

THIS SYSTEM MUST GO

Old Folks Institute

This is the story of Britain's old people, people too old to speak for themselves, with no one to speak for them. All too many live in the dread seclusion of loneliness, many infirm, many in failing health. The people you see here might be your father or mother - a relative - a friend. In all we have five million of them - our story reveals the condition of those who live - or would like to live - in the public institutions of Britain.

In fairness to the hard work of many public authorities charged with the care of the aged, we begin at one of the most modern of public assistance institutions - that at Farnham, in Surrey. The old men and women here live in up-to-date buildings, where everything that can be done to break down the institution atmosphere is done. They tell you they are happy; they do not complain. But they have never lost the dogged independence of people who have always worked for their own livings - they know they are in an institution - and they do not forget.

Here, at Farnham they have their own small pleasures. And if a little Indian summer of romance creeps up, nobody minds.

We begin at Farnham to emphasise that in this investigation we attack no public authority - what we do attack is a system - a system for which the British public alone is ultimately responsible.

We show you now, the institution at Epsom, run by the same authorities as Farnham. Here, in a building erected a hundred years ago (and now housing 350 old men and women) you can learn something of what was recently disclosed in the Nuffield Report on the Care of the aged. In this document, you can read of other homes (some run for private profit) where the helplessness of age is used as a means for gain. One such was run by a drunkard who left her patients naked in their beds. Even in well run institutions like this you need only watch to feel the hopelessness of age - the sense of frustration and uselessness. If this were a scene from Charles Dickens we would shudder at it. Yet this is in Britain, in 1947. Would that Charles Dickens were alive today.

From Epsom, to Chesterton Hospital, Cambridge. Here, again an ancient, out-moded building imposes an impossible task on authorities striving to do their best. Two hundred old people live here. Some of them are tired and sick. Their duty to us and their country is done - what are we to say about our duty to them.

Lord Amulree declares that better conditions for the aged can only come when we are as proud and careful of those whose work is done, as we are of the young whose work is yet to come.

The problem is what can you do about it. You have an M.P., write to him. You elect councillors; press them. You have newspapers - write to them. Once the public conscience is aroused, the fear of old age will be banished for ever. The demand should be, "This system must go."