

verification—copies for filing and references as to character and efficiency—from which the State Register can be compiled for publication. The Rules permit of no exceptions, however well known a Matron or nurse may be, and this conscientious method of investigation upon the part of the Council must commend itself to every nurse who wishes to avail herself of Registration.

## PROFESSIONAL REVIEW.

### THE EXPERIENCES OF AN ASYLUM DOCTOR.\*

(Concluded from page 168.)

#### ASYLUM FOOD.

"Perhaps," writes the author, "nothing in asylum life is so important from the patients' point of view as their daily meals, and one can understand and sympathise with their feelings. In the everlasting dreariness and monotony of their lives, meal times assume an exaggerated importance and become the main events of the day. Yet it is probably true that nowhere is this monotony more apparent and a greater source of dissatisfaction than in the meals served to the pauper insane in most of our large public asylums." Dr. Lomax emphasises the fact that what he says of the dietary of the insane must be regarded as confined to what he saw during the war. "Even so," he says, "it reflects little credit upon the administration of the asylum in which my experience was chiefly gained.

#### LUXURIES FOR OFFICIALS.

"During the war we were, of course, rationed like everyone else in these islands, but as the rationing was spread over an asylum population numbering considerably more than three thousand it was a comparatively simple matter to give everyone a share of nutritious food, and that any scarcity experienced should not have been of the prime necessities of life, but only of such unessentials as should come under the head of luxuries. The matter resolved itself into one of fair and equal distribution, with special consideration for those who were most in need of it. For all that, it seemed obvious to me as time went on that there was anything but a fair and equal distribution of the available food, and that *the patients were discreetly limited in what food was obtainable in order that the remaining members of the asylum population, i.e., the medical officers, attendants, and nurses, and all those holding minor official posts should not suffer.* (The italics are ours.—ED.) The evidence of this fact is, I think, brought out by the Reports of the Board of Control, which showed that during the whole period of the war there was a steadily-increasing death-rate among the asylum inmates which was attributable in the reports to such diseases as tuberculosis, dysentery, pneumonia, and that new and somewhat mysterious disease,

'senility,' but which a leader-writer in *The Times* seemed to have hinted at under the less pleasing but probably more appropriate term of 'starvation.'"

Dr. Lomax proceeds to describe how, in the period of national food shortage, four asylum doctors, only one of whom was an Englishman, were fed at the beginning of the first month of the war, the food pinch being greatest then and onwards.

"For breakfast, porridge, bacon and eggs, marmalade and jam, unlimited bread and butter, a pint of cream, milk, tea and coffee. It is significant that the tea and oatmeal, which were the same as the patients were provided with, were of exceedingly poor quality, and the porridge never properly cooked. On the sideboard there was an excellent cold ham, and sometimes potted meat or brawn as well. After the first six months, the ham and cream disappeared, and we were rationed in butter, but everything else remained.

"On Friday we had fish, *in addition to the above*, and on Sundays we had sausages as well as bacon and eggs." The other meals were equally generous but "with all this abundance there was a corresponding waste. Half-eaten puddings were left in the pantry cupboard until they went bad, and I have many a time seen large portions of quartern loaves, pieces of meat, bones, potatoes, &c., in the pig bucket in the scullery. . . Waste, I suppose, is inseparable from all forms of bureaucratic control, as was abundantly illustrated in the great Government departments during the war, but waste of good food, when many asylum patients were dying of 'senility' for want of it was little short of a crime. And all the time that the asylum death rate was steadily mounting the Visiting Committee were coming to their monthly house-dinner, and were generously dined and wined at the asylum's expense, receiving, I was told, in addition from the grateful ratepayers an honorarium of a guinea a head for travelling expenses, and as compensation for the time lost to their businesses."

#### STARVATION SENILITY.

What was the food supplied to the patients in the same period, including those sick in hospital? *Breakfast*—Lukewarm, tasteless tea, barely sweetened, and of a very poor quality, together with bread spread with a thin layer of margarine. Sometimes porridge instead of bread and margarine; but it was always abominably cooked, and more like oatmeal soup than porridge. The patients much preferred the bread, which was fairly good and well baked, and of which they could have as much in reason as they wanted.

*Midday Dinner*.—On certain days there was meat or tinned bully beef, potatoes or sprouts, or dried peas or beans. No bread. Sometimes pork or chunks of fat bacon took the place of mutton or beef. One day a week, a thin and tasteless soup, with boiled potatoes, was given instead of meat; a milk pudding usually of rice completed the meal.

\* George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., Ruskin House, 40, Museum Street, W.C. 1.

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