

## TREATMENT OF THE INSANE.

To physicians and the general public there is much of interest in the report of the Commission that recently investigated the latest European methods of treatment of the insane.

For a number of years there has been dissatisfaction with the opportunities provided for the intelligent and scientific treatment of those suffering from mental diseases. This dissatisfaction, too, is deepest in those who are connected with our asylums and institutions for the care of the feeble-minded. The present system has outlived its usefulness. It is a product of a very limited knowledge of the nature of mental disease. Under it many cases of acute insanity are allowed to develop until they become chronic and incurable. This defect arises possibly from the imperfect knowledge of the average physician. Few practitioners are trained to detect signs of approaching insanity. If they are able to do so, they have no opportunity of giving effective treatment to check the progress of the disease. At our asylums, too, owing to lack of equipment and of an insufficient number of trained physicians and nurses, the treatment of certain forms of insanity is not as effective as it might be. The governing conception of the purposes of an asylum is inadequate. The forcible detention of the insane is not the only purpose that an asylum should serve. Recognizing this fact, the men in charge of the institutions for the care of insane persons have converted them as far as possible into hospitals for curative treatment. Annually a large number of cures are effected. And these results have been attained under handicaps that can be entirely overcome only by radical changes in our present system.

The Commission to which we have referred indicates in its report the nature and extent of the changes considered necessary. It recommends that the number of nurses and physicians at our asylums be increased, that more careful attention be given to each patient. The desideratum in this respect is one nurse to two patients. The most important feature of the report, however, is the suggestion that Psychiatric Departments be attached to the largest hospitals of the province. It is further suggested that laboratories for research be established in connection with these departments. Not without interest either is the recommendation that insane criminals be confined in a separate institution and "regarded as sick persons rather than as convicts." To complete its report the Commission furnishes estimates of sums required to effect the changes recommended.

To the men who have achieved important results under the present system high praise is due. But it is of first importance that the suggestions of the Commission should furnish a basis for action on the part of the Provincial Government. There are forms of insanity that cannot be cured. A tissue that has undergone change cannot be restored. But incipient insanity and other forms of the disease are amenable to treatment. Psychiatry will not relieve humanity of the danger of mental diseases. But better knowledge of its methods will do much to lessen their prevalence and results. Wider diffusion of knowledge on the subject of insanity and means of getting insane persons without delay to institutions devoted to their care, will produce results of great importance.