

Occasional Notes.

The Proposed Psychiatric Clinique in Edinburgh.

The establishment of a psychiatric clinique in connection with the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary has been strongly recommended to the managers of that institution at a recent meeting of the Edinburgh Medico-Chirurgical Society. The meeting was a very representative one, the discussion being initiated by Sir John Sibbald, and the motion moved by Sir John Batty Tuke.

The treatment of mental in association with other diseases in general hospitals is probably one of the most important steps that can be taken to aid in the prevention of insanity. The incipient stage of mental disorder is that in which all authorities agree in describing it as most curable, but at the present time it is the stage that receives the least attention, and in which there is little or no provision for its treatment. The existing condition, indeed, has been likened to that which would obtain in eye diseases if no special treatment could be obtained until the patient was qualified by total blindness for admission to the Ophthalmic Hospital.

The public prejudice against insanity and the fear of the asylum can only be overcome by teaching the people to associate mental with other diseases in the general hospitals, and not with the asylum or poorhouse lunatic ward.

Steps in this direction have already been made by establishing out-patient departments at St. Thomas's Hospital, the Charing Cross Hospital, and at the Sheffield Infirmary. Other London hospitals are preparing to follow in this track.

The treatment of mental disease in a general hospital is not a new departure. In the thirteenth century a department of the large general hospital in Cairo was set apart for the treatment of mental disease. Mahommedans, indeed, have always recognised insanity as disease; it was the Christian idea of evil possession that led to insanity being regarded as something quite different from ordinary bodily affliction, and this resulted in the abominations of treatment which persisted through the Dark Ages almost to our own times. Christian

communities have, indeed, large amends to make for the evil inflicted through all these ages on the insane throughout Christendom, and they should be frankly reminded of the fact.

Psychiatric clinics have long been established on the Continent, and would have been still in existence at Guy's Hospital in London, but that the clinic there was strangled by the red tape of legal procedure.

A correspondent in the *Lancet* has suggested that these psychiatric wards, if established, should be placed under the care of a general physician.

The ignorance of mental diseases in the general body of the profession could not be better illustrated than by this suggestion. Would it be possible that any medical man could be found so totally unacquainted with diseases of the eye, for example, as to suggest that the eye wards should be placed under a general surgeon?

The abuse of the alienist physician by his fellow-workers has been of long duration, and in the past may have had some justification, but in the present day we can point to a large proportion of active scientific workers, and a large output of scientific work, rapidly increasing.

On the other hand, the records of our case books would furnish material giving very little encouragement to the suggestion of placing the psychiatric clinic under the general physician, and any attempt of this kind must be vigorously opposed by the specialty.

That the recommendation of the Medico-Chirurgical Society will bear fruit is therefore most earnestly to be desired. The managers of the Edinburgh Infirmary have it in their power to become the pioneers in a procedure which is certain to be widely followed, and which will be evidence of the progressive spirit which has always been so prominent in Scotland generally, but especially in its capital. Edinburgh, by setting this example of progress, will add an additional claim to the title of "Modern Athens."
