

Asylum Officials: Is it necessary or advisable for so many to live on the premises ?⁽¹⁾ By FRANK ASHBY ELKINS, M.D.

ASYLUM officials may be roughly divided into three groups. In the first group are included artisans and others who are paid weekly wages, have no emoluments, and live in their own homes away from the asylum, whilst in the second and much larger group are included nurses and attendants (estimated by the Commissioners in Lunacy to number in England and Wales more than ten thousand persons), laundrymaids, housemaids, kitchen-folk and others, who, in addition to their monthly paid wages, usually have the emoluments of board and lodging. In the third group are included chief officers and others who are provided with houses, cottages and apartments on the asylum estate. The weekly paid or artisan class are, as a rule, well paid, contented, and of long service. They do not lead a cloistered life, and it is not with them that this article deals. As to the second group, the public now happily recognises the unselfish labours of the large army of workers in direct attendance upon the insane throughout the country, and it is not necessary to enlarge upon their usefulness to the community. Their hours of duty are very long, their pay is not large, and the restrictions and disadvantages under which they work are very great. Probably all asylums have allowed a certain number of these officials to board and lodge off the premises. Some asylums may be more favourably situated than others, and thus have done more in this direction, but the writer thinks that at all asylums more could and should be done towards de-cloistering the staff. In an asylum constructed to meet the circumstances and placed in suitable surroundings, the sane resident population could be reduced to very moderate proportions. It is urged that when the abnormally long and trying hours of duty are over, as many officials as possible should be altogether freed from institutional restraints. The cost of the erection of asylums would be decidedly lessened if they were built to provide accommodation only for (1) the patients, (2) such members of the staff as must of necessity be boarded and lodged on the premises, and (3) such officials as

must have houses provided for them on the estate. Has any asylum authority ever prepared an estimate showing the cost of the erection and upkeep of quarters, and of the provision of necessities and conveniences of every description specially made for members of the staff who do not need, for any particular reason, to be provided with lodgings on the asylum estate?

If, on the male side of an asylum, there are sufficient staff living inside, in case of fire, or to be near at hand should the night staff require assistance, there is surely no necessity for others to sleep on the premises. Some have urged the necessity of building cottages on the asylum estate with a view to keep the married attendants within call and under institutional control, and though still an advocate for the building of asylum cottages, the writer is now convinced it is better to allow the demand to create the supply off the estate, whenever this is possible. It is as well to consider the possible disadvantages of asylum cottages. Asylum authorities do not appear able to build as cheaply as the local builders. When the asylum authorities have built a cottage for a certain sum, they naturally desire that the rent shall be in proportion, so that the ratepayers' pockets shall not suffer unnecessarily. If, however, this decision is adhered to, one of two results follows. Either the attendant is compelled, perhaps against his will, to live in the cottage in lieu of receiving lodging money and choosing his own home, or else there is difficulty in letting the cottage because the neighbouring cottages suitable for attendants and built more cheaply are let for a less rent. An asylum official may wish to leave his cottage, perhaps because he dislikes his neighbour in the next cottage, or because he sees a cottage vacant which he covets as a home, yet he is deterred from moving because he fears he may lose his lodging money and perhaps his post too if he gives up the asylum cottage. With the best possible intentions, too, the committees of asylums place certain restrictions upon occupiers of their cottages. For instance, they perhaps may not have guests to sleep in their houses without the consent of the authorities, for this may lead to lodgers, their houses are regularly inspected to see that they are kept in good order, and to ascertain what repairs are necessary, and although in the country maybe, they may not keep dogs, poultry, or pigs, for profit or amusement without consent. In fact, the asylum atmosphere pervades the

homes. The proud vaunt that an Englishman's home is his castle, frequently does not apply to asylum officials' houses. A tenant likes to make his own bargain with his landlord, and when he has rented the house, no matter how humble, he likes to feel he only is master of it. As cottages are being advocated and being built all over the country, it is well to bear in mind the disadvantages from the attendant's point of view. Surely it is better for married attendants to live as ordinary individuals among the general community, leaving their work and its surroundings when that work is done. When attendants and their families live together, often in a kind of compound, the men never escape from the associations of their work, their companions and associates are all similarly employed, the women and children never get away from the asylum life, and the individuality of the home is greatly destroyed. It has been suggested that the night attendants sleeping outside will not take proper rest, and so will not efficiently perform their duty. Experience does not confirm this, and an official who does not perform his duty properly should be dismissed from the service.

Let us now turn to consider whether it is not possible for some of the female staff also to live off the premises. The public is now happily accustomed to see the village nurse and the Queen's nurse living like ordinary folk among the general community. Anyone who has seen the stream of respectable and well-behaved women pouring into and out of London and other large centres of population every morning and every evening to engage in business or other pursuits, knows how ridiculous is the belief that women—even young women—cannot look after themselves. On the contrary, they are treated with the greatest consideration by the travelling public, and it is rare indeed for them to show by their actions that they are unfit to move about without chaperones. Even in asylum service nurses and other female officials on leave for the day or after duty from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. are allowed to do exactly as they please, although it is considered essential, no matter how long their service or how old they are, that they should sleep in the asylum under the motherly and vigilant eye of the matron! As on the male side, a certain number of day nurses must always sleep within call of the night nurses, in case of emergency, and these should preferably be those who have last

joined and who are in training as asylum nurses. This will give the authorities time to decide whether a new nurse is suitable for the work, and she can decide whether she feels able to continue the occupation. But in every asylum there must be many nurses and other female officials whose characters are well known, who it is certain would lead such lives outside as would bring credit to the asylum, and there is no reason why such nurses should not live off the premises. The unmarried village dressmaker, school-mistress, and district nurse live among the community without reproach. In an old-established asylum it will be found that quite a perceptible proportion of the female staff have near relatives with good homes in the immediate locality, some near kin actually coming purposely to live near a daughter or a sister employed in the asylum. For the nurse of long service who has no relative at hand, the wife of an artisan or attendant earning good wages is often willing to receive a respectable lodger in her clean cottage, and why not? Female officials thus join a family circle when off duty, and what could possibly be better for those whose days are mostly spent in tending insane patients? Former nurses, now married and living near, are also often glad to receive old friends and former colleagues. Experience shows that nurses so lodged are happier and healthier. It might be thought that nurses would find a difficulty in being on duty at 6 a.m., but in a working population, and especially in the country, early hours are the rule for everybody, and no difficulty is experienced. It must be remembered that the rooms vacated in the asylum increase the accommodation for patients. In recent years it has been the fashion to build nurses' "homes," some very elaborate ones, in order to make the lives of asylum nurses more bearable and less sombre. May we not now ask ourselves, have these nurses' "homes" been a real success? Do we find them appreciated as much as we hoped? Some, at least, of us feel reluctantly compelled to answer in the negative. Whenever the weather permits most of the nurses prefer to be off the premises, and do not stay in their so-called "home." Wet days keep them in the privacy of their bedrooms writing letters or attending to clothes, reading a book, or resting. The nurses' sitting rooms are really only used when there is a little time to waste at meal times. It would be of greater service to the public to convert asylum nurses'

“homes” where possible into villa residences for patients of a suitable kind, paying a moderate board, a class of the community badly provided for in England.

What officials is it really necessary to provide with homes upon the asylum estate? Are there not far too many houses, as a rule, provided? It is acknowledged by all that, as head of a large medical institution, the medical superintendent of an asylum must always be resident on the estate, and whenever, day or night, he is absent from duty, his deputy should take his place. As a matter of fact he is invariably provided with a house and allowed to marry. His house should certainly not form part of the main building. It should be surrounded by its own garden, and preferably should be directly approachable from the public highway, so that the household of the medical superintendent shall not mix in any way with the asylum community, and so that the medical superintendent, when he seeks some rest, may have privacy, and may feel that he really is off duty although within easy call. Leading the cloistered life he does, the visits of acquaintances and friends should be encouraged, but the knowledge that a call at the medical superintendent's house means passing through the main entrance gates, having one's name booked, and walking or driving right up to the asylum building, deters many visitors; and other institutional regulations of a similar kind act unfavourably to those whose houses are similarly placed. It is notorious how many medical superintendents devoted to their work break down at a comparatively early age, so that it is reasonable to ask that the unfavourable surroundings in which they live should be made as favourable as possible, and that the fewest possible institutional restrictions should be imposed. The importance of children not mixing with an insane community when their habits and characters are being moulded, and the unwisdom of having sane persons who are not officials subjected to sights, sounds, and smells, not to speak of bad behaviour, all the result of disease, emphasise the importance of building houses, where these are really necessary, with the doors opening off the estate. The medical superintendent, on account of his position and in spite of the disadvantages he labours under in living within the asylum gates, can generally manage, with some little effort, to have as many acquaintances in the neighbourhood as he desires, but the case is often different with the assistant

medical officers, the matron, the assistant matron, the superintending and head nurses, the steward and other chief officers, female and male, occupying positions of high trust and responsibility. So far as the neighbourhood is concerned they may live, unless special efforts are made, as a class apart, and under a sort of social interdict. In such cases the asylum gateway becomes an impassable barrier, and outside persons in the same station of life either may not wish to know people living in an asylum, or may not even know of their existence. Special regulations, too, discourage or prevent visits altogether. Being thrown upon each other for society, conversing upon little else but asylum topics, and living in close daily contact with the insane, they are apt to become pessimistic, hypersensitive, soured and dissatisfied with their lot, unless they are able to cultivate optimism and enthusiasm under depressing circumstances, take up athletics or other hobbies, or earnestly set themselves to take an interest in the outside world. Some asylum authorities, in the case of assistant medical officers, have actually arranged that each officer must be re-elected after the lapse of a certain time, and annually thereafter, evidently considering that it is not good in some cases for medical men themselves or the institution that they should be continued in the service. With some chief officers, alas, who should never have taken up asylum work, and who do not leave so soon as they discover their error, life tends to be less and less roseate, there is more and more centering of their thoughts upon petty details and grievances of asylum life, they often cannot be induced after duty hours to leave the surroundings in which they work, and at last, being compelled to resign, they become pathetic figures, more or less wrecked in health, middle-aged, without an occupation, and lucky if they get a small pension. In an asylum where medical emergencies so frequently occur, it is absolutely necessary that there should be sufficient medical help readily available day and night, but at large asylums, where there are two, three, or more assistant medical officers, the writer does not see why the senior or other assistant medical officer, if he desires, should not be a married man with his house on the fringe of the estate and outside the curtilage proper of the asylum grounds, or even off the estate. Such an arrangement would remove a real grievance of the senior assistant medical officers of large asylums, who at present are com-

pelled to lead celibate lives, although holding positions of considerable trust, and often by no means youthful. Of course, such a medical man would have fixed hours of duty with time for meals, and it would be clearly understood that when the medical superintendent was off duty, day or night, the senior assistant medical officer must take his place as a resident medical officer. Such an officer would lead a more natural life, and would have what every man after a certain age has a right to expect—a home. It is a much better way than providing a house for him within the curtilage, and bringing within the asylum gates another family. This arrangement would not be a reversion to the old practice of visiting physicians, as the medical officer would clearly still be an assistant to the medical superintendent.

It is almost a religious axiom, more especially near the Metropolis, that the steward (often the assistant steward, too) must reside on the asylum estate, yet that well-known and large institution, the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, not to mention other asylums, has been successfully administered for years, although the steward and assistant steward live in their own homes off the asylum premises. Can it be seriously believed that anyone intending to rifle the stores would be deterred by the knowledge that the steward lived on the asylum estate? The chaplain is another official for whom a house need hardly be provided. With so much machinery about, and in case of fire an engineer is a suitable official to have a house on the estate, but a foreman of works does not need one. With an efficient head night attendant there is really no reason why the senior or other head day attendant should be provided with a house. Similar considerations should be taken into account in deciding who should and who should not be allowed housing accommodation on an asylum estate. To take an extreme example of what should not be. Assuredly a gravedigger ought not to be supplied with a cottage adjoining a graveyard, in which he and his wife are to live and bring up a family, under the most melancholy surroundings and under all the restraints which result from living on an asylum estate.

Any suggested scheme by which pressure in an asylum laundry can be relieved is worthy of consideration. To erect and equip an asylum laundry in accordance with the standards

considered necessary by those who supervise and manage asylums is a costly business, and the expense does not end with erection and equipment, paid labour being a considerable item year by year. At many asylums patients capable of doing efficient work in the laundry or elsewhere are yearly decreasing, whilst the percentage of patients for whom much washing is required on account of their faulty habits or bodily infirmity is on the increase, so that there is a constant demand for more paid help. Lady visitors to asylums are nearly always impressed with the beautiful way in which the caps, cuffs, collars, aprons, and uniforms of the staff are "got up," but it may be asked how far is all the time and labour thus entailed at the public expense justified? Some, at least, of the laundry equipment, with paid labour in proportion, is mostly or wholly provided for the staff washing. Many asylum authorities have become so alive to the cost of the staff washing that they have limited the number of articles which each indoor official may send to the weekly wash. The linen of the village nurse "got up" by the local washerwoman may not look so immaculate and smart as that of her sister in the hospital, yet it is clean, looks fresh, and serves its purpose. Whilst uniform is to be encouraged as showing the profession of the nurse, it is not worthy of worship and does not of itself constitute the nurse.

It might be thought that the risk of the introduction of communicable diseases among the patients would be increased where so many officials in direct attendance upon the patients come daily to duty from their homes and lodgings in the surrounding neighbourhood, but in practice this has not been found to be the case. When the medical practitioner in attendance upon an asylum official's family discovers such a disease as scarlet fever in the house, the custom—well-known both to the medical men of the locality and to the members of the asylum staff—is for the official to stay away from duty upon a medical certificate stating the cause. He is thereupon required by the asylum authorities to be absent from duty until his medical attendant can certify that no harm is likely to result to the asylum community if he resumes work, the committee paying the wages in full during such enforced absence. The visits of patients' friends, many of whom are slum dwellers, are much more likely to introduce communicable disease into an asylum

than officials living, as a general rule, under the healthiest circumstances.

A great deal more could, and should be done in the way of allowing asylum officials to have their meals off the asylum premises. Where it has been done, the improved health, more especially of some of the older staff, is very evident, and no doubt has been brought about by the compulsory short walks in the open air before and after each meal, by the suitable diet, and by the pleasant home surroundings in which the meals are taken, together with the fact that the long day, from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m., in the asylum is completely broken into four parts by pleasant interludes. The dietary scales in force at most asylums are very generous. Indeed, a thrifty housewife, if shown the raw materials, would at once say that with some slight and inexpensive additions she could feed her husband, herself, and her children with the amount apportioned to one official. In recent years the diets of asylum officials have, in consequence of recurring complaints, nearly always sympathetically considered, become more and more generous. Yet it is notorious that however generous, however well cooked, however well served, and however varied the dietary is, it does not satisfy a great number of the staff. The long hours of harassing duty, the confinement to wards, be they ever so well ventilated, and the nursing of patients of dirty and disgusting habits, particularly noticeable in infirmary asylums, these all undermine digestion, develop capricious appetites, and fully explain the grumbling at meal times. The officials who most enjoy asylum diet are the newly joined, because they are not used to such good fare. Tastes vary enormously, and if, too, the appetite is impaired, an official would much sooner have money in lieu of food, and so make it possible to have meals prepared to his liking. Moreover, if a married man, he has to provide food for his wife and family, and it would therefore be a distinct gain for him to take board-money home and share the family meal. It must at once be granted that it is possible to carry on an asylum by refusing to listen to complaints respecting the excellent food provided, and by getting rid of those who grumble at the meals. This has often been the attitude of asylum authorities, but it is not in the interests of the patients to bring about the resignation of good nurses and attendants just because the nature of their occupation interferes with appetite

and digestion. One cannot, of course, treat officials with capricious appetites as one would a patient by continually changing the diet, but if real endeavours are made to board out as many officials as possible, then those taking their meals inside will either be newcomers or else those who remain by preference, and so the whole difficulty will be solved. The difference in the state of health between a male attendant who boards and lodges in his own home and one of similar length of service who boards and lodges in the asylum is very marked. It has been seriously urged that if asylum officials are given money in lieu of board they will be likely to steal the patients' food. For this reason some think it most advisable that nurses and attendants employed in the day time, and who see to the distribution of the patients' food, should certainly take their food in the asylum, that night-nurses and attendants receiving an allowance in lieu of board should be made to pay for food eaten during the night, and that those employed in the preparation and distribution of food, such as bakers, stores porters, kitchen men, mess-room attendants and general porters should also take meals at their work. In other walks of life to treat a person of known character and long service as a potential thief would be considered very improper. The elaborate precautions taken when issuing food from the stores and the constant supervision of supervising officers should soon detect thieves, and detection means dismissal. There are other things to steal in an asylum besides food, and if the same argument were universally applied, every asylum official would have to be systematically searched each time he passed the asylum gates. Moreover, asylum officials are now drawn from a respectable class of the community and have a position to maintain. The writer very much doubts whether a really accurate estimate has ever been prepared showing the cost per head of boarding asylum officials. Besides the cost of food and drink there has to be taken into account the labour and other expenses of the garden—for it is surprising how much of the garden produce requiring much labour is used by the staff—the provision and furnishing of messrooms which might in some cases serve other and more profitable uses, the labour in the kitchens and messrooms, the provision of napery, glass, crockery and cutlery, the cost of the laundry, and lastly, the cost of cooking and cooking appliances, many expensive cooking

appliances being got expressly for the staff. The amount allowed for board to the few officials usually allowed to live out is reckoned as approximately the worth of the emoluments, but if more attendants and, perhaps, female officials, such as night nurses, boarded out, and if the clerks' mess, the bakers' mess, and the messes for kitchen men, stores porters and general porters were altogether discontinued the result would be economy to the institution and satisfaction to the staff. The question whether labour could not be reduced in the gardens, the kitchens and the mess-rooms would then arise. The privilege cannot, however, be extended to all the staff—for instance, a fire-brigade must always be on the spot.

Some deny that asylum officials living long in close contact with the patients tend to degenerate in mind and body. In July, 1906, in answer to a question in the House of Commons, the President of the Local Government Board replied that roughly speaking in any given year 1 *per cent.* of the average number of attendants employed in asylums became insane. This figure, he added, was slightly in excess of the percentage of insanity in the general population between the ages of twenty and fifty-four. He might have added that it was the general rule of asylum authorities to choose men and women who are much above the average as to physical condition, and, therefore, that such officials should be *less* likely to be affected. No account, too, is taken of the fact that many stay such a short time in the service that the risks they run are very slight. Those who have had much to do with asylums know that short of insanity a number of breakdowns in health, due to the life led, occur among the staff, particularly among those closely and constantly in contact with the patients, and that officials who resign "for a change" often do so because they feel they cannot continue the work without risk of breakdown. Any reasonable steps, therefore, which can be taken with a view to reduce the risk of breakdown should be most carefully considered by asylum committees.

Some have urged the necessity of asylum authorities looking after the lives and morals of the staff when off duty, and these good people have explained that this is why officials should not be allowed to live out. Surely it is the business of full-grown men and women to look after their own lives and morals, and people who cannot do so are not suitable to take upon

themselves the great responsibility of caring for the insane. Asylum authorities have quite enough to do in seeing that the officials perform their duties efficiently. It cannot, however, be for the best for an unnecessary number of nurses, attendants, and others when off duty to be subjected to the sights, sounds, and smells inevitable in asylums and to live for the most part of the twenty-four hours in close contact with insane patients, many of whose expressions and actions tend to be debasing to morals. As a matter of fact, the indoor life is demoralising and throws unusual temptations in the way of officials, so that it is surprising to the writer, not that a few fall, but that the large majority pass scatheless through the ordeal. On the contrary, a large body of married attendants living out will produce a healthy public opinion which will mature and become more powerful in the future in its influence upon the younger staff, whilst the female officials who live out will be living under less dangerous circumstances. The public opinion of a village is largely influenced by the middle-aged and elderly. They are the persons who unerringly point out the man or woman to be avoided, so that everybody knows the risks run in having anything to do with such persons. Young women desiring to be considered respectable dare not be seen in such company. Village gossip when it pulls to pieces the lives and characters of neighbours may be hateful, but it certainly serves a useful purpose by acting as a warning, a deterrent, or even as a punishment. A single woman living in a village has every incentive to make herself respected by those among whom she lives. The lot of the newly-joined nurse, usually taken straight from a good home, but often with little or no experience of the world, at a large asylum where most of the staff, male and female, live in, is very different. She is at once placed in a difficult position. She has no middle-aged and elderly acquaintances who know the life—so apt to be demoralising and full of temptation—she is called upon to lead, and who can hold up the warning finger. There is no healthy public opinion and no gossiping village circle to make her extra careful how she walks. It is idle to expect the matron of a large asylum to watch and know what each female official does when off duty, though she could supervise a small indoor staff. Can the good people who think that nurses must sleep in the asylum prove that this form of cloistering has

resulted in asylum staffs being noted for a higher standard of morality and for leading better lives than the rest of the community? If a man or woman is straying upon doubtful paths, he or she will not be deterred by being compelled to eat and sleep within the asylum. The public-house resorted to for social purposes, particularly by those who have no good homes of their own, naturally proves a great attraction to too many indoor asylum officials, with the result that many a promising young man develops drinking habits, and loses his character and his post. When a man lives out he soon finds himself with a home, a wife, and family, and these responsibilities and incentives to keep his post, with the force of public opinion behind them, may be relied upon to prove the best stimulus towards leading a reputable life. It is idle to compare the lives led by asylum nurses with the lives led by hospital and infirmary nurses, for the circumstances are quite different, but it may be hazarded that it would be better from the health point of view if hospital and infirmary nurses, long at their work, did not always live amongst their much less trying patients. Village and Queen's nurses have as high a standard of life as hospital or infirmary nurses, indeed it has often been stated that the influence of their lives upon the general community is all to the good. It seems as if the greater freedom will lengthen service, will diminish breakdowns, will make the post more worth having, and will attract a better class to the service. Nurses who have mothers or other relatives to support will make a home for them in the locality.

It has often been said that nurses and attendants cannot be induced to stay in asylum service unless the institution is very near to a town where shops, crowds, and places of amusement abound. Such an apology for constantly resigning officials is plausible, but experience proves that the possession of a home or suitable lodging is a much more potent factor in lengthening service. Out of pity for their cloistered life, and with the object of affording them reasonable amusement which may keep them out of harm, the chief officers and committees of asylums spend much energy and time in getting up entertainments for the staff, especially at the festive seasons, but when once an official lives out he rarely troubles to put in an appearance on these occasions, thus proving that the social life of the village is all-sufficing.

Where so many officials live in an institution, the question was bound sooner or later to arise, what emoluments shall each official be allowed? How often shall these windows be cleaned on the outside for this official? Shall this man be allowed to have his carpets shaken twice a year? How many clothes may this person send to the wash without charge? Does the emolument "vegetables" include flowers, herbs, and fruit? Is this official who is allowed a fixed quantity of coals also to get sticks to light his fires, or must he buy fire-lighters or wood from the outside? Such inquiries must be worrying to committees, and are highly vexatious to those who are unfortunate enough to have houses or apartments within the asylum gates. Unless there are very good reasons indeed, the restrictions placed upon officials living in an asylum should be very small in number, bearing in mind the lives they are compelled to lead. The obvious and natural remedy is to have as few sane residents as possible to live upon the estate.

An asylum is intended for the patients, and all arrangements connected with the institution or the staff must be subordinate to the patients' interests. To improve the lot of officials on the lines suggested by this article implies more skilled and trained service by a more contented and happier staff, less break-downs and resignations, fewer raw hands on duty, and therefore less risks to the patients. Whilst asylum officials in following their vocation, give, as a rule, without stint, their best services to the insane, and are subject to all sorts of disabilities and restrictions when on duty, it does not seem reasonable that their lives when off duty should be—

"Cribbed, cabined and confined."

(¹) A paper read at the Annual Meeting, July, 1908. The discussion on this paper was postponed till the Quarterly Meeting in November.

Some Aspects of Inebriety. By Lady HENRY SOMERSET.

I FULLY appreciate the very great honour which has been done to me this afternoon in asking me to speak of the experience which I have had in nearly twenty years of work amongst those who are suffering from alcoholism. Of course