FAMILY AND PERSONAL HISTORIES OF PATIENTS.

With the help of a grant from the Carnegie Trust, the Royal Edinburgh Mental Hospital is paying for the working expenses of a physician whose sole duty it is to visit the homes of the parochial patients sent to the Institution. Thus, for the first time in Scotland, a detailed investigation by the personal inspection and inquiries of a medical man is being made into the possible hereditary and environmental causes of the insanity of the cases admitted. "Such an investigation," writes Dr. G. M. Robertson, "while extending and making for the accuracy of our information, cannot fail to throw light on the causation of insanity in general, and of acquired insanity in particular, and in the event of our patients being discharged may be the means of suggesting such measures as will prevent many from relapsing into insanity again."—*The Medical Officer*, March 14th, 1914.

[A like proposition has been urged for some years in the London County Asylums. —ED.]

THE AFTER-CARE ASSOCIATION.

THE Annual Meeting of the After-Care Association for poor persons discharged recovered from asylums for the insane was held on February 23rd, at the Royal College of Physicians, Pall Mall East, Sir THOMAS BARLOW, Bart., K.C.V.O., M.D., presiding.

The report of the Council, and balance-sheet for the year ending 1913, were read by the SECRETARY (Mr. H. THORNHILL ROXBY), who emphasised the fact that additional subscribers and donors are much needed, and that it was only owing to the increased legacies that the income in 1913 had not declined.

The following is an abstract:

One of the most important events of the Association's year has been the consideration by the Council of extending the work so as to receive cases discharged on trial, as suggested in the paper read at the annual meeting on February 13th, 1913, by Dr. Hubert Bond, Commissioner in Lunacy. A special committee was appointed, consisting of Dr. Rayner, Sir George Savage, Dr. Hubert Bond, Dr. Percy Smith, Dr. Lord, Dr. Stoddart, Dr. Worth, Dr. Bower, and Mrs. Marriott Cooke, to consider if the extension were possible.

After a most careful consideration of detail they drew up a report recommending to the Council that the suggestion be tried from November 1st in connection with certain asylums in the South of England. Since then several applications have been received on behalf of such cases, and at present the results have been satisfactory. This has, however, thrown considerably more work on the Council and officers of the Association, and has necessitated a meeting of the Council every fortnight, with a rota of chairmen for the increased number of meetings. It is hoped, if the plan succeeds, to extend the offer of similar help to various other asylums during 1914. It is also proposed to hold a special meeting of subscribers at an early date to alter the title and the constitution, so that the Association may be able to conform permanently to the altered conditions of the work.

Finance.—The total amounts received in 1913 and 1912 were made up as follows:

1913.	£	s.	d.
Subscriptions and donations, including amounts collected at meetings	838	6	8
Donations for special cases ...	59	0	8
Guild of Help	42	2	0
Legacies	1,166	13	4
Dividends on investments, and interests on deposits	159	0	7
Donation from Queen Adelaide's Fund, Commissioners in Lunacy's Fund, repayments for outfit and maintenance, and contributions from friends ...	141	15	4
Affiliation Fee from Birmingham Branch	3	3	0
	£2,410	1	7

1912.	£	s.	d.
Subscriptions and donations, including amounts collected at meetings	974	1	3
Guild of Help (including Café Chantant)	192	18	4
Legacies	550	11	7
Dividends on investments, and interests on deposits	129	19	0
Donation from Queen Adelaide's Fund, Commissioners in Lunacy's Fund, repayments for outfit and maintenance, and contributions from friends ...	133	12	11
Returned income tax on interest on investments (3 years) ...	17	9	3
	£1,998	12	3

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.60.249.343-a Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although the total receipts have increased owing to legacies, it will be seen that the actual income from subscriptions and donations has slightly decreased, and that fresh contributors are therefore urgently needed.

Legacies.—During the year the Association has received a further instalment from the solicitors of the estate of the late Miss E. W. Walker, amounting to £166 13*s.* 4*d.*, and the sum of £1,000 under the will of the late Mr. A. H. Harman. Owing to the uncertainty of the money market during the greater part of 1913, and the great fluctuations which took place in all Trustee stocks, together with the high Bank rate which prevailed during the year, the Council thought it better in the interests of the Association to place these amounts on deposit with their bankers (The Union of London and Smiths Bank, Victoria Street, Westminster), at the current rates of interest.

Cases.—During the past year applications on behalf of 377 persons were received, of whom 11 were on trial. Of these, 228 were women, and 149 were men. Of this number, 106 were cases from the London County asylums, 197 from other county and borough asylums, 18 from mental hospitals and licensed houses, and 56 from other institutions or private sources. Of these, 119 had been assisted in various ways during previous years, and 258 were before the Council for the first time.

One of the most important functions of the Association is finding suitable occupation for persons who, although recovered, would probably have great difficulty in re-starting themselves in life. The bestowal of a large amount of personal care and individual attention upon each case is necessitated, and the careful investigation of the suitability of those with whom they are placed. The result of this part of the work is far greater than the mere supplying of temporary homes, clothing, or grants for maintenance and tools, important though these may be. The strongest possible evidence of the utility of this Charity is shown not only in the comfort and aid given, but in the prevention of relapse, many who have had previous attacks remaining well since they have been under the influence of the staff of the Association.

Since the work of the Association commenced, with the appointment of the present secretary, 5,171 cases have been considered by the Council; of these a very large number from time to time, although suitably re-started in various spheres of work, require counsel in many ways, and call at the office to see some member of the staff. Advice is freely given, and frequently enables them to overcome satisfactorily any possible difficulties, and tends to prevent mental strain, which is particularly undesirable in the cases with which the Association deals.

Guild of Help.—This Guild has once more rendered valuable assistance during 1913. In addition to many useful presents of clothing, etc., for which the Council is most grateful, the total amount contributed in subscriptions and donations was £42 2*s.*

A report with balance-sheet of this Guild is published separately, and all further information may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. Ironside Bruce, 10, Chandos Street, W.

The following account has been received from the Birmingham Affiliated Branch.—President: The Lord Mayor of Birmingham. This Branch was formed at the beginning of the year, and during that time all patients discharged from the Mental Hospital have been visited by members of the Case Sub-Committee and others. Forty-three patients have been assisted—twenty-four women and nineteen men. The assistance has been given in various ways, such as finding work, arranging holidays, paying arrears of rent, giving grocery or milk orders, hospital notes or clothing, etc. The Committee endeavours by home visits to keep in continuous touch with all friendless and poor discharged patients, who, besides receiving material help, have often much benefited by advice, sympathy, and encouragement. Among the female alcoholic patients this work has been particularly successful, as these on their discharge are reported to the British Women's Temperance Association, whose members visit regularly, and have obtained most encouraging results, several patients having been induced to sign the pledge.

The Committee is now starting in connection with the Brabazon Work Society to teach the inmates of the Mental Hospital various kinds of needlework, with the idea of interesting and brightening their lives. Though this cannot exactly be called "After Care," it is intimately connected with the work, as, by means of the lessons, the helpers have an excellent opportunity of getting to know the patients about to be discharged.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.60.249.343-a Published online by Cambridge University Press

The balance-sheet of this branch is published separately, and is not included in the accounts of the Association. This, together with the report of the City of Birmingham Branch, can be had on application to Miss Wightwick, 318, Summer Lane, Birmingham.

Sir THOMAS BARLOW then gave an address (see p. 295).

Sir GEORGE SAVAGE moved the adoption of the report and balance-sheet. He said that there had been slow but steady uniform growth in the work, and urged the importance of obtaining more money.

Dr. TAYLOR (Medical Superintendent, East Sussex Asylum, Hellingly), in seconding the adoption of the report, said that the decision of this Association to take cases on trial was of very great assistance to the Asylums, the question having always been a most difficult one to deal with. He exampled one or two cases from the East Sussex Asylum, in which the Association had been of the greatest help.

Mr. A. H. TREVOR (Commissioner in Lunacy), in supporting the motion, said that in reading the report the two most satisfactory points that appealed to him were that Birmingham had started an affiliated society, and that the Association had extended their sphere of usefulness to taking cases on trial.

The Rev. H. STEPHENS (Chaplain, Essex County Asylum, Brentwood), and Mr. H. L. WOOLCOMBE supported the adoption.

The re-election of President, Vice-Presidents, and Council was proposed by Dr. STANSFIELD (Medical Superintendent, London County Asylum, Bexley), and was seconded by Dr. SIDNEY COUPLAND (Commissioner in Lunacy).

A vote of thanks to the Chairman was proposed by Dr. HENRY RAYNER, who said that Sir Thomas Barlow's kindness in presiding on that occasion would, he felt sure, go very far towards increasing the funds of the Association. Dr. R. PERCY SMITH seconded the vote.

Sir THOMAS BARLOW replied, and the excellently attended meeting ended.

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF MEDICINE.

SECTION OF PSYCHIATRY.

SIR GEORGE H. SAVAGE, President, in the Chair.

At a meeting held on Tuesday, October 28th, 1913, at 1, Wimpole Street, W., Dr. C. A. MERCIER read a paper on "The Concept of Insanity."

The synopsis of the points for discussion was as follows:

Insanity and unsoundness of mind are not the same thing. Each includes much that is not in the other.

Insanity is disorder of conduct and of mind, and consists of certain disorders only of conduct and of mind. This is the simplest concept of insanity.

But disorder of brain function may be added to the concept, which is then three-fold, and disorder of metabolism may be added, making a fourfold concept. There are, therefore, three different concepts included under the name insanity; which is right?

Each is right in its own connection, but confusion results from calling different concepts by the same name.

If insanity means disorder of conduct and mind alone, then insanity is a symptom of disorder of brain function.

If insanity means disorder of conduct and mind plus disorder of brain function, and if these three disorders are all correlated disorders that the patient suffers from, then these three disorders constitute the disease of insanity.

If, however, these three disorders are correlated with some wider disorder, such as alcoholic poisoning, myxœdema, gout, specific fever, Graves' disease, etc., then the three-fold disorder is not a disease, but is a sub-disease of the wider disease.

When insanity is a symptom only, it is expedient to call it delirium, and to reserve the name insanity for the cases in which what is meant by it is a disease.

The paper was discussed by Sir GEORGE SAVAGE and Drs. PERCY SMITH and ERNEST JONES.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.60.249.343-a Published online by Cambridge University Press