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EDITORIAL.

THE NURSING IN MENTAL HOSPITALS.

The question of the care of the insane in Public Asylums, or, as they are now more usually and properly called, Mental Hospitals, is one which is arousing a great deal of anxiety and interest at the present time. These have been stimulated (1) by the book written by Dr. Montagu Lomax, "The Experiences of an Asylum Doctor," the revelations in which have shocked the public conscience; (2) by the fact that the asylum door, which is usually tightly closed, has been left somewhat ajar because of the number of ex-Service men who have passed through its portals—a situation which again hurts the public, who endeavour to penetrate the silence, and to discover what happens to these heroic sufferers in their enforced seclusion; (3) the public are also beginning to realise that our Lunacy Laws are in need of revision, and that it is outrageous that before a patient can be received into a Mental Hospital he must be certified as insane, when by that time the most favourable period for effecting an eventual cure has passed.

It will be remembered that early in the year the Minister of Health appointed a Departmental Committee to inquire into, and report upon, the charges made by Dr. Lomax against asylum administration. Dr. Lomax has, however, now declined to give evidence before this Committee, for reasons which he has made public in the press. In adopting this course he is supported by the advice of the National Council for Lunacy Reform, and influenced by the fact that the National Asylum Workers' Union, to which most of the witnesses for the facts narrated in his book belong, has informed the Minister of Health that owing to the unrepresentative character of the Committee it has instructed its members not to give evidence.

Dr. Lomax states in the *Times* that "what is needed for this purpose is a Royal Commission, not a Departmental Committee. A body consisting of two representative women, a medical man of recognised authority, together with a barrister of repute, and one or two members of Parliament and social workers, the whole presided over by a retired Judge, seems to me to be the sort of Commission needed. There is no necessity for mental specialists—we want human beings, not specialists. Such a Commission could hear all the evidence brought before it, examine witnesses on oath, and visit as many asylums as might be necessary. Then, having issued its report, it would be for Parliament to appoint a special legal and medical committee to draw up the draft of a new Lunacy Act. For nothing short of a new Act will be able to effect the reforms needed. This all legal and mental specialists fully realise."

It is not surprising that in the wide publicity given in the press to the discussion of the subject the need of a more public recognition of the services of both male and female mental nurses should receive attention. The work of general nurses, and untrained workers, in the War received generous recognition. Much of it was splendid, but its recognition was largely due to the fact that it was done in the full light of publicity, often by socially influential people.

Mental nurses work behind closed doors and have little social influence, and though the duties are difficult, dangerous, and demand the highest qualities of heart and mind, as well as professional skill, public recognition and honours are rarely bestowed on them.

The fine national work of mental nurses should receive the same sympathetic consideration from the State, and from the Fount of all Honour, as that of any other class of nurse.

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