as in the postnatal period to mobilise preventative interventions.

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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

The Increase of Insanity

SIR: The article in the British Medical Journal of October 22nd upon this subject was calculated to afford much interest to those engaged in the treatment of the insane. Little consideration is needed to convince us that the increase referred to is to be checked by legal, rather than by medical, means. The measures adopted to check the transmission of insanity can only be advised medically, whilst legally they can be enforced. What such advice is worth in the case of a contemplated marriage, based on affection, an elementary acquaintance with human nature will teach us. A legal remedy for the increase of insanity by propagation to the effect would be that the law might "forbid the banns" in case one of the contracting parties had been insane. I venture to think such a measure too severe for a preliminary one, and suggest that immunity from further attack for a certain number of years (to be decided by experts) might warrant us in giving the quondam patient a clean bill, so far as mental health was concerned. If experience showed that this modified measure failed to meet the case, then we should have more justification in enforcing the stricter course suggested in your article. This criticism, of course, leaves unimpaired the main contention – that the law should have authority in the matter. There is perhaps an even more difficult problem to decide than that just considered – namely the course best to pursue with persons already married, who are discharged from the asylum as "cured" or "improved." 'The results are, of course, often deplorable. And it is a very common occurrence for such persons to be readmitted to the asylum, having meantime begotten insanity. The resources of the asylum are then employed in bringing them once more into a fit condition for discharge, and all its potentialities. I think this is a humiliating reflection.

Your suggestion regarding the creation of special hospitals in connection (I presume) with the existing asylums, to be devoted to the treatment of recent and curable cases, will, I feel sure, meet with cordial welcome from all asylum physicians who have at heart the welfare of the insane, and, I would add, their own reputation. The finger of scorn has too long been pointed at alienists. At least, they should have an opportunity of trying, unhampered by the care of dements in their hundreds, all the resources of our art, all the means with which medical science has endowed us, upon recent and curable cases, in order to determine whether cure can be hastened or obtained in larger measure. We need a consensus of alienistic opinion on this matter, and it is to be hoped that your suggestive article will be the means of furnishing us with such. Already, as is well known, some of the leading and most respected superintendents of asylums are in favour of separation and special treatment of the recent and curable cases.—I am, etc.,

Oct. 24th ALIENIST

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