

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,943. Vol. 78.

JUNE, 1930.

Price Sevenpence

EDITORIAL.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE.

The Mental Treatment Bill, which was introduced first into the House of Lords by Earl Russell, and then into the House of Commons by the Minister of Health as a Government Measure, has passed through all its stages, and now awaits the Royal Assent. It is a Measure which carries a message of hope to the mentally afflicted and to their friends.

The Bill is intitled—"An Act to amend the Lunacy Acts, 1890 to 1922, and such of the provisions of the Mental Deficiency Acts, 1913 to 1927, as relate to the constitution and organisation of the work of the Board of Control, the exercise of the powers of the Board and the protection of persons putting those Acts into operation."

The Bill is founded on the Report of the Royal Commission on Lunacy, which the Labour Government of 1924 appointed, and which two years later issued its Report. The main emphasis of this Report, as the Minister of Health told the House of Commons, is upon the need for a new conception of mental disorder and its treatment. There is emphasised the view that there should be early treatment, and that mental disease should be viewed much in the same way as we now view physical disease.

"The keynote of the past has been detention. The keynote of the future should be prevention and treatment."

"Contrary to the accepted canons of preventive medicine, the mental patient is not admissible to most of the institutions provided for his treatment until his disease has progressed so far that he has become a certifiable lunatic. Then, and then only, is he eligible for treatment."

The Commission were emphatic that "Certification should be the last resort in treatment, and not the prerequisite of treatment."

"With the advance of medical science and the growth of more enlightened views, insanity is coming to be regarded from an entirely different standpoint. It is being perceived that insanity is, after all, only a disease like other diseases, though with distinctive symptoms of its own, and that a mind diseased can be ministered to no less effectively than a body diseased."

It is on that basis that the Bill has been founded. If we accept that view of mental disease, then it becomes quite clear that the community ought to organise its resources to enable preventive measures and early treat-

ment to be carried out. In the Bill provision is made for two categories of treatment: First, those who themselves recognise the instability of their condition, and who realise the desirability of taking early preventive measures; and, secondly, cases of people who themselves are no longer able to realise their condition, but who, nevertheless, may be curable, and who ought to receive treatment different from that of the certified lunatic.

It is with feelings of great thankfulness that we realise this Bill will go far to decrease the number of persons who drift into insanity because of the natural aversion of relatives to adopt the extreme measure of certification. The most hopeful stage of the disease is therefore allowed to pass, whereas it is imperative for the welfare of the patient that active treatment should be begun at the earliest possible moment. Now a person who fears a mental breakdown can place himself quite simply and naturally under expert care as a voluntary boarder in an institution, and thus the dreaded breakdown may be altogether averted.

The Bill was debated at length, from every possible angle, during its passage through Parliament, and we are in sympathy with Dr. J. H. Morris-Jones, M.C. (L. Denbigh), the last speaker in the Debate on the third reading in the House of Commons, who said: "I feel sure that this is a very excellent Bill and I should like to congratulate the Minister of Health on getting it through, I think it is a great charter for the poor of this country, and for the first time it gives the poor as great a chance as the rich. I think the Bill gets away from the spirit of detention to that of prevention and treatment. I have no hesitation in saying that when the Bill comes to be adopted and understood in the country it will be successful."

Closely allied with mental treatment is mental nursing, and if the best possible is to be done for the mentally afflicted, Nurses must take pains to become highly qualified for this difficult work.

The passing of the Nurses' Registration Acts (1919) for England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, the establishment of the three General Nursing Councils and the publication under their authority of State Registers of Nurses with Supplementary Parts for Mental Nurses, makes it possible for Mental Nurses to give to the public the guarantee that, having been tested and proved competent, they possess the legal status conferred by Act of Parliament.

No class of patients need protection so much from ignorant and inefficient nurses as mental ones, and the proof that they are registered by the State should be demanded of all nurses in charge of insane persons.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)