

'The After-care Association for Poor Persons Discharged Recovered from Asylums for the Insane': a paper read by Mrs Robert Henniker at a special meeting of the Association

Publication/Creation

Jan 1893

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A Paper read by Mrs. Robt. Henniker (Lady Guardian of Fulham), at Special Half-Yearly Meeting of the "After-Care Association," on Monday, Jan. 23rd, 1893.

The After-Care Association for Poor Persons discharged recovered from Asylums for the Insane.

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THIS Association, which was founded in 1879 mainly by the exertions of those well known for their experience as medical men and philanthropists interested in the care of the Insane, has for its object the facilitating the re-admission of Convalescents from Lunatic Asylums into social life.

There are in the Asylums for the Insane about 43,000 women, who are supported by the rates. Of these a large number are discharged yearly quite recovered, many friendless, not knowing where to turn for shelter, nor how to exist until they can again earn their own living. Shopwomen, domestic servants, employés of different kinds, widows, young and middle-aged women, capable of doing good work could they only have a helping hand to give them a fresh start, and (almost more to be pitied than these) governesses, highly educated ladies, quite destitute, for whom the workhouse surroundings are very unsuitable. Some have friends willing to help to the best of their ability, but too poor to do much, either in supplying food or lodging.

A further difficulty has also to be considered, namely, the fear of mental disease entertained by many people, which causes them to decline employing persons having suffered from any of its forms.

The chief methods by which this Association endeavours to meet the needs of these various Convalescents are :—

- I. By obtaining for them when needful an interval of change of scene and air, often so beneficial on recovery from ordinary sickness.
 - (a) By placing them in a Convalescent Home.
 - (b) By boarding them out in the Country, when thought desirable, under proper care and supervision.
- II. By giving them grants of money and clothing.
- III. By assisting them to obtain suitable employment.

In the carrying out of these ends the Council has, from time to time, received considerable assistance from Working Associates in finding Homes, and providing Clothing for the Convalescents. The Council has also appointed Hon. Local County and District Secretaries, and would gladly welcome more ladies and gentlemen willing to help in this most useful way, as their co-operation would materially aid the labours of the Secretary, upon whom the work of visiting the Homes and providing employment at present falls almost entirely ;

and especially would this assistance be valuable, as the cases increase in the more remote parts of England and Wales, in the saving of time and cost of travelling, thus effecting an appreciable economy in the working expenses of the Association.

Hitherto the Council has had no Home for its Convalescents, but they have been boarded out in Cottage Homes previously visited by the Secretary and approved by the Council; but it is now proposed to open a small Cottage Home, as it is considered that this will greatly add to the efficiency of the work, and that it has, for various reasons, become a necessity.

With regard to this Home it is a great consideration that it should, if possible, be certified. This would enable Boards of Guardians, either to make an annual contribution to the Home, if sanctioned by the Local Government Board, or to pay for separate cases as they arise. The boarding out will also continue as before.

The work of the "After Care Association" was started on behalf of women only, but such good results followed that the Association was strongly urged to enlarge its sphere of action and extend the After-Care work to men also. This has been tried, and the result of this trial proves that a real want has been met. It is, therefore, intended to continue help to men as well as women, so far as funds will allow. What is required now is to make the work thoroughly known systematically in the right quarters. How can this best be done?

Chiefly through two channels—Boards of Guardians, and the Medical Superintendents and Visiting Committees of the Asylums.

As the law now stands the greater proportion of patients are sent to Lunatic Asylums through the agency of the Poor Law. The methods of admission do not so much concern the present question as the methods of discharging the recovered patients. There are three to be considered:—

- 1st. Patients without friends or means of any sort who are discharged to the workhouse.
- 2nd. Patients discharged to their own friends, but brought home by the Relieving Officer and either taken by him to their friends, or discharged to them at the workhouse.
- 3rd. Patients discharged from the Asylums to their own friends, who take them home direct.

The 1st Class are comparatively few in number. They are generally seen either by the House Committee or the Schools and Asylums Committee of the Board of Guardians, according to the arrangements of the Parish to which they belong, and dealt with as the Committee decides. In some instances the "After Care Association" has been applied to on their behalf; in others—as in the case of a most respectable servant, a Welsh girl, who desired to return to her friends—the Guardians claimed only a portion of her wages and savings for her maintenance, returning to her sufficient for her travelling expenses and to keep her until she could again find employment.

The 2nd Class is more difficult to deal with and more frequently requires the assistance which the "After-Care Association" could give. At present there is no regular method by which these cases can be made known to After-Care, and it is feared that many suffer much unnecessary trouble and privation from ignorance of the help they might receive if they knew where to ask for it. In one Union the plan has been tried by a Lady Guardian of noting each case of the discharge of a Female Convalescent from an Asylum and of obtaining the address to which she had gone, and of paying her a friendly visit of enquiry. In no instance has this lady met with any objection to her calling, but has generally been warmly thanked for her interest, even when friends were able to do all that was necessary; and, in some cases, she has been able to assist materially in obtaining work.

This, however, is an insufficient method to ensure the systematic help aimed at, for two reasons—Firstly, the time it takes. In the Union referred to the total number of Lunatics sent to Asylums during three years ending December 20th, 1892, was 356—163 men, 193 women,—of these 51 men and 70 women were discharged, recovered. As yet only women are generally visited, but the experience of this Lady Guardian is that men, as much as women, need assistance, and, After-care having extended its work to them, visiting has become desirable in their cases also. This would be too great a task for any one guardian to undertake, in addition to the multifarious details of other portions of work which fall to each to be carried out. Then,—Secondly, no good work that is meant to last should depend upon one person, else it will be in danger of lapsing. If worth doing at all it should be placed on a permanent basis, aided certainly by the personal interest and work of the individual, but safe to go on should the individual be removed at a moment's notice.

What suggestion can be made to meet this? The following might perhaps answer—

That Boards of Guardians should be asked to make an order empowering the officer whose duty it is to remove convalescent patients from Asylums at the request of the Asylum Authorities to give regular notices to the Secretary of the "After-Care Association" of such removals, and some report of what has become of the cases, and so bring them direct to the notice of the After-care. If passed it could be done on printed forms similar to the notices sent to the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants, with but little trouble to the officer.

There is a further development which, if sanctioned, might aid the After-Care Committee materially in their efforts to help these Convalescents, and that is that the officer might, if such information is required, state briefly what he knows of the history of the case prior to removal to the Asylum. But it would have to be distinctly understood that such reports are strictly private and confidential, as otherwise no officer would care to give them for fear that he might subject himself to some proceedings.

It is doubtful how different Boards would treat this request—the matter requires delicate handling, and some might object to it on the score of publicity. But it is not necessarily any more public than the notices to the Boards of Guardians make it. It would be well for the Secretary to prefer the request officially through the Clerk to the Guardians and, where possible, let an individual member of the Board know before-hand, so that some one would be prepared to move that an Order of the Board be given.

We now come to the third method of discharge—that is, Convalescents discharged by the Visiting Committees of the Asylums on the recommendation of the Medical Superintendents direct to friends, either on probation or as altogether cured.

There are in England and Wales 54 County Asylums, 3 District Asylums, 13 City and Borough Asylums, and 5 Metropolitan Licensed Houses, which take pauper cases. How is this Association to come in contact with such Convalescents from these Institutions as might be benefited by its assistance? In some instances the Medical Superintendents write to the friends who, being quite unable to take care of the discharged patient, appeal to individual Guardians or friends to know what they can do and are by them referred to the "After-Care Association." This occurred in the case of a man whose wife could not possibly support him in addition to their children. It was so

strongly urged that work in the open air was essential to this man and that living in idleness, brooding over his inability to obtain employment, would only end in his again becoming ill, that private assistance was given by a member of the Committee, work found and, by mutual agreement of husband and wife, accepted with great gratitude and with most successful results. Again, in the case of a girl that came to the Committee's knowledge in a similar manner—though the circumstances were different—assistance was given when the opportunity of work offered.

But it is plain that this means of bringing these cases to the knowledge of the "After-Care Association" is very uncertain and not likely to reach all those who might be helped. What is most needed is the co operation and support of the Medical Superintendents of the various Asylums throughout the country. Cases have been assisted since the Association started from 32 Asylums, including one from an Asylum in Roumania. But it is hoped that more Medical Superintendents will be induced to report cases direct to the Secretary when they become better acquainted with the work of the "After-Care Association." It is undesirable to occupy their already fully-occupied time with frequent letters and appeals. Still it is thought that the Report of the Annual Meeting of the "After-Care Association" in the *Journal of Mental Science* may draw their attention to the subject and arouse more interest in it. It is of the utmost importance to the progress of the Association that it should have their support. But to secure this support, both from Medical Superintendents and Boards of Guardians, it is essential that they should understand what is being done, as until further informed of individual cases assisted, they cannot express an opinion on the work of the Association and are not likely to take much interest in it.

It hardly comes within the scope of this paper to enlarge upon general ways of furthering the work of the Association, but two valuable methods appear worth mentioning, as both have had their origin in connection with Asylums' authorities—the one, a Sale of Work, which interested many ladies, and no doubt led to much enquiry and information as to the objects of the Association it was intended to benefit, and certainly increased its funds. The other, a Ladies' "Working Association" for making Clothing, often sadly needed by poor convalescents, and a most welcome assistance to the Committee in providing it for them. This is a branch of a fuller organization engaged in caring, not only for Convalescents but also for patients. It is under the fostering care of the Chaplain of the Colney Hatch Asylum, and may in some respects be considered as the forerunner of the present "After-Care Association." It is interesting to note that the year just ended is the Centenary of the Reform in the Treatment of the Insane, first begun in the York "Retreat" in 1792 by the great-grandfather of the late Chairman of the Council of the "After Care Association" (Dr. Hack Tuke). Such persevering, continuous, good work augurs well for the Association, and encourages the belief that foundations so steadily and carefully laid under such practised hands will eventuate in it becoming impossible for any Convalescent from any Asylums for the Insane to be without the care that is so important to enable these saddest of sad cases to once more take their places amongst the workers of the world.

All communications to be made to the Secretary, H. THORNHILL ROXBY, Esq., Church House, Dean's Yard, Westminster, S.W., by whom contributions will be thankfully received, or they may be paid into the account of the "AFTER-CARE ASSOCIATION," Union Bank of London (Regent Street Branch), Argyll Place, London, W.