond the manifestations of disease to the condition of the patient, and those who practise their profession humanely, sympathetically and skilfully are entitled not only to the gratitude of individual patients and their relatives, but to that of the nation at large.

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