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## EDITORIAL.

### EX-SERVICE MEN AS PAUPER LUNATICS.

During the Great War, when the world was thrilled with the heroism of our soldiers, who by discipline, fortitude, and with splendid courage endured to the extreme limit of endurance, and achieved what was well nigh impossible, we heard much of making this country one fit for these heroes to live in on their return.

Four years have well nigh passed since the bells rang out to celebrate the declaration of the Armistice, years in which have been divulged the tragic histories of many of the men broken in the war. Is it any wonder that in many instances mind as well as body has given way under the strain? Is it not a first duty of the nation that men who have so suffered in its service should be treated with all honour?

Yet, on September 30th, some 750 ex-Service men in lunatic asylums were handed over from the care of the Ministry of Pensions to the care of Poor Law Guardians, on the ground that their condition was "non-attributable to their service with the Forces." What are we to understand by that? Were men who were insane passed for war service? If not, even supposing that their previous, or family, history showed a tendency to mental disease, and as a result of the strain on their nervous systems such disease developed subsequently, surely they should be a charge on the Ministry of Pensions and not be stigmatised as pauper lunatics. Whether they are cared for by the Ministry of Pensions or the Guardians, the country has to pay for their maintenance, through taxes on the one hand, through the rates on the other.

Incidentally, we are of opinion that the word "pauper" should be abolished in connection

with all whom sickness has rendered destitute through no fault of their own, and it is particularly offensive when applied to ex-Service men. The words "lunatic asylum" and "lunatic" are also words which should be consigned to oblivion as unscientific terms, and "mental hospital" and "patient suffering from mental disease" substituted. The word "asylum" simply indicates a place where patients are housed under care, whereas "hospital" indicates remedial treatment.

We sympathise with the Southwark Board of Guardians, who recently decided not to pay for the maintenance of any ex-soldiers in mental hospitals whose maintenance was transferred to the Guardians by the Ministry of Pensions. One member said that sooner than pay this maintenance he would be pleased to go to Brixton Prison, and the Chairman remarked that they would all go together. If all Boards of Guardians show a like spirit, the Ministry of Pensions can scarcely persist in this intolerable decision.

Mrs. Ayrton Gould, Organising Secretary of the National Council for Lunacy Reform, and Mr. Ian Macpherson, Minister of Pensions, have been crossing swords in the *Times* on this matter, but we see nothing in the letter of the Minister of Pensions to justify his action.

A deputation from the British Legion, who interviewed Mr. Macpherson on this subject, regarded his attitude as so unsatisfactory that they are appealing to the Prime Minister. We hope that if they do not receive the assurance they desire from the Prime Minister that the matter is one which will be carried to the polls at the General Election, which cannot be far distant. We do not believe that the electors will permit ex-soldiers, by reason of whose valour they enjoy their present freedom, to be subjected to the ignominy of being branded as pauper lunatics.

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