The Disabilities of Medico-Psychologists.

The disability of Medico-Psychologists connected with private asylums, from being appointed as Lunacy Commissioners within a year of such connection, is in a fair way to be abolished. This is due to the initiative of Dr. Mercier, resulting in a deputation to the Lord Chancellor, consisting of Dr. Mercier and other members of this Association, whose representations were very favourably received.

This result is gratifying, not only as a probable amendment of an unjust legislative enactment, but as testifying to the influence of the Association and the practical results that may be obtained when its power is exerted with a definite objective.

Other important disabilities still remain to be amended. The most important, both for the welfare of the public, of the public mental hospital service, and of the medical officers of these institutions, is the hindrance to the latter from engaging in the personal treatment of the diseases in which they have acquired so much experience when they resign their hospital appointments.

A medical man who has devoted himself for years to the study of the treatment of the insane in hospitals, when he retires from such a post, cannot reap the benefit of his experience (or enable the public to profit by it) by taking a few cases under his personal treatment, but is limited, by Act of Parliament, except under special conditions, to the treatment of a single case only, a privilege which, as we have often pointed out, is shared by every layman or woman, whether with or without experience, and with or without character. The criminal, the drunkard, the bankrupt, and even the mental hospital nurse discharged for incompetence, misconduct, or ill-treatment of patients, are actually on a level, in this respect, with the physician of twenty years' experience of the highest reputation and character. This anomaly is, of course, consistent with the absurd legislative position which licenses "houses" to treat mental diseases, or rather, we may presume, to immure the sufferers, the idea of treatment being foreign to the legislative views of the last century.

The treatment of incipient insanity without absolute certification is now so definitely accepted and so certain to become law whenever any new lunacy enactment becomes possible

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that the above-mentioned disability calls for more serious attention. In order to make the treatment of incipient insanity more satisfactory it will be desirable that it should only be undertaken by those who possess very special qualification for the work.

The needy spinsters, the broken-down nurses, the struggling nursing home, etc., should not be able to compete on equal terms with the thoroughly experienced physician or the thoroughly trained nurse. A wise addition to the incipient insanity clauses would be to extend the power of the Lunacy Commissioners to permit medical men possessing special skill and experience to receive two, three, or four such cases. This would be some relief to the present disability of ex-asylum medical officers.

Such an opportunity of professional work would react favourably on the medical staffs of institutions for the insane by giving an outlet for those who, after years of service, have failed to obtain a senior post, or who, from weak health, wish to escape from the arduous work. The incipient cases coming thus under the care of responsible persons would, if not recovered at the end of the six months' treatment, be relegated to institutional care. If, however, the present irresponsible people continued to take charge of these cases, it is to be feared that the cases may be shifted from one home to another almost indefinitely, each home being able to plead that it knew nothing of the preceding.

Should the Association take up this disability in the same vigorous and direct manner that it has brought to bear in the example mentioned in the beginning of this note, some amelioration of this special disability might be expected, to the great advantage, not only of medical men, but of the asylum medical service and the public.

The Journal of Abnormal Psychology.

This new addition to the periodical literature on abnormal psychology, made its first appearance on April 1st last, and is to be published bi-monthly. The Editor-in-Chief is Dr. Morton Prince, Professor of Nervous Diseases, assisted by Dr. Hugo Münsterberg, of Harvard, Dr. C. L. Dana, of Cornell, Dr. I. I. Putnam, of Boston, and Dr. Adolf Meyer.

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