

Unit. It is one of the leading hospitals in the British Isles.

Miss Brooksbank has been in Birmingham for 11 years, having spent the first four as District Maternity Sister under the City of Birmingham Public Health Department. Before coming to Birmingham, she was Assistant Supervisor of Midwifery for the County of Kent for four years. She won the 1949-50 Florence Nightingale International Foundation Scholarship which enabled her to tour a number of States in the U.S.A. and to visit hospitals for observation purposes. She read papers, also, before two important conferences there. She has studied, also, in Denmark.

## Bed Shortage in Mental Hospitals.

### Effect on Voluntary Admissions.

SHORTAGE OF BEDS IS DESCRIBED AS "one of the principal handicaps of the Mental Health Service," by the Board of Control in their report to the Lord Chancellor for 1949, published as a White Paper on May 9th.\*

"It is apparent," observes the Board, "that additional beds are not being provided in a sufficient number to keep pace with the increase in the demand, which results not from any increase in the incidence of mental illness but from the normal growth of the population of the country."

On January 1st, 1950, the overcrowding in the mental hospitals of England and Wales amounted to approximately 14 per cent. as against 12.2 per cent. a year earlier. "The effect of the shortage of beds, however, is not to be measured solely in terms of actual overcrowding, serious though that is," says the Board. "But it results, unhappily, in the limitations imposed on voluntary admission, and it is known that several hospitals have declined to receive further voluntary patients on the ground that the available accommodation is scarcely sufficient to provide for certified patients who must be admitted."

"Three factors have contributed to this serious situation. In the first place, there were on January 1st, 1950, 2,753 mental hospital beds diverted to other services. This figure compares with 3,034 on January 1st, 1949. The return of these beds is not proceeding as rapidly as is necessary. But, of the accommodation that has been returned, no fewer than 2,607 beds were awaiting re-conditioning and re-equipment. The figure on January 1st, 1949, was 2,694. Secondly, the total number of new beds provided during the year by the Regional Hospital Boards for patients under the Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts was 92. In the third place, 2,279 beds were not in use on January 1st, 1950, through shortage of staff. This shows a slight improvement on January 1st, 1949, when the number of unstaffed beds was 2,689."

There was also a slight increase in nursing strength during the year. This amounted to 303 full-time and 618 part-time female nurses, and 517 full-time male nurses. It resulted in a reduction of the ratio of patients to nurses (two part-time being counted as one whole-time) from 7.6 to 7.4 for women and 5.5 to 5.4 for men, over the whole country.

"The position, therefore, continues to give rise to anxiety," state the Board, "especially as the overall shortage is enhanced by the progressive loss of trained and experienced staff, and the continuance of the service even at its present levels is only possible by the use of less trained persons and by the very substantial use of part-time nurses."

### LESS TUBERCULOSIS

There were fewer cases of tuberculosis arising in the former county and borough mental hospitals than in 1948, the ratio per 1,000 patients resident being 7.4, compared with

8.9 the previous year; the death rate also fell from 4.7 to 4.2. In these same hospitals 9,805 died during the year. The death rate per cent. of the average number resident was 7.43, this being 1.17 above the rate for the previous year and .03 below the mean percentage for the past ten years.

### MORE UNDER TREATMENT.

At the end of 1949, there were 146,228 persons under care under the Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts, an increase of 1,503 during the year.

Of these 142,414 were in hospitals vested in the Minister of Health. There were 59,204 direct admissions to mental hospitals, and 16,524 patients left hospitals as recovered. 22,529 as relieved and 5,878 as "not improved."

Tribute is paid to the help given by the Women's Voluntary Services, to the Council for Music in Hospitals, and to the Picture Library Scheme of the British Red Cross Society. "It is impossible to evaluate completely the effect of activities of this nature," says the report. "Apart from their purely therapeutic side, they bring the outside world into what are perforce to some extent closed communities; and it must be of comfort and help to patients to have the assurance that kindly people are willing and anxious to do what they can to introduce into their lives interests and pleasures that might otherwise be out of reach."

A fuller account of the mental health service generally will appear in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Health. The Board of Control, however, is required to make annual reports to the Lord Chancellor on Mental Disorder under the Lunacy Act, 1890, which forms the subject of the report now reviewed.

\* "Annual Report of the Board of Control to the Lord Chancellor for the Year 1949." H.M.S.O., Price 6d.

### REMARKS.

It is with regret that we read that so many *requisitioned beds* are still not available to the Mental Hospital Services, thus curtailing the most necessary work of admitting the "Voluntary Patient" and rendering perhaps the loss of "curative treatment," which had begun to show such marked improvement for the Mental Health of the Nation. It was a hard struggle to get the Act passed to give the mentally ill the urgent hospital treatment early in the disorder, and it had revolutionised the tone of the hospitals.

Now this very urgent need is still being severely curtailed. What a lack of foresight this is!

The Mental Hospitals opened their doors gladly to help the General Hospital Bed shortage during the Bombing Crisis.

It is five years since hostilities ceased and quite time the requisitioned beds were returned.

The Mental Hospitals staff were very generous in their assistance and had very little thanks.

A good opportunity for a wider training for mental nurses was missed and now the early mental case too is to suffer.

Whose is the responsibility?

When will it be rectified?

M. C. B., (S.R.N., R.M.N., D.N. (Lond.))

SOME 1,000 BRITISH BOOKS which, together with 250 periodicals, constituted the exhibition recently shown by the British Council in Karachi and Lahore will remain in Lahore to form the nucleus of a British Council Library which it is hoped to open shortly.

In Karachi some 2,200 people visited the Exhibition. It was officially opened by the Minister of Education, Mr. Fazlur Rahman, who said that, though on a different basis, the "association between Great Britain and Pakistan is still close and strong." "It is," he said, "through the medium of the great English language that the treasures of Western science and learning have been unlocked."

One man came 150 miles from the steel works in Mirkpukas to see the technical books exhibited.

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