

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,820.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1923.

Vol. LXX

EDITORIAL.

THE EARLY TREATMENT OF MENTAL DISORDERS.

Great interest is rightly centred in the Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, because, as was the intention of the late Dr. Henry Maudsley, who gave £30,000 during his lifetime, and bequeathed a further £10,000, for its establishment, it will bring the treatment of patients suffering from mental disorders more into line with modern ideals than has hitherto been the case.

All those concerned with the health of the people realise that prevention of ill-health is a supremely important factor in treatment.

This is now the acknowledged aim in relation to the care of the body. And yet, in the treatment of mental disorder, instead of providing in our public asylums, or mental hospitals, for the care and treatment of incipient cases, we have hitherto been content to make provision mainly for those in whom the disease is so advanced that it is necessary to certify them as insane, by which time the chance of permanent recovery is seriously minimised.

It will be remembered that the Maudsley Hospital was, during the war, used as a Neurological Clearing Hospital, but it has now reverted to the original purpose of its founder, and was recently opened by the Minister of Health for the treatment of early cases of mental disorder. The fact that no certified cases are received, and that cases cannot be certified while resident in the hospital, will give confidence to those who are apprehensive that if they enter such an institution they may be certified there, and passed on to another department.

In addition to the treatment of incipient cases the objects of the hospital include the diagnosis of difficult cases, and exact research into the causes of mental disorder. It will also be a school for the clinical instruction of medical practitioners and students. The hospital will, no doubt, also have due recognition in the training of mental nurses, although, as it only receives incipient cases, it cannot pre-

sumably be recognised as a "complete" school by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

We hope that in the future the example set in London—where, under the Mental Deficiency Act, uncertified cases may be received in institutions under the London County Council—will be followed in the provinces, and that adequate provision will be made in our public institutions for the treatment of early cases of mental disorder. Not only, it may be anticipated, will many patients be restored thereby to sound health, instead of becoming progressively worse until they are certified as insane, but the country will be saved the great expense of their permanent maintenance in hospitals for the insane.

The care of the mentally diseased has progressed very slowly, presumably because so little has been really understood as to the causes of their condition. Restraint and punishment were, for centuries, the predominating methods of treatment. Then, as the result of the teaching of Tuke in this country, and other humanitarians abroad, it came to be recognised that humane treatment was of far greater efficacy than brutality.

The care given in the Asylums in the latter half of the last century was a great step in advance of that which preceded it. Now the fact that we are abandoning the term asylum in favour of "Mental Hospital" is an indication that not merely the care but the cure of the patients is our present objective. And lastly, it is being slowly realised that it is supremely important to treat incipient cases of mental disorder as early as possible, to which realisation the foundation of the Maudsley Hospital has contributed in no small degree. We wish for it all the success for which its founder hoped.

The Minister of Health, referring to the Nursing Staff at the Maudsley Hospital, remarked that he was glad it was the rule at that institution that their nurses should have had a general hospital training, which was by far the best training to fit them for their special work.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)