

INSANITY AND THE WAR.

The report of the Royal Edinburgh Mental Hospital, Morningside (consisting of two establishments—Craig House and the West House), is always of interest, and the medical report for the year 1917—the hundred and fifth since the opening of the institution—presented by Dr. George M. Robertson, the Physician-Superintendent, is of special importance, and deals with far wider issues than those of any individual institution.

There has been a decrease in admissions, especially in regard to males; but this is mainly due to their absence on military duties and to the fact that, though the strain of war has been the exciting cause of much insanity, the vast majority of these cases are being dealt with by the military authorities.

The amount of insanity amongst women, however, has not increased, but has tended also to decrease. Although there have been many cases of mental breakdown among women from excitement from overwork and exhaustion, and from worry and anxiety, on the whole the strain and the conditions produced by the war have not resulted in an increased amount of insanity. In many cases the higher wages earned and the separation allowance regularly received must, says Dr. Robertson, have relieved domestic worries and uncertainties.

In regard to alcoholic excess as a cause of insanity the amount (15½ per cent. of male admissions) is slightly less than the average of seven years before the war. "That the legislative restrictions upon the sale of alcohol are to be mainly credited, not only with such improvement as has taken place, but with defeating the operation of the law that increased wages are associated with an increase of drunkenness is almost certain.

"With regard to women, the amount of insanity alleged to be directly due to alcoholic indulgence was under 3 per cent. This is about a third of the average amount for the seven years previous to the war, so that whatever may be the facts as regards occasional drunkenness, there is no doubt that insanity directly due to alcohol has diminished."

WAR WORK AT THE WEST HOUSE.

The managers of the institution have undertaken for the duration of the war to the utmost of their ability to provide accommodation and treatment for all cases of insanity occurring in the city which would have been sent in peace time to Bangour Mental Hospital, thus setting Bangour free to become one of the most important and renowned military hospitals in the kingdom. The burden and responsibility connected with doubling the admissions to the West House in order to effect this has been loyally undertaken by the medical and nursing staff, reduced as it is. "I do not think," says Dr. Robertson, "that the staff of any other similar institution has done war-work comparable in magnitude and importance to this."

Craig House was opened twenty-three years ago for private patients, on one of the finest sites in Edinburgh, and at that time "without equal anywhere as an asylum for high-class patients." Now the time has again come to meet the present-day needs of the public, and the new requirements of medical science which has made great progress in the interval.

NURSING HOMES FOR MENTAL DISORDERS.

Dr. Robertson is a strong advocate of the provision of nursing homes, quite detached from Craig House and its grounds, as the form which the extension of its beneficent work should now assume, rather than by the erection of additional villas within the grounds. The trend of medical opinion and the still stronger force of public opinion are against the latter proposal. Medical men are agreed that the favourable period for treating mental disorder is the earliest stage, when it is undesirable and often impossible to send the patient to an asylum. The public also are getting rebellious in spirit and growing more averse to sending persons suffering from short and recoverable attacks of insanity to asylums, as thereby, not only does a certain stigma—unjust though it be—attach to them, but they also require to be legally certified as lunatics. Hence the proposal for the establishment of the nursing homes above mentioned, in which patients suffering from the early stages and the curable forms of mental disorder could be specially treated without the necessity of certifying them to be insane, and without requiring them to be placed in an asylum.

NURSING HOMES FOR OFFICERS.

Dr. Robertson wrote: "If the Board have so far failed in their efforts to provide nursing homes for civilians, they can regard with satisfaction the accomplished fact of such homes for officers suffering from the more serious effects of shell shock and war strain. It will be remembered that public sentiment was so deeply stirred by the knowledge that those who were broken down in mind in the defence of their country were being legally certified as lunatics and placed in asylums, that the authorities decided not thus to treat them, but to provide for them specially. Knowing that the Board was endeavouring to establish nursing homes, it was first approached by Major Marr, R.A.M.C. Then, after consultation with General Culling, D.D.M.S., and the War Office, a satisfactory agreement was concluded by which homes for officers were established by the Board outside the boundaries of Craig House, but under my supervision. The arrangements made, while capable of extension and development, have proved satisfactory and have been of great assistance to the military authorities."

Dr. Robertson urged in a previous report that there is no essential difference between the case of the soldier who becomes insane in the defence of his country and that of the woman who suffers from an attack of puerperal mania as a result of

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