

" I should like to summarize briefly the objects for which this Association works. Firstly, it facilitates the discharge of patients by acting as an intermediary between the hospital and the patient's home, or by offering accommodation in one of the cottage homes when the friends of a patient are unable to receive him. Secondly, it consolidates recovery by giving convalescence at the seaside or in the country ; by helping to obtain suitable employment ; or by supplying tools or clothing when necessary. I need not emphasize the extreme importance of this side of the Association's work in finding a job in life for those who need it so desperately. (Cheers.) And, thirdly, it prevents relapse by personal supervision of individual patients, by helping them to see specialists, or by giving them such extra nourishment or surgical appliances as their circumstances require. (Cheers.) Further, the Association is often able, by giving "pre-care," as distinct from "after-care," to prevent threatened cases of mental infirmity, and to avert a breakdown which might result in a long and painful illness. (Cheers.)

" This is only a brief survey of what the Mental After-Care Association does. Its general object, however, if it is once realized, will surely obtain for it the support which it so obviously deserves. That object is to bring back health, happiness and efficiency to our countrymen and countrywomen who are afflicted by what is perhaps the saddest of all infirmities, and to refit them for making their own way in life without being a burden to others. (Cheers.) It is an object which has my very warmest sympathy, and I wish every success to the appeal which is now being made on its behalf to the British public." (Cheers.)

The Hume-Spry Case.

THIS case, in which Mr. Hume-Spry sued Dr. R. Percy Smith and Dr. A. H. Watson for alleged negligence in certifying him insane under the Lunacy Act, came to a sudden and dramatic conclusion on the fifteenth day of hearing, March 22, 1927. The jury stopped the case and returned a verdict for the defendants.

The Judge, Mr. Justice McCardie, in giving judgment for the defendants, said :

" I feel sure that the jury will agree with me when I say there is absolutely no basis for the suggestion of bad faith against either of these two defendants.

" Several names have been mentioned in connection with the case. I have gathered from the jury, as well as from Sir Henry Maddocks, that the honour of Mr. Chetham-Strode has been fully vindicated. In my view it also follows upon the verdict of the jury that the honour of Major Woods has been completely vindicated and I infer that the honour of Major Stodart-Walker had been vindicated. I think the jury would desire to express their regret at the careless and foolish letters he wrote.

" I, myself, infer, from the verdict of the jury, and I should hold it myself without the slightest hesitation, that there was not the faintest ground for suggesting that there was any conspiracy among the officials and doctors of the Ministry of Pensions wrongly to send the plaintiff to an asylum.

" Finally, on my own part, I shall retain the documents in the custody of the Court so that the Public Prosecutor may consider whether or not he should take criminal proceedings against the plaintiff for perjury or such other offence as he may think fit."

We desire, in union with the whole of the medical press, to offer the defendants, one of whom, Dr. R. Percy Smith, is a greatly honoured member of our Association, an ex-President, and once an Editor of this Journal, our hearty congratulations on the successful ending to a long and trying experience of nearly fifteen months' duration.

The defendants in January, 1926, made an application under Section 330, subsection (2) of the Lunacy Act, 1890, to a Master of the King's Bench Division to stay the proceedings which was granted and affirmed by the Judge in Chambers. The Court of Appeal, however, reversed this decision and so the case ultimately came to trial.

The case very adequately proves the necessity for increasing the measure of protection now afforded medical practitioners in carrying out the distasteful duty which falls to them under the Lunacy Act—a duty not only for the purpose of the effective treatment of many cases of mental disorder, but for the protection of patients so suffering, and of the public.

This urgent matter was pleaded by the Association in its evidence before the Royal Commission on Lunacy and Mental Disorder, when it urged "that the protection afforded by Section 330 of the Lunacy Act, 1890, to medical practitioners and to others engaged in pursuance of the Acts should be extended to stay proceedings at an earlier stage than at present, and that they should receive the same immunity as is given to witnesses in a court of law." The Royal Commission recommended amendments to the Act which would put the onus of proof of the alleged bad faith and lack of reasonable care upon the plaintiff, which would certainly place practitioners in these circumstances in a safer position, and yet allow of the Judge and Court to permit cases to go forward for trial where there were substantial grounds for such allegations and not merely *prima facie* evidence of neglect.

The case also raises the important question of how expert medical evidence can best be submitted, especially as such evidence may affect the honour and professional reputation of a brother practitioner of medicine. It is a matter we cannot enter into now, but it is one well worthy of the attention of the Association.