

THE
BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
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No. 1,763.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 1922.

Vol. LXVIII

EDITORIAL.

**EARLY TREATMENT CENTRES FOR CASES
OF MENTAL ILLNESS.**

Everyone is aware, in cases of physical illness, how important it is that the patient should be brought under treatment at the first opportunity, so that the development of a more serious condition should be averted, and the patient more quickly restored to health thereby. To go a step further back, we are more and more learning the value of preventive medicine and preventive nursing.

It is therefore a matter for special regret that, in a large number of cases of mental illness, the patient is not brought under treatment until the disease is so firmly established as to be difficult or impossible of cure; and the reason lies mainly in our Lunacy Laws, the effect of which is to discourage the disclosure of incipient cases, and consequently their treatment at a stage most favourable to recovery, and to deal with them only when disease is so far advanced as to render the patient certifiable, and detention in an asylum essential.

We are glad, therefore, to learn that the Board of Control has convened a conference on the administration of the Lunacy Laws for January 19th, and we hope the result will be that the Lunacy Laws will be remodelled and brought into line with modern knowledge and medical opinion; and, further, that the pauper taint will be removed from those patients admitted to public asylums for treatment.

An interesting pamphlet, "Thirty Years' Administration of the Public Asylums of England and Wales," has just been published for the Mental Hospitals Association by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton (price 6d. net.), which should be studied by all interested in the subject.

The Association is of opinion that, on the

whole, asylums are well administered, are under the care of able and conscientious medical practitioners and nurses, and that the real trouble is in the Lunacy Laws.

The pamphlet states:—"One of the objects of this Association has been, and is, to obtain an amendment of the Lunacy Laws in order that incipient cases of mental illness may be treated before the malady has reached such an advanced stage as to compel the certification and detention of the patient in an asylum. It is the opinion of medical experts that a great number of patients in our public asylums who are now regarded as irrecoverable might have been useful and healthy citizens had they had the advantage of skilled treatment in the early stages of their illness."

At present the authorities of asylums have no power to receive for early treatment incipient cases of mental illness; nor are clinics in psychiatry available, such as on the Continent, and in the United States of America, can be attended by sufferers of this class.

The Mental Hospitals Association says:—"It is undeniable that in this important matter the United Kingdom is far behind other comparable countries. Many people on the verge of mental illness dread even the mention of the word asylum, and this dread is often equally shared by the friends and relatives. There is abundant evidence that in many cases patients cannot be brought to the existing institutions until their illness is well established and the outlook is less favourable."

There is urgent need for the establishment of early treatment centres, both in connection with general hospitals and also in institutions specially organised for the purpose. We shall await with much interest the result of the conference convened by the Board of Control. Amendment of our Lunacy Laws is long overdue.

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