

THE NECESSITY OF HOSPITAL TRAINING FOR MENTAL NURSES.

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In the last Report of the Board of Control (Lunacy Commissioners), dated August last year (1919), there were on January 1st, 1919, a total of 116,703 persons notified as insane in England and Wales. It is somewhat striking that since the war in 1914 there has been a decrease each year in the certified insane. In the first two years of the war, 1915 and 1916, the decrease was assigned to social and economic conditions, because everyone who could be occupied easily found a situation and the demand for persons to work was so great that moderate incompetence and some infirmity were readily tolerated in order to release every healthy and able-bodied person for war work, either overseas or at home; as a result wages were high, and there was no difficulty in finding occupation for anyone who wished to work. For this reason there was far less domestic stress, anxiety, and strain, to get a livelihood. Everybody found a job and everybody was well paid, and although the prevailing anxiety about relatives and friends at the front brought their quota of nervous breakdown and insanity, yet the worry of financial inadequacies—the concern about *res angustæ domi*—were practically non-existent. During the last two years of the war there was still a decrease of notified insanity—even a greater one than in the first two years—but this was due to the heavy and appallingly high death-rate in institutions for the insane, which has brought them into undesirable public notice. The insane in the asylums suffered, as did the sane outside, from the limitations of food and warmth, but owing to the failure of their nervous system they were less able to withstand the hardships implied by rationing, and in consequence of which the death-rate amounted to 200 per thousand (in one asylum 382 per thousand) of the daily average resident in all institutions, *i.e.*, more than ten times the death-rate among the normal population outside, although the latter included deaths from zymotic and other diseases as well as the high death-rate from infant mortality. Such an incidence of illness as is implied in this high death-rate among the insane demonstrates the need for the best possible trained nurses to look after mental patients. The analysis of this high death-rate included tuberculosis on an extensive scale, amounting to 52 per 1,000; organic heart disease, 16 per 1,000; renal disease, 10 per 1,000; pneumonia, 17 per 1,000; other causes being epilepsy, general paralysis, dysentery, enteric fever, influenza, and organic brain disease, conditions which call for the best and most careful nursing. The rate of mortality among the insane in asylums was so high during the last year of which we have an exact knowledge

that it called forth adverse comments in a leading article in the *Times*.

We have given some reasons above for the diminished number of admissions, *viz.*, that these were related to special economic conditions connected with the war, but there is another factor in the diminished incidence of insanity which also needs to be taken into consideration, and that is the fact that no soldier and very few nurses were certified as insane until they had been nine months under treatment in special mental hospitals under the military authorities, during which period many of them naturally recovered. As the illness of these patients was detected early and on the first appearance of symptoms, owing to failure to perform their usual military duties, they were at once brought under notice and were received into one or other of the base hospitals for treatment, and afterwards into some of the special mental or neurological hospitals at home, where, as stated, many, if not most of them, recovered. These institutions, although previously in use as asylums for the insane poor, were handed over with their staff to the military authorities, and were given other names to lessen the possible stigma; for instance, the Lancaster County Lunatic Asylum was called the Lord Derby War Hospital, the Middlesex County Lunatic Asylum became the Napsbury War Hospital, the L.C.C. Lunatic Asylum at Horton became the Epsom War Hospital. Over 20,000 men suffered from mental and nervous breakdown during the war, but these were not certified unless and until they had been nine months or more under treatment. These, or many of them, would probably, under the old conditions, have been certified at once as insane, had not the Director-General of the Army Medical Service made such preparations with the civil authorities to receive the soldier who had failed mentally and nervously from the strain and stress of army service into these special "war" hospitals. It is unsatisfactory to realise that, in addition to the excessively high death-rate (which has never before been paralleled among the civilian insane) during the last year of which we have a record, the recovery rate for the insane has also decreased considerably.

In regard to the enormously high death-rate allowance must be made for the absence on active service of many of the male staff of the asylums, as also of some members of the female staff who left for specific duties in connection with the war, so that both the male and female nursing staffs in many of the asylums were compulsorily depleted. Add to these factors the overcrowding of the ordinary patients, so as to make room of the soldiers, and here we have some of the chief factors which have contributed to the high mortality rate, but great dissatisfaction has been felt about this point, and a feeling of marked uneasiness has gradually grown up in the public mind about our methods of dealing with the insane; suspicions were felt that the insane generally were not under the best condition for

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