

**Gheel : the city of the simple / by the author of "Flemish interiors".**

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GHEEL,  
THE CITY OF THE SIMPLE.



1875

# GHEEL

## THE CITY OF THE SIMPLE.

BY THE  
AUTHOR OF "FLEMISH INTERIORS."

For he that is of Reason's skill bereft  
And wants the staffe of Wisdome him to stay,  
Is lyke a shippe in midst of tempest left  
Withouten helme or pilot her to sway:  
Full sad and dreadfull is that shippe's event;  
So is the man that wants entendement.

SPENSER.

LONDON:  
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1869.

LONDON

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DEDICATED

AS A TRIBUTE OF SURVIVING REGARD AND ESTEEM

*In the Memory of*

THE DISTINGUISHED AND LAMENTED BELGIAN  
SAVANT AND PHILANTHROPIST,

M. EDOUARD-ANTOINE DUCPÉTIAUX,

INSPECTEUR GÉNÉRAL, HONORAIRE, DES PRISONS ET ÉTABLISSEMENTS

DE BIENFAISANCE,

MEMBRE DE L'ACADÉMIE,

MEMBRE CORRESPONDANT DE L'INSTITUT DE FRANCE,

SÉCRÉTAIRE GÉNÉRAL DU CONGRÈS DE MALINES,

DÉCORÉ DE LA CROIX DE FER,

OFFICIER DE L'ORDRE DE LÉOPOLD, &c. &c. &c.,

BY

ONE WHO IS PROUD TO HAVE POSSESSED HIS FRIENDSHIP.

THE AUTHOR.



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## PREFACE.

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IN offering this little volume to the British public, I am animated by the hope that it may find its way, into the hands, among others, of those who are unhappily so placed as to bear the responsibility of caring and providing for the mentally affected.

To such, the information it contains ought to be of the greatest practical value. It reveals to them a secret after which their hearts must long have yearned, and happily not only a secret, but an available fact—that their afflicted charges need not be subjected to incarceration, restrictions, coercion,



and, we fear we must add, violence, in order to bring them to conform to "what is for their good."

It is all very well to deny that violence is resorted to in the treatment of the insane—to speak of it as obsolete, and to represent the method adopted in our day as altogether reformed, because it is in some degree modified: I honestly believe there is not a country in civilised Europe, and not a lunatic asylum, perhaps, in Belgium itself—with the exception of Gheel—where humanity is not, occasionally, more or less grievously outraged. My convictions are not founded on any random hypothesis, and I speak modestly, but from wide observation, having personally visited these abodes of humiliation and misery, within a range including England, France, Belgium, Prussia, Austria and Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain.

No doubt a most important and salutary advance has been effected all over the world in the management of the insane, and the horrors to which they were formerly subjected, and which we shudder to think of, are happily, and we may hope, for ever,

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abolished; but it is not possible—whatever may be the good-will of those to whose care they are committed—to remove the evils which still survive in their treatment; for they are absolutely inevitable under ordinary circumstances. Gheel, therefore, stands alone in its superiority; and it would be very difficult, if not impossible, even to create imitations of this unique locality.

Setting aside the peculiar qualities of the air and soil, to which native physicians attribute the most important properties, where could we find another village-population—much less a number of adjacent populations—willing to devote themselves to the cause, worthy to be trusted with so responsible a burden, or in every way efficient in the discharge of the duties it imposes? The antecedents of Gheel are unprecedented, and they form the chief elements of its valuable actualities.

We may build asylums of colossal proportions, we may extend the grounds in which they stand, to the most park-like limits, it will always be an enclosure—a prison on a noble scale, but, a prison still.



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Walled or fenced it must necessarily be; and the moment the restriction of a visible boundary is imposed, the feeling of complete liberty is infringed, the system loses its character, and the principle is no longer the same. We all know the effect of chaining up a dog; the same dog, who will ceaselessly pull at his collar, and howl or whine till he is released, would, in all probability, bask in perfect tranquillity all day on the self-same spot, if the thought of restraint had not been thus practically suggested to him.

The inmate of an asylum is a being in a different category from the inhabitant of a free colony. He feels himself to be the object of continual forethought and watchfulness, which, however humane and judicious, is translated by him into "surveillance." He knows he is there for the purpose of being looked after, and, if possible, cured—cured, alas! of what?—and thus his malady is constantly before his mind; the whole machinery by which he is surrounded recalls it to him at all times; the very tones of compassionate interest in which he is addressed—

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supposing them to be always compassionate—are unconscious echoes of that absorbing thought within, which is day by day, and hour by hour, receiving fresh aggravations, each doing its little best to feed and stimulate the disease which the intention is to alleviate. He lives, in fact—if I may use the expression—in a “vicious circle,” and how he is ever to emancipate himself from it, I confess I cannot imagine.

How often we detect the effect of these baneful influences, in the confidential remarks made to visitors by the inmates of a mad-house! How many among them we find pre-occupied with the thought that they are always being considered and cared for in one way or another, till the consciousness of it becomes a habit of mind with them, rendering some, at once arrogant, suspicious, and cunning, depressing others, while it prejudices the recovery of all, by forming, as it were, a soil in which the malady roots itself more firmly than ever.

“This is *my* palace,” says one. “You see this grand house; this was built on purpose for *me*,”



cries another. A third will do the honours of *his* mansion with an assurance and a conviction which does not even coin itself into words; while the majority exaggerate their eccentricities and extravagances, nine times out of ten, from the mere perverse pleasure of tormenting those they feel to be always "after them," and against whose authority they entertain the most antagonistic and rebellious purposes, knowing how futile it is for them to dispute it.

To go no further than Hanwell—since one instance is as good as a thousand, and I select that, not only as being known, probably, to all my readers, but as being considered one of the largest and best managed institutions of the kind, in the world: I see in the notes I have kept of my visit, that the circumstance which made most impression on me, of all I observed there, was the universal, eager craving for liberty. Ward after ward that we passed through, it was always the same earnest, beseeching cry, piercing to one's very heart. The doctor walked on unmoved; he must have been so used to it! and,

alas! what *could* he do? For myself, I involuntarily sided with the patients, who appeared to me in the character of incarcerated victims, while I felt towards the poor man as if he were their heartless and inexorable despot; my fingers tingled to unbolt the doors, and give the poor wretches that boon they so abjectly entreat, and which I enjoyed, without ever remembering to feel thankful for it!

Besides those who prayed for freedom—prayed like criminals, falling on their knees and clasping their hands to their gaoler as he walked before me—there were some, goaded into desperation, who scowled, threatened, reviled, and following him to the door, would have rushed out after us, had not the keepers interfered to seize and hold them back.

I remember one woman who shook her fist at him, and said, with an expression of vindictiveness almost diabolical:

“Ah! he’s *got* to go mad; I’ve *done* it.” And she laughed with a harsh maniacal roar frightful to hear.

It is a serious question to ask ourselves—Would



these wretched creatures have been wearing away their lives in desponding and ineffectual efforts to escape—would they have been, suicidally, aggravating their dreadful condition had they been left to a freer existence?

Presumably they would not. At Gheel, where they come and go as they please, where they feel themselves as much at liberty as the other inhabitants of the place, and recognise no inequality in their condition, we find they act as they see others act, and it never occurs to them to complain of their position. What should they seek to escape from? the whole place is theirs; if they leave the house, no one asks them whither they are going, or how long they will be absent; and if, through inadvertence, they wander along the road which takes them out of the village, it is never with a view to withdraw themselves, and they are only too thankful to be brought back. Each of the six "*gardes de section*" is responsible for those located within his district, and if he perceive in any unusually vicious lunatic an intention to give his hosts the slip, all he would



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do would be to fasten round his ankles the humane contrivance, which, while it could not hurt a newborn child, would prevent the wearer from running away, and at the same time admit of his being left at large.

Again, placed as they are among the other inhabitants, living the life of the villagers, whose occupations are rarely even suspended on their account, uncontradicted in their caprices, unnoticed for their peculiarities, to which during so many generations, the Gheelois have been habituated, there is no incentive to self-centralisation; and soon—such as are not absolutely incurable—cease to remember they are in any way different from those whose lives and labours they witness and share; thus a fertile cause of irritation is withdrawn, and an immense step is gained towards the removal of a grave fundamental symptom.

How it should happen that the system pursued at Gheel has been successfully working in unobtrusive tranquillity for nearly twelve hundred years, without attracting the attention or exciting the emulation of

other nations, is as mysterious as all else connected with this singular spot ; for singular it is. And we may mention the curious fact, that the aptitude of the Gheelois for the duties which constitute their speciality is confined to themselves and the population of the surrounding hamlets, and continues to be, as it always has been, unshared by the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, who entertain a more than usual prejudice against the insane. But enough has been said here on a subject which will be found fully discussed within.

In the subjoined narrative of my recent visit to this most suggestive place, I have made a point of conscientiously adhering to the facts which came under my observation, my object being to supply authentic information on a serious and important subject, at the risk of presenting my readers with a less entertaining, though certainly not less interesting, volume than might easily be produced out of the materials.

It is for those who peruse it to judge whether it can be turned to account.

## CHAPTER I.

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Travelling in the Campine—Herenthals—The “Saumon”—Its Characteristic Interior—The Chimes—My Fellow-travellers—We make Acquaintance—My Ignorance discovered—“What is Gheel?”—I learn some Local Facts—Hendrik Conscience—Reputation of Bruges—Occupation of the Gheelois—My Visit deferred—Thirteen Years after—The Diligence—A Commercial Traveller—Land in the Campine—Farms—Oolen—A Walk across Country—Social Condition of the Peasants—Derivation of “Campine”—Its Original History—obscure.





# GHEEL.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

Insanus vobis videor : non deprecor ipse

Quo minus insanus.

PETRONIUS.

“GHEEL ! Wie heeft er niet over Gheel hooren spreken ?”

“Gheel ! Who is there who never heard speak of Gheel ?”

Such is the opening line of a little Flemish pamphlet treating of the merits and peculiarities of that singular spot. (I may well call them peculiarities !) And yet—whether to my shame or not I cannot say—but there certainly was a time when I never *had* heard of Gheel. I make the admission frankly and humbly, and I hope my readers, who, I am willing to

believe, are much wiser and better informed than I was, will not think too meanly of me when they read my opening speech and confession.

I was travelling some years ago across the desolate plains of the Campine of Belgium, and had halted for the night at the little primitive inn of the "Saumon," in the once important but now forsaken provincial town of Herenthals.

It was a bitterly cold night, and I felt uncommonly snug in the chimney-corner of that old, hospitable Flemish kitchen. Some travellers, of the commercial class apparently, had arrived by the same diligence from Turnhout, and it was agreed between the hostess and ourselves, that we should mess together, a goose being the only eatable article in guise of a *pièce de résistance* that her larder afforded.

I had been provided with a small table, which I had drawn near the crackling wood-fire, and was occupied in writing, while the savoury bird turned on the spit, offering every moment a browner and more presentable appearance; the good-wife walked to and fro over the bright red tiles, now basting the



roast, now preparing the solid oak table for the repast, while the bright pans and kettles, the queer old lamps and quaint candlesticks, the platters and flagons which adorned the shelves, reflected every flicker on their brazen surfaces; the cat purred beside the hearth, the Dutch clock ticked vehemently, as no doubt it had ticked during the whole of its long life, and as a culminating completion of the "things of Flanders," the melancholy carillon ever and anon chimed out the periods of the hour from the belfry, while the time was repeated as periodically from the tower of the grand old cathedral of Herenthals, a splendid relic of its ancient glory.

I was a middle-aged man even in those days, far advanced into what are forbearingly termed "years of discretion," and yet—proh pudor! up to that moment never had so much as heard of Gheel!

I was the bearer of a letter I had received a few days before, in the "fayre citie of Antwerp," from my friend, Hendrik Conscience, recommending me to the reverend father superior of a venerable monastery of Premonstratensians, situated at an outlying

locality called Tongerlo, and I was now on my way to explore this place, rarely visited by strangers, and, at Conscience's request, to receive the hospitality of the simple-minded but wealthy monks of the order, who had inherited the old building and its adjacent lands, generation after generation, from mediæval times.

The loquacious chimes told out another quarter, with their "strange unearthly music," when punctual to the moment, mine hostess announced that supper was on table, and we all took our places.

My companions were talkative enough, but unfortunately for me, their talk was all poured out in Flemish, not one word of which conveyed a single definite idea to my mind. At length they began to observe that I remained silent, and it seemed to me that they had some remote suspicion I was a spy, and that my object was to listen to their conversation without committing myself by any remarks, for I perceived they suddenly ceased speaking, and eyed me now and then in a way which was not altogether reassuring. At length one, who seemed rather superior to



the others in intelligence as well as in manners, seemed resolved to take the bull by the horns, and turning to me, said in a polite tone and in very good French :

“ Monsieur est Francais ? ”

“ Du tout, monsieur,” I replied ; “ mais je vois avec plaisir que vous parlez une langue que je connais comme la mienne.”

“ A la bonne heure,” ejaculated the young man ; “ dans ce cas là, nous allons pouvoir vous mettre des nôtres. Messieurs,” continued he, addressing the other two who formed his party, “ voici un bon compagnon, que ne se tenait à l’écart, que parcequ’il ne connaissait pas notre patois ; faisons l’amende honorable, mettons nous au Français.”

A cordial assent followed this proposal, and I soon felt quite at home among these good Flemings. We talked of old days when England and Flanders were good friends, and of old days when they were bad friends ; we talked of the feeling existing between the two countries now—of Antwerp—of Conscience. Ah ! when we came to Conscience, and I pulled out his very autograph, there was no longer any doubt



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about my welcome among them. I was at once a man and a brother: then we came to Herenthals and its quondam consequence; at last we reached Tongerlo—that is to say we got as far as the important act that it was my next destination, and the more important question of how I was to get there.

“I see but one way,” remarked the youth who had broken the ice: “monsieur must take the diligence to GHEEL.”

“To——?”

“To Gheel,” repeated my fellow-guest, in the most natural tone possible.

“And what is Gheel?” inquired I, without the least suspicion that at that very hour stood recorded against me, in black and white, the condemnatory clause: “Wie heeft er niet over Gheel hooren spreken?”

“What is Gheel!” reiterated my friend, with open eyes and uplifted hands. “What is Gheel! Messieurs! monsieur appears never to have heard of Gheel!”

“Astonishing!” said one.

"Prodigious!" exclaimed the other.

"Where does he come from?" cried my landlady, eyeing me with curiosity.

The very chimes put in their voice at this critical moment; when, humiliated, crestfallen, little, even in my own eyes, I meekly answered in a low, deprecatory voice:

"From Portman-square."

"From——?" shouted all in a breath.

"From Portman-square," replied I, with a little more courage.

"And pray what is Portman-square?"

"Portman-square," said I, "is simply one of the wealthiest, best-frequented, and most important centres of London; and now I think, my good friends, as I am willing to excuse you for being ignorant of this well-known fact until I imparted it to you, you may be indulgent with me, and consent to enlighten me as to what Gheel may be, for I assure you, in sober seriousness, I am totally unacquainted even with its name."

The hearty laugh which followed this explanation



showed me the apologue had been understood, and the younger of the three travellers, taking up his parable, replied:

“ Since you are a stranger in these parts, I will tell you with pleasure all I know about Gheel; for to be quite sincere, although I have often passed nearer to it than even this town, I have never visited the place myself.”

“ Nor I.”

“ Nor I.”

“ Nor I,” said the three voices almost in chorus; and the chimes joined in once more.

I felt pretty sure *they* could not have made the trip, and I could not help thinking, “ Well, upon my word, I am not so far behind them, after all.”

“ But then, you see,” said the first speaker, apologetically, as if he read my thoughts, “ we Flemings are such stay-at-homes.”

“ I know it,” said I; “ my good friend Hendrik Conscience told me, only the other day, in a tone of triumph, that he had never been twenty miles from the place of his birth—*he* who ought to go and collect ideas



from all parts of the world, and then *pose* them in his studio, so as to give them out again, gilded with the sunshine of his own originality."

"Nay, nay, Sir Stranger," said all, "leave us our Conscience as he is; now, he is one by himself; his ideas are all his own, all fresh, all Flemish; there are plenty of other writers who have bastardised theirs in the way you propose."

"Perhaps you are right," said I; "Conscience is a charming writer, no doubt; and his originality is very winning as well as very *piquante*. Let each preserve his speciality; but to return to Gheel."

"To return, as you say, to Gheel. Gheel, then, you must know, is the *pays des fous*." He paused; I stared; he pursued: "Yes, sir, Gheel is, as I have the honour of telling you, the land—the dwelling-place—the country, of the insane. I may call it the 'CITY OF THE SIMPLE.'"

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean that, from time immemorial, the village of Gheel has been the resort of persons too mad to live anywhere else—too mad to live even in Bruges."

“In Bruges?”

“What! don’t you know the saying among us Flemings, to the effect that if we could but close the gates of Bruges we should have shut up all the lunatics of Flanders? Oh yes! the extreme simplicity of the *braves Brugelois* has passed into a proverb not altogether flattering to their intellect.”

“Is there then a lunatic asylum of large proportions at Gheel?”

“Of such large proportions that it includes the whole place; but, understand me, the lunatics at Gheel are not confined in cells, or chambers, or wards, or even gardens; they are at large, loose, unconfined; they live among the people; they go in and out at pleasure; with few exceptions they are left to their own devices, and what is more extraordinary, no harm has ever come of it.”

“You *have* astonished me! But what if they are raving, mischievous, vicious; dangerous, in short, to themselves and others?”

“Why, then they are placed at farm-houses at a distance from the village, and, if it is absolutely neces-



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sary, they have their feet chained about half a yard apart, so that they can still take exercise, but cannot escape ; their hands are in like manner manacled to a certain extent, but still they can use them, and are allowed as much liberty and open air as possible : they are contradicted as little as is consistent with the extent of the malady, and you would be surprised to see how much less violent they are under this than under any other treatment."

"And can any one who chooses, see this place?"

"Undoubtedly ; all is open, all is public, and every traveller who passes through Gheel sees what I have told you, and in all probability a great deal more."

The conversation turned to other topics. My informant knew nothing respecting Gheel but what he had related to me, and this was not enough for my curiosity ; the whole story seemed to me so singular, that, but for the serious tone in which he had spoken, and the corroboration of those present who had acquiesced in his information, I should have thought he had been hoaxing me. I retired to rest full of the subject, and dreamed of dungeons, and chains, and

handcuffs, and whips, and strait-waistcoats, and all the instruments of torture which in former days constituted the ordinary furniture of lunatic asylums; ever and anon I was disturbed, if not altogether awakened, by the indefatigable chimes, which seemed always tauntingly to repeat: "I'd go and see, if I were you. I'd go and see, if I were you."

And I did fully mean to take their advice even after I woke and got up next morning. "Man proposes," however, and "woman disposes." Next morning, on applying for my letters at the post-office, I found a hurried summons from a lady relative, which obliged me to return home and to abandon all my projects of investigation. So Gheel, if it did not altogether go out of my head, passed into the category of visionary possibilities.

Thirteen years later—that is to say, in the year of grace 1868—I was once more travelling in the Campine. As fate would have it, I halted once again at Herenthals, and once more found myself quartered at the "Saumon." I was astonished to see how very little things had changed in the antiquated and un-



pretending little burgh. The only alteration I found was in myself; years had not told on it, as they had on me! Hélas! As the French say, “Il était passé beaucoup d’eau sous le pont depuis ce temps là!”

I sat in the same chimney-corner, I slept in the same bed. I lay awake listening to the same chimes; I fell asleep, and they rang in my ears as they had, thirteen years before: “I’d go and see, if I were you. I’d go and see, if I were you.”

“I *will* go and see, this time,” said I, as I rose, for it was spring-tide now. “I *will* go to Gheel this very day. Better late than never; and I am never likely to be so near this wonderful place again. I wonder if all that man told me was true—whether it’s true now—and I wonder what’s become of him!” I continued, soliloquising, as I stropped my razor, “and of the other two worthies, and of my landlady, whom I do not see here this time! Ah, well! it’s no use wondering, for I shall never know. But Gheel is still in my power, and that I *will* fathom before the day is an hour older.”

The reader will perceive how much I had advanced

in the time, and how the garrulity of age had gained upon me.

I walked into the inn-yard.

“When does the diligence start for Gheel?” said I.

“It doesn’t start from here now,” said the ostler, “but it will pass through Herenthals in about two hours, and will stop about two minutes for the mail.”

“But I want to go by it?”

“To Gheel?”

“Ay. Is there any objection?”

“No *objection*,” said the man, dryly, “but there may be a difficulty.”

“What difficulty?” said I, “passports are obsolete, I believe, now?”

“Oh, it isn’t a question of passports; it is a matter of *places*.”

“Well, now,” thought I, for I believe I have grown very superstitious as I have become older, “there certainly is a fatality about this. I suppose I am not destined to gratify my curiosity, after all:” and I walked in again. 14



Determined not to be thwarted, however, I sat down to breakfast, and as, notwithstanding my years, I have always, since my Oxford days, maintained my character as a walker, I determined that if the diligence refused to carry me, my own boots should; and then tranquilly awaited the event.

As it turned out, my resolution in this respect was not put to the test; the diligence came rumbling over the stones at about one o'clock, and after driving up to the post-office, crossed the road and halted before the door of the "Saumon."

"Place pour un?" said I, with a note of interrogation after it, to the conducteur.

"Ya, mynheer," replied that functionary.

"Allez," said the ostler, grumpily; "vous trouverez de la place, il n'y a dans l'intérieur qu'un voyageur en tabac."

"Tant mieux," said I; and I climbed in.

On we rolled, first over the stones, and then along the flat but uneven road which traverses the Campine. There was an improvement in that, and my fellow-traveller informed me that large speculations in land had been taking place here.

“A few years ago,” said he, “three hundred thousand acres of this Campine land were regarded as utter waste—you might have squatted here, and enclosed as many of them as you pleased; a few later, and you might have had them for the asking; but now that buying has once begun, the price has risen, and I consider it is selling for quite as much as it is worth. It is,” he added, “an ungrateful soil as it stands; nothing will grow on it, and by the time you have bought it, drained it, manured it, and brought it into cultivation—to say nothing of loss of interest on your capital, which lies idle all the time—it has run away with too much of your profits to pay as a speculation. It is true,” he continued, “that here and there you find fertile patches, and these have turned out extremely<sup>n</sup> productive, but then Flemish industry and Flemish economy combine to render husbandry almost a speciality of the country, and if these barren moorlands could be turned into teeming fields it would be by the hands of Flemish agriculturists.”

“You seem well acquainted with these parts.”



“ I have reason to know the country well. I am a Dutchman myself, but many years of my life have been passed in travelling over Belgium.”

“ And pray by whom is the Campine cultivated ?”

“ These small farms that we find around us here are mostly petty speculations undertaken by labouring farmers on their own account, but where it has been taken in hand in earnest it is committed to gangs or colonies, consisting some of paupers, some of convicts, some of reformatory prisoners. The present king,” he said, “ has of late been buying up large tracts of the Campine for agricultural experiments.”

If the cultivation of these heaths manifested an advance, the travelling in this district certainly did not, for anything more wretched than the jog-trot pace of the two miserable horses and the rattling of the crazy vehicle, I never experienced ; then the frequent halts and stoppages by the way rendered the whole affair as tedious as well could be. At Oolen we waited fully half an hour, so that I had time to

scan the primitive little village, its quaint peculiarities and homely population, to my heart's content. Its antiquated draw-well was almost as biblical in character as the *noria* of Spain, and as for field labour, it seemed to be chiefly accomplished by women, children, and bullocks; of men and horses I saw few.

I sauntered into the village church, and was struck by its size and traces of bygone importance, and not less by its architectural beauty. All down the nave, the arches which divided it from the aisles were supported by clustered columns and adorned with life-size statues representing the apostles, admirably carved, while the pulpit was of that wonderful wood sculpture recognised as a "thing of Flanders." It consists of a life-size group representing St. Martin sharing his cloak with the beggar, and is a fine specimen of the art.

Here, again, among the "things of Flanders" was a jangled old carillon, the second chiming of which seemed to recall our driver to the recollection that there were duties in his career, as well as pleasures.



I was about to re-enter the vehicle, when my fellow-traveller, who, it appeared, frequently passed this way, proposed to me, as I seemed interested in the scenery and character of the Campine, that we should walk across from Oolen to Gheel, and as we proceeded, we could take the opportunity of observing the agricultural operations of the natives; he also offered to call with me at one or two farm-houses by the way, and so take me through the small scattered hamlets which lie between Oolen and Gheel, that I might obtain an idea of the mode of life of the rude peasant population of these moors.

The suggested expedition suited me admirably, so we bade a joyful farewell to the lazy diligence; and I must say, that while the walk interested me greatly, it revealed to me a degree of poverty among these people of which I had no idea.

They seemed literally to live from hand to mouth, and to possess nothing beyond the requirements of the hour—a striking contrast to the thriving and industrious farmers who till the more populous and fertile districts of East and West Flanders. My

companion assured me that scarcely any of them would be found, when one meal was over, to have a crust of bread in the house towards the next, and it always puzzled a stranger to know whence their means of subsistence was to come, as there seemed no ostensible evidence of any within any reasonable distance. We found, however, that some parts of the Campine have proved excellent both as pasture and arable land, supplying the markets with grain, cattle, and dairy produce. The few small farmyards which came under our notice seemed to be poorly stocked, and all operations were carried on on a petty scale, a mode of proceeding in itself a great drawback to agricultural success. We saw little or no machinery, and it was evident that the capitals of these cultivators did not admit of large investments in plant.

We stopped at a blacksmith's shop, where I was surprised at the roughness and clumsiness of the work and the primitiveness of the tools.

In the course of our ramble my companion called my attention to a morass, which he told me had, a



few years ago, been the scene of a serious disaster. A regiment of cavalry, he said, crossing the Campine had got entangled there, being wholly unconscious of the existence of this treacherous ground, and although the greater number were stopped in time by the warning of the vanguard, several men from among these, sunk into the swamp before they could be rescued, and perished with their horses.

The derivation of Campine, or Kempen as it is called in Flemish, is from the word "kamp," signifying a camp, and an annual encampment, by way of practising the men in camp-life, which takes place near Beverloo, in the midst of the Campine.

I was, on the whole, well pleased to have made this little circuit on foot; but we did not gain time by the move, as it was towards evening when we entered Gheel.

The nomenclature of Gheel has been variously interpreted, but the most popular opinion attributes it to the yellow colour of the soil, "die er geelachtig uitziet." Obscure as is its early history, the Roman remains found in and around it, testify to the belief

that at some time or other it was in possession of that ubiquitous people, whose traces are so wide-spread, so unmistakable, and enduring.

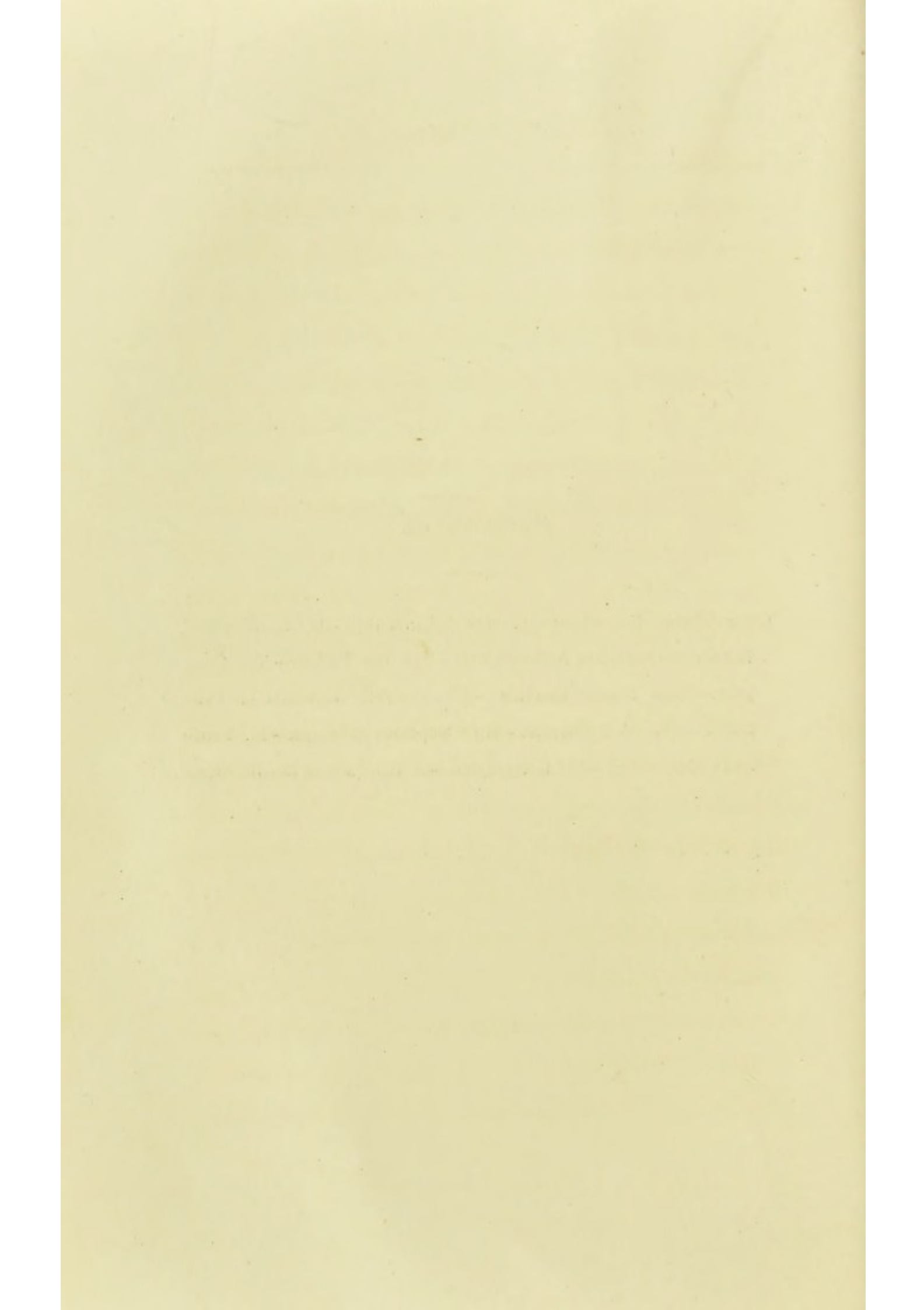
Its annals, however, during the first five or six centuries resemble those of all other conquered people, and offer but little interest to the present generation ; I shall, therefore, make no apology for relinquishing all research into that remote period, and when I resume the antecedents of Gheel, as I hope I shall in my next chapter, I will carry my readers back no further than the seventh century.



## CHAPTER II.

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General Description—Inns—"Armes de Turnhout"—My Landlord and Landlady—Primitive Arrangements—The Inn Parlour—The Company—Their Mental Condition—Characteristic Incidents—A Political Maniac—A Delusionist—My Companion at Supper—My Landlord's Story—Legend of S. Dymphna—A Word about Dr. Bulckens.





## CHAPTER II.

'Tis going, I own, like the "Knight of the woful countenance," in quest of melancholy adventures,—but I am never so perfectly conscious of the existence of a soul within me, as when I am entangled in them.

STERNE.

GHEEL is not one of those picturesque spots with which one must infallibly fall in love at first sight, but its simple character, its two ancient churches, and venerable "Gast-Huis," impart to it a certain interest, and there are circumstances under which it might be attractive. It has been said that an uncomely woman does not appear ugly on her wedding morning, and a village must be uncouth and hideous indeed if it can repel us on a bright summer's day or a still moonlight night. After all, say what we may,

and think what we will, it is by external circumstances that our admiration is influenced, and the presence of light and shade makes *all* the difference in a view, whether architectural or of the landscape family, so there be but a little local beauty of form to aid the effect.

Gheel has that quaint Dutch-toy-like character which marks, more or less, all Flemish villages. None of the houses have more than two storeys, many no more than one; and as for shop-fronts, there are few to distinguish the place of business from an ordinary dwelling. Here and there, are a few antique signs; and wherever any name, calling, or public notification appears, it is written up in Flemish. The village consists principally of one long straggling street, which appears wider than it really is, because of the unpretending architecture and low stature of the houses. There is a calm, reposeful air about the spot, and the turf and foliage, mingling here and there with its buildings, add their measure of cheerfulness. The village green is utterly wanting in those attributes which accompany that



feature in an English country place, and the poorer lanes into which it diverges exhibit much squalid poverty. Still the population is industrious and hard-working, and their occupation being chiefly agricultural, their circumstances are very dependent on the nature of the harvest.

Gheel has of late years considerably increased in extent and population, and no doubt the completion of the institution now planted in its centre will tend to enlarge and improve it still more.

I found the place boasted two inns; but the superiority of the "*Armes de Turnhout*" was so unquestionable, that I at once resolved to turn in the direction of that house. My fellow-traveller having some reason for preferring the "*Hotel de la Campine*," as it called itself, I relinquished that to him; and we parted here.

The "*Armes de Turnhout*," though a very respectable house, and unusually clean, inviting, and roomy, was too homely to be dignified with the title of "*hotel*."

A comfortable-looking parlour with sanded floor,

according to Flemish custom, communicated with the dining-room on one side, and with the kitchen on the other. The bedrooms were spacious and lofty, not overburdened with furniture, but reasonably supplied, while excellent beds with spring mattresses, and invitingly clean bed-linen, compensated for the simplicity of all the arrangements.

The landlord and his wife were as handsome a young couple as one could wish to see, and their presence threw a great deal of life and decorous gaiety into the circle of habitués who sat smoking and sipping their beer round the fire, and making themselves thoroughly at home in that same inn-parlour.

It was a cool evening in early spring, and some ten or twelve guests were seated there, variously occupied, but, though there was some little merriment, all was perfectly orderly. Some were playing at dominoes, others were watching the game; one was reading a Flemish paper, and others were chatting. I was prepared to meet with strange incidents in a place, the description of which had alone sufficed to bring me there; but when I was privately informed



by the landlord that more than half of the people by whom I was surrounded were lunatics, I confess I *was* somewhat startled. Not a single expression in the conversation I overheard, nor a gesture in the conduct I witnessed, would have led me to make this discovery ; and even after I had been informed of the fact, the utmost I could detect was a slightly exaggerated taciturnity in some, and extra amount of loquacity in others, with sometimes a depressed expression of countenance.

“Do you observe,” said one of the guests—a respectable-looking mechanic—drawing me aside, “that serious-looking old fellow, steadily gazing on the *Pachter van Gheel*, which I ought to tell you is our local paper? Get him on the subject of politics, and you would be surprised how he would come out. One evening not long ago, a stranger passing through the place was stopping here ; he spent the evening in our guest-room, just as you may be doing, when Messire Jehan happening to be in a talkative humour, accosted him, and soon found out that the stranger was of opposite opinions to his own. This gentleman,

having no suspicion that the man who addressed him was of unsound mind, was soon engaged in a warm discussion upon the policy of the government, when, to his utter amazement, Messire Jehan, who found he had the worst of the argument, and furious at the idea of being beaten, stopped suddenly short, and assuming a menacing gesture, said :

“ ‘ Listen to me, monsieur. It is evident you know not to whom you are speaking. I am the presiding genius of this country—the directing but invisible influence with whom it rests to decree every step in its destiny. Without me, Belgium could not exist a day. Every night before I retire to rest, I send my orders to the king; I pass the day in reading the papers, in comparing events, and in studying the signs of the times; and every night I record my observations, and transmit my decisions thereon to his Majesty, who is a mere puppet in my hands. Good-night, sir; the hour is come at which this solemn duty demands my undivided attention. Another time I advise you to inquire who you are talking with, before you commit yourself so rashly.’ ”



“ With this he took his departure. The gentleman could not recover from his surprise ; he looked round him for an explanation.

“ ‘ Sir,’ said I, ‘ pay no attention to the poor fellow ; he is harmless enough ; but on that subject——’

“ ‘ Completely mad,’ said, for me, that droll-looking figure you see there stretched before the fire, and looking perfectly happy.

“ ‘ Com—pletely mad, poor fellow !’ he repeated. ‘ He has been writing to all the crowned heads in Europe these twenty years ; but I assure you he’s a good soul for all that ; and I can tell you, sir, he is the only man in Gheel who believes me when I tell him I have a purse of gold between my coat and the lining. *You* hear it, I’m sure,’ continued he, hold-up the skirt of the garment and shaking it before me. ‘ There it is—chink, chink ; give me your hand ; *there*, you feel it, don’t you ? You can count the pieces : I know exactly how many there are, though I have never seen them. I can’t get them out, though I have often unpicked the seam ; still there they are plain enough—chink, chink. Don’t you hear ?’

“ ‘Well,’ . . . said the stranger, hesitating, ‘I can’t exactly say I do.’

“ ‘You don’t!’ roared the other, becoming quite excited: ‘You don’t! why, then, *you’re* mad too, and all the people in Gheel *are* fools; it’s the custom to say so, and with the two exceptions of myself and Messire Jehan, I verily believe all have their intellects more or less impaired.’ ”

My first impulse was to laugh heartily at this anecdote, notwithstanding the melancholy facts it implied; my second to cast a furtive glance at my informant, who, it suddenly struck me, might, in the course of another minute, betray the cloven hoof, and, while calling others mad, in *his* turn begin to rave about some equally unaccountable delusion. I thanked him, however, for the trouble he had taken about me, and was not altogether at ease till he moved away.

I found afterwards, however, that he was one of the most trustworthy and esteemed among the *nourriciers*, and had had a great deal of experience with the insane.

I had ordered supper, and in due course of time one



of the female garçons—for the waiting was all done by waitresses—came to apprise me that I was "servi." As my object was to learn all particulars of the place, and I saw in my intelligent-looking landlord a promising informant, I begged he would accord me the pleasure of his company, and desired him to order up a bottle of his best vin de Tours, that we might discuss it together.

So now I was in a fair way to learn all it behoved me to know about Gheel.

In a few minutes Boniface appeared. He had a frank, honest, pleasing manner, and I was struck by the extreme tact with which he recognised and kept his place, while chatting much to the purpose, and satisfying all my queries; for he was withal very communicative, and seemed nothing loth to impart his knowledge. Indeed, the history of his native village echoed like sweet music in his ears, and he was ready to converse as long as I pleased on the congenial theme.

"Yours seems a good substantial house," said I, "and one of the largest, I suppose, in the village?"

“ Yes, sir, I may say it is, since we have made the new additions to it.”

“ How long ago may that have been? I suppose you had some reason for increasing the dimensions of your hotel?”

“ About eight years ago, you see, monsieur, I lost my father, and came into possession of this old house, which has been in our family for generations—for all is traditional here. Soon after, I married, and began to think it would be well if I could enlarge my business. About the same time, or a little later, there was a great change in the organisation of what I may call our *spécialité*, and the place became more frequented in consequence.”

“ And what may be your ‘*spécialité*?’ ”

“ Oh! I thought monsieur knew all about that; but if you want me to tell you the history of our village, I shall have to go back a long way, and my recital might fatigue you.”

“ By no means, my good friend; on the contrary, I am immensely interested in all you have to tell me; so fill your glass and mine, and let me hear your story.”



“My story, then, monsieur, or rather the history of Gheel, dates back as far as the seventh century, and we owe its origin, indirectly, to a heathen king of Ireland.”

“That is curious indeed.”

“It is mysterious, at all events, and we may learn from it, how good often comes out of evil, and how the passions of one man, and that man a bad man, may influence the destinies of subsequent generations for centuries—who knows?—perhaps, until the end of the world.”

“You are a philosopher, I perceive, as well as an innkeeper, and I can tell you your reflection is a very sensible one; but let us hear how his majesty of Ireland misbehaved himself.”

“Ah! monsieur may well say that, for his conduct was as bad as bad could be. But then we must bear in mind he was an unenlightened Pagan, and never had the help of the grace of God to keep him from going wrong; so he listened to no voice but that of his own evil will, and was feared and hated, as all tyrants should be.

“The legend relating to this matter,” continued

mine host, "states that this heathen monarch had a gentle and beautiful wife, who was as much revered and beloved as her unpopular husband was dreaded and disliked. He led her a sad life, not only because he was a coward, and the weakness of her sex placed her in his power, but because, under the teaching of an aged priest, named Gerebern, she had embraced the Christian faith. Odilla died while still in the bloom of her youth and beauty, for the king had married her when scarce fifteen years of age, and she was then little more than thirty, leaving an only daughter to inherit her charms and her virtues, and to deplore what, to her, was no ordinary loss.

"This child had been the innocent cause of much of her father's ill-treatment of his queen. Disappointed that she had not given him a son to continue his succession and strengthen his dynasty, he ordered the helpless babe to be removed from his presence, and never to be brought before him again. Odilla, terrified at the cruel and tyrannical command, concealed the child as long as she could in the neighbourhood of the palace, entrusting it to a faithful



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servant, through whose assistance she obtained daily access to it ; but when the time came for Dymphna (by which name she had been secretly baptised) to receive instruction befitting her rank, finding her husband as averse as ever to see his daughter, Odilla committed her to the hands of Gerebern, who carried her by night to a convent of holy nuns just beyond the borders of the king's territory.

“ The queen, finding herself on her death-bed some few years after this, despatched thither her trusty friend and counsellor, bidding him inform the child of her death, and watch over her interests when she should be no more : not long after, she departed this life.

“ The despotic monarch, unused to see his inclinations thwarted, was first aghast, and then furious at his wife's death, for he loved her as much as he was capable of loving anything besides himself, and, when she was gone, he found a dreary blank in his existence, of which, till then, he had never realised to himself the possibility.

“ Festivities, hunts, games, were devised for his

diversion, but, moody and irritable, the king rejected all the efforts of his court to console or amuse him; nothing would calm his ill-temper, and, at length, no one dared venture into his presence.

“ One day he suddenly summoned a solemn conclave, and when all were assembled he bade them give him their silent and serious attention. All eyes were fixed on the lips of the man they had so much reason to fear, when he spoke thus :

“ ‘ Be it known unto you all that, whereas our late Queen Odilla, whom we had chosen for ourselves, united in her own individuality all the graces of mind and all the charms of person which made her fit for our companionship, and as she has been removed from us by death, it is our royal will and pleasure that another woman, exactly resembling the late queen in every respect, be immediately found, no matter how or where, and brought to us, that we may establish her in the place of our deceased queen.

“ ‘ As we desire to wait for the performance of this command as short a time as possible, we give you three days—three days and no more—to find this lady, and to convey her into our royal presence ;



and whereas we will load with honours, him among you who obediently and dutifully fulfils our royal command within the prescribed period, in like manner we will load with chains for the rest of your dishonoured lives every man among you if this our order be not executed . . . . see to it.' And the king frowned ominously as he rose to depart. The unhappy courtiers would have thrown themselves at his feet to beg for some modification of these cruel conditions, for they felt the impossibility of satisfying so unreasonable a requirement, but, deaf to their appeal, he strode angrily out of their presence without vouchsafing another look, leaving them in a state of terror and perplexity not easy to describe. On the evening of the second day, when all had come to the gloomy conclusion that they must resign themselves to their hard fate, the oldest and wisest—and perhaps the least scrupulous—among them, convened a council of the rest, and when all were collected and the doors shut :

“ ‘Friends,’ said he, ‘we are in a great strait.’ A universal groan testified to the general acquiescence, and one or two thought it was hardly neces-

sary to call them together to inform them of so obvious a fact. 'Great evils demand great remedies,' continued he, uttering another truism ; still they said nothing, expecting that some sapient remark would follow, seeing that this old gentleman had always enjoyed the reputation of a sage, and behind his back had been surnamed 'The Owl.' 'I see but one expedient that can save us,' pursued the Owl, 'and that is so violent and desperate an one that I hesitate to name it.' A severe fit of coughing here interrupted the speaker, and only increased the vehemence, with which all with one accord exclaimed :

" 'An expedient !' 'Name it !' 'Name it !'

" 'It is this, then,' said he, as soon as silence had been restored ; 'nevertheless, be not too sanguine, for I know not whether you will think that it can be carried out : You all remember that the gentle and beautiful Queen Odilla left a daughter, whom the king would never consent to look upon, and that she was sent by her mother to a convent of nuns, where she still is. I have discovered the retreat of the princess, and my counsel is that we despatch a depu-



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tation thither to demand her person in her father's name, and then conduct her before him at the appointed time ; she is the only woman who is likely to resemble the late queen.'

" 'The measure is, indeed, a hazardous one, but it is well discerned,' replied the others ; 'and as we have no alternative we must avail ourselves of this, and thank the gods that they have inspired you with this, possibly, happy thought.'

" 'It now behoves us,' continued the sage, 'to consider the means ; and first I must obtain from the king his ring, without which credential it might be difficult to persuade the maiden to follow us.'

" 'This,' observed the next in wisdom, 'may be effected by telling his majesty it is needed to gain possession of the person he has commanded to be sought, but without enlightening him as to her individuality.'

"The preliminaries thus agreed upon, it was not likely that either courage or resources would be wanting to men, over whose heads the sword hung by a single hair. The person of the princess was

secured as proposed, and at the very hour fixed by the tyrant himself, she was led into his presence, full of filial respect and affection, but surrounded by her conductors with all the pomp and pageantry they could contrive, to enhance the occasion.

“The king, all eager to embrace his promised bride, ordered her to be unveiled ; but what was his astonishment, not to say alarm, to behold before him the living image of the wife he had mourned, restored to the budding youth and artless beauty which had first vanquished his savage heart.

“Scarcely believing his senses, the king stood pale and motionless, as if he were confronted with a being from the world of spirits ; Dymphna was the first to speak.

“ ‘Father !’ said she, ‘is it to be reconciled to me, now my mother is no more, that you have sent for me——’ But the king—to whom these simple words betrayed all—enraged at the obstacle they suggested, turned to his assembled court, and bursting into a fury,

“ ‘Is it to mock me,’ said he, ‘vile sycophants,



that you have done this! . . . but——’ he added, in an altered tone, as his glaring eye fell on the lovely girl who stood before him, not knowing how to interpret the scene of which she was the unconscious heroine. ‘I care not *whose* daughter she is; I defy your insolence, and, be she who she may, I make her my wife. Lovely Dymphna!’ he continued, approaching the trembling girl, ‘you will consent to share my throne, and to accept my heart, which I offer you with the affection of the most devoted of lovers, throwing myself at your feet, to await your gracious consent.’

“ ‘Oh, father!’ said the maiden, terrified at the king’s vehemence, ‘will you not let me be to you a daughter, to love and serve you with filial duty, to mourn with you my gentle mother’s death, to——’

“ ‘Nay, nay, girl, I want no words, neither do I want any daughter; all I desire of you is the *obedience* of a daughter and the affection of a *wife*.’ And this time he spoke angrily, and with the tone of one who would enforce by violence what he could not obtain by cajolery.

“Dymphna was as discreet and prudent as she was beautiful, and with the quick tact of a woman she saw her only chance of escape was in a seeming acquiescence.

“‘Father,’ said she again—and the king frowned at the expression, but he listened eagerly—‘my religion teaches me that filial submission is one of the first of my duties, but I crave of your tenderness a brief delay: let me retire with my women for the rest of this day, and to-morrow let me again be brought into your presence.’ These words she uttered with so much dignity and self-respect, that the king was, as it were, awed, and he suffered her to withdraw, promising to molest her no further that day.

“Dymphna had thus gained the respite she needed, and no sooner had the shades of evening descended on the palace, than closely disguising herself, and accompanied by Gerebern, with whom she had taken secret counsel, also attired in garments unlike his own, she fled from the palace, gained the coast, and crossing the sea to Flanders, landed at Antwerp. Here the fugitives were received with open arms at a convent, where they sought pro-



tection and advice, and after a brief sojourn proceeded through Oolen to the obscure hamlet of Gheel, there hoping to remain concealed, and intending, as a token of their gratitude, to found a house that should be dedicated to God.

“Meantime the king, having discovered the flight of his daughter and the aged Gerebern, tracked and pursued them in hot haste, discovered the route they had followed, pursued them with an armed force, and, remaining at Antwerp, sent his military emissaries in every direction to scour the country and report their whereabouts. Halting at a village not far from Herenthals, called Oolen, a party of these scouts tendered in payment at the inn where they had lodged, some pieces of money which the hostess refused to accept, alleging that she had already been troubled enough with some similar coins, which she had had the greatest difficulty to pass.

“‘And who could you have taken such pieces of?’ said the soldier, on whom a ray of light suddenly burst. ‘You cannot often have people here from our land?’

“‘Oh no, I may say it was the first time I had

ever seen such money, or I should not have risked taking them.'

" 'Then who were the travellers who owned them, and how long since, were they here?'

" 'They were here only a few months ago—a beautiful young lady and an old priest.'

" 'Indeed! And what became of them?'

" 'They went on to a hamlet not far from here, called Gheel, but I don't know if they remained there.'

"On receiving this information, as may be supposed, the king's spies did not let the grass grow under their feet. They scampered off first to Gheel, where they soon learned the objects of their search were safely located, and then back to Antwerp, where their master was awaiting their information with great impatience. No sooner was the king apprised of the fact than he started for the spot indicated, and entering the house where his daughter was, commanded her at once to make preparations for the Pagan marriage, which he told her he was quite determined should now take place. Dymphna,



finding further subterfuge useless, told her persecutor, mildly but firmly, that nothing should induce her to consent to so odious a proposal. The king's rage at this unqualified refusal knew no bounds ; he swore, he threatened, he raved, but to no purpose ; Dymphna neither lost her composure nor wavered in her reply ; she simply fell upon her knees, and clasping her uplifted hands, invoked the mercy of Heaven upon herself and the forgiveness of God upon her wretched father. The tyrant was now, however, only more exasperated than before, and calling to his guard, commanded them to seize the maiden and destroy her. Strange to say, not one of them so much as moved ; they seemed awed by the youth, beauty, and innocence of the defenceless victim. On this, the king, no longer able to contain himself, fell upon her himself, seizing her by her long waving hair, and mortally wounding Gerebern, who tried to throw himself between them. With a cry of horror Dymphna sank at his feet, bathed in the blood of her old and trusty friend, and as she lay there swooning and helpless, the barbarous father severed her beauti-

ful head from her body. Having perpetrated this savage and revolting crime, he hastened from the spot and returned to his northern home, leaving the mangled remains of his victims to be torn by the dogs.

“The blood of these saintly martyrs had, however, irrigated the ground to some purpose, for, says the legend, so numerous were the miracles which occurred on the consecrated spot, that the circumstance led the inhabitants to search for their bones among the heather which now covered the place.

“Excavations were accordingly made, and, to the surprise of those who directed operations, they came upon two magnificent white marble tombs, adorned with elaborate sculpture and enriched with gilding, the handiwork of angels, who in the night-time had come down from heaven to enshrine their remains.

“It was on the 15th of May—a day ever sacred in the annals of Gheel—that all the population, preceded by the priests and their acolytes, all robed in white, and bearing lighted tapers in their hands, repaired in solemn procession to the site, and having removed



these tombs, transported them to the consecrated vaults of the church, then in course of construction, and thenceforward dedicated to S. Dymphna.

“Such,” said mine host, “is the legend which has been handed down for twelve centuries among our population, and is devoutly believed by all Flanders. Now, you must know, sir, that by degrees the fame of the miraculous cures obtained at the tomb of S. Dymphna, soon spread to the surrounding villages, and from these to others yet further removed, so that it became the object of daily pilgrimages, and it was chiefly the insane and idiotic,” said my landlord, very gravely, “who sought the protection and intercession of the saint. At first the few, comparatively speaking, who resorted hither, were lodged in small cells or chambers built for their reception adjoining the Church of S. Dymphna, and placed under the charge of an old woman, who had a permanent dwelling there, and cooked for and attended on the guests.

“As the number increased it became necessary to extend the accommodation, and in process of time pilgrims were received by nearly all the inhabitants ;

the better class taking those who could afford to pay for superior treatment, and the poorer getting themselves lodged and boarded where they could. As the system developed itself, the organisation improved, and a general scale of charges was established, which, however, in most cases was scarcely more than remunerative.

“The inhabitants seem to have had a peculiar aptitude for the calling, and to have always taken a particular pleasure in showing their hospitality to those who came to establish themselves on the spot.

“Thus, from little to more, the custom went on, until Gheel became, and has continued, the recognised resort of those afflicted with mental infirmities. The inhabitants, from long habit and traditional usage, seem intuitively to understand the management and general treatment of this suffering section of the community, who now form an absolute colony, and constitute a large proportion of the population.

“Now, monsieur,” observed my landlord, “I think I must have pretty well exhausted your patience, though to bring the history of Gheel down



to the present day, I ought to have entered into an account of the improvement introduced here, about eight years ago, by one Dr. Bulckens, now a great man, but formerly one of the people, who has reached his present high position of physician to her Majesty the Empress of Mexico, entirely by his own skill, knowledge, and energy."

"Well, my good friend, you talk like a book," said I, "and I thank you most heartily for the truly interesting details you have supplied me with. As to the more recent particulars, do not trouble yourself about them; I have a letter of introduction from a common friend to Dr. Bulckens himself, and I have no doubt that from his lips I shall glean all circumstances connected with his work, if he should be in the place when I call on him to-morrow morning."

The old clock had recorded the hour of ten, the guests had retired from the parlour one by one, and when we at length rose from table, the last had departed.

Early hours, it was evident, formed the order of the day, and apparently the order of the night, for

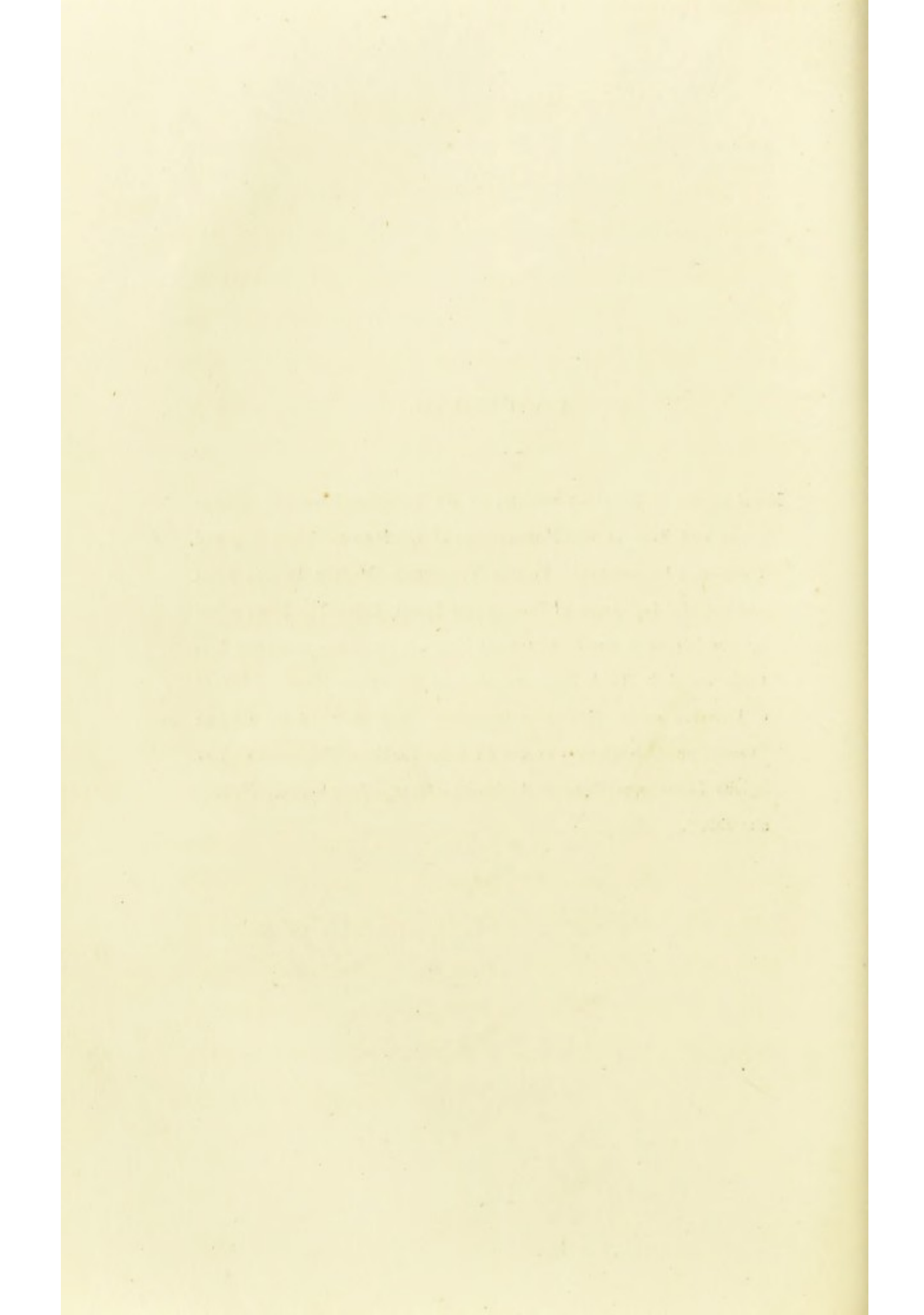
when, on retiring to my room, I looked out into the moonlit streets, they were entirely deserted, and the only sound that disturbed the solemn silence was the shrill cry of the night-birds, which ever and anon broke from the venerable tower of S. Dymphna's Church.



### CHAPTER III.

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Moral Aspect of Gheel—Character of the Inhabitants—Their Intelligence and Tact in the Management of the Insane—Their long and traditional Experiences—Former Treatment—Modern Improvement—Healthful Influences of Liberty and Family Life—The Place taken by the Insane in the Family when they are received—Negative Methods adopted—Their Success—Various Instances—Entire Absence of Coercion unless absolutely necessary—and then, of the mildest Description—Attachment of the Lunatics for their *Nourriciers*—Religious Influences—Peculiar Aptitudes—Occupations—Their Nature and Effect.





## CHAPTER III.

*Nil homine, in terrâ, spirat miserum magis almâ.—LIPSIUS.*

THERE is something unspeakably distressing in entering an asylum for lunatics—in feeling that we are surrounded by human creatures occupying an undefined mean between ourselves and the inferior creatures—in looking on countenances, human in form, but deficient in expression, lacking that indescribable spark which reveals to us the presence of mental power, and constitutes the almost immeasurable difference between man—however humble in intelligence—and brutes.

If we are thus impressed when visiting a limited

community of these ill-fated beings—from sharing whose misfortune, no one alas ! is secure—what must be our sensations on arriving in a town of which a large proportion of the population, though to all appearance using the freedom and enjoying the privileges of sane persons, consists nevertheless of irresponsible agents, deprived of the light of reason, and, at best, but living automata, or human machines ?

Such is Gheel ; and the interest with which it is explored by all thinking persons would, but for the admirable and efficacious system pursued there, be as sad as it is unique.

Few of the insane sequestered here, however, are dangerous ; and of those brought hither in a violent state, few continue so, under the mild régime to which they conform. The denomination they receive in the colony—for so we may indeed term it—is that of “Innocents ;” and it not only well expresses their harmless and pitiable condition, but is eminently suggestive of the estimation in which they are held, and the tender and compassionate solicitude of which they are the object.



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The good people of Gheel are rough campagnards, and remarkable rather for their honest and simple rusticity, than for the sharpness of their wit or the civilisation of their manners ; though, in the gentleness, forbearance, and tact with which they treat their protégés, there is a native delicacy and refinement which we hardly know how to account for.

The simplicity, however, of their minds, and the uncultivated condition of their ideas, no doubt, contribute greatly to diminish the shock with which, under ordinary circumstances, a sane and an insane person are wont to meet, and the approximation is additionally facilitated by the traditional habit, transmitted through the amazing space of twelve centuries.

The Gheelois have given proof of a considerable amount of intelligence of a rare sort, in the uses to which they have turned their experience in the treatment of the mentally afflicted ; and whereas tradition tells of a time, even here, when maniacs were indiscriminately loaded with chains, fettered with manacles, confined in strong vaults, restrained by ligatures, and occasionally subjected to punishment ; all

these harsher means of management have long since given place to a mild, gentle, and confiding course, except in cases where the patient is absolutely dangerous to himself or others. When such an instance occurs, he is removed to some of the outlying dwellings or hamlets in the immediate environs, but always within the six sections under the supervision of the six "*gardes*" attached to the institution, and there, if absolutely necessary, and not otherwise, the patient—who is still allowed as much liberty as possible consistently with safety—is manacled with a small, light, padded chain, which—as his symptoms are closely watched by the *garde de section* and head-physician—is removed as soon as ever his condition admits of the relaxation.

The more tractable are by this means kept aloof from those, the degree of whose malady requires a different régime, and these are preserved from the aggravation consequent on the sight of a severity, of which it is undesirable they should even suspect the existence; while none are subjected to the slightest restraint who can in any way be managed without it.



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The healthy influence of family-life is the prevailing element in the system adopted at Gheel ; and while it constitutes the peculiarity of that system, it is the great secret of its success.

The arrival of a boarder in a family is generally celebrated as a little family festivity. The simple-minded Campinois, whose wife is the presiding genius of the household, provides, on the occasion, a "reception meal ;" the children wear their Sunday clothes ; if in winter, another log is added to the fire, the brass skillets and pans receive an extra rub, a clean cloth covers the board, and the cottage interior seems to smile on the new-comer. The intercourse, begun under these auspices, is maintained in the same spirit, and soon the guest reciprocates the confidence with which he is treated. He makes a friend of his host, pours the recital of his troubles into his ear, and receives consolation and advice. Sharing in the prosperity and adversity of the family, partaking of their daily life, he attends with them the religious service of the church, he kneels with them at the angelus-bell, he joins in their family devotions, he

becomes in fact one of themselves, and he feels himself surrounded by the most endearing ties—he who before was misunderstood, perhaps ill-treated, the scorn and the disgrace of those to whom he was allied by blood, meets in these hospitable strangers a whole family regarding him with but one sentiment, that of benevolence and affection. He who was nobody has become the object of every one's regard and attention; he rises in his own estimation, and soon, by his efforts to show his gratitude, feels that he is in a position to earn the kindness he at first received gratuitously. Gradually he gains the level of those by whom he is surrounded, and often this simple and spontaneous resuscitation of moral vigour, alone suffices to effect his cure.

The daily familiar intercourse pervading all the habits and practices of life, imperceptibly regulating its duties, and unobtrusively determining the position occupied in the household by the boarder, withdraws his thoughts from himself, and while providing him with an occupation, gives him an interest in the joys and sorrows of those among whom he is received and treated as one of themselves.



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In all things equal with them, except that his well-being is more considered, more studied, better cared for, allowed full liberty to come and go as he pleases, to work or be idle, to rise or retire, he has no contradiction to resist, no opposition to combat, and one great cause of irritation is thus entirely removed. If he be mischievously inclined, or afflicted with that digital restlessness, which we often observe even in persons allowed to be perfectly sane, he is suffered to destroy what he pleases. The objects that come in his way are comparatively valueless, and it is asserted that in most of those cases where it is otherwise, the grief or annoyance of the owners of such articles as had been demolished, had more effect on the patient than the restrictions or punishments imposed under other systems; many such patients have, in consequence of the vexation they felt at having injured those who were uniformly kind to them, successfully laboured to overcome the habit, and in a case of recent occurrence, it appears that a "*jeune demoiselle*," who had been placed for two years in a lunatic asylum where she had been severely reprimanded, and even punished, for the indulgence of her wantonly mischievous habits, and who on first

arriving at Gheel seemed disposed to destroy everything that came in her way, became an altered being under the plan pursued here.

It is true she is not yet completely cured ; but being unable to master the inclination, she would, after a time, of her own accord, whenever she foresaw the approach of a crisis, select some utterly worthless object, such as a rag or a piece of paper, on which to exercise her destructive propensities.

One young man now there—an Englishman, and the only one of our nation at present at Gheel—had so unconquerable a predilection for the amusement of breaking windows, together with other expensive and unattractive habits, that after a four years' residence at a private asylum in England, where he grew daily worse, the physician under whose care he had been placed, declined to keep him any longer. He was then sent to Gheel, where, the first day he arrived, he broke twenty-eight squares of glass, with every demonstration of vindictive glee. No notice whatever was taken of this feat, at which he seemed very much mortified. The next day he made a second



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attempt, but this time confined himself to about half the number. The same course was pursued, from which moment, strange as it may seem, he entirely abandoned the pastime, and during the three or four years he has been at Gheel he has never since indulged himself in the same way. Of this singular case we shall have more to say when we come to visit the wealthier houses at Gheel, he being the inmate of one of them.

This, indeed, is a fair example of the spirit in which the eccentricities of the insane are met, and it is very curious to observe how thoroughly the "*nourriciers*," while apparently pursuing their ordinary avocations, just as if the lunatic inmate did not exist, understand how to manage them. An incident illustrative of this is worth recording. A poor fellow, pensioned in a middle-class house, was every now and then subject to a nervous crisis, during which he threatened to throw himself out of window; the *nourricier*, perceiving that the restraint he had thought it necessary to impose only made matters worse, determined on an opposite course; he observed that the man talked

and blustered about his intention in a mode seldom pursued by those seriously bent on such a step, so one day, when he was more violent than usual, he replied with great calmness, and without taking his eyes off his last—for he was a cobbler by trade,

“I’ll tell you what it is, Yvon, you’ve talked of this so often that I am quite tired of the subject, and I am persuaded you are right, and that the best thing you can do is to try the window, since you are not satisfied with going out at the door.”

“But I shall be killed!” replied the lunatic, completely taken aback by the coolness of his host.

“Oh, that is *your* look-out; see here, I’ll help you as far as opening the window goes, but the rest you must do for yourself.” And he rose and deliberately opened the lattice, which was only one story from the ground, and below it was a dung-heap, reaching fully half the distance. “Now,” he continued, “I am going down to dinner, so I’ll say ‘good-bye,’ for I suppose you don’t want *me*.”

If the cobbler felt any alarm for the result of his



experiment, he was soon reassured, for the lunatic, looking steadily at him to see if he could possibly be in earnest, walked to the casement and closed it, observing,

“To dinner, you said? Well, I don’t mind if I dine too; I can do this afterwards.”

With these words he followed his *nourricier*, and no further allusion was ever made to fenestral egress!

I was told of a touching instance of attachment and sensibility where a young lunatic, who beguiled his hours by playing on the violin, finding that the noise worried the mistress of the house, who was ill, resolved to give up the amusement, and destroyed his instrument that he might not be tempted to gainsay his determination.

It is interesting and suggestive to see these poor afflicted creatures doing their best to help the family among whom their lot is cast, by their labour. The care of the children generally falls to their share, and the gentleness with which they tend them is remarkable; they wash, dress, and feed them, walk out with them, and play with them. It is by no

means unusual to see an old fellow, who might be the grandfather, carrying an infant in his arms, while three or four older children follow his steps, or gambol by his side; and this is the happiest as well as the most favourable moment of the lunatic's monotonous existence; the society of these little ones and their innocent joys find an echo in his unsophisticated mind, and he can follow without an effort the meaning of their simple prattle, meeting a congeniality in their ideas, limited, like his own, to the objects they see around them.

Their confiding helplessness seems to touch a responsive chord in his heart, and to draw him closer to them, while it brings out the better feelings of his nature. When they are well, he naturally becomes their playmate and companion, and when they are ill, and he feels his inability to bring skill, judgment, or experience to their aid, he sits despondingly by, watching, weeping, and often praying, forgetting for the time his own troubles, whims, and ailments, and ready if not eager to render any service to the sorrowing household, whose grief, maybe, he only half understands.



The dormant affection he feels for the family at whose fireside he has been received, only requires some such occasion to elicit its depth and its sincerity; and when a patient has been pronounced cured, and it is desirable for him to return to his own relations, heartbreaking on both sides is the hour of separation. Rarely does an instance occur in Gheel of any patient wishing to change his domicile, or to leave the family on which he had been originally quartered. In almost every case they seem to become the *enfant gâté de la maison*, and to endear themselves to their protectors as much as they are attached to them. The relationship is a very touching one, and the traditional antecedents of Gheel render the mutual tie peculiarly interesting.

There is hardly a trade that is not pursued in Gheel by persons recognised as insane. I saw the handiwork of cabinet-makers, joiners, shoemakers, tailors, *sabot*-makers, and many others. At a forge, several men working with apparent knowledge and deliberation at the trade of the blacksmith, were executing wheel-tires, horse-shoes, culinary vessels, &c.

Many perform with fidelity and accuracy the duties of commissionnaires, not only carrying messages and parcels, but making purchases and bringing back change correctly to their employers. It is not without a melancholy interest that one observes traces of the small childish vanity with which they receive these marks of trust, and look for commendation when they think they are entitled to it.

In the fields, a large proportion of the labourers, male and female, are lunatics or epileptics, and it is the opinion of the medical staff that agriculture is by far the best occupation they can follow. It is a curious fact, and one worth recording, that although trusted with scythes, sickles, shears, bill-hooks, spades, hoes, and other dangerous tools, they have never been known to misuse them.

Many—indeed, most of them—are found to be peculiarly amenable to religious instruction, and, under the mild and gentle teaching of the village-priest, they not only learn to recite prayers, to sing canticles, to repeat hymns, and say their rosaries, but they carry out the principles instilled into them



in a practical way, proving that the holy precepts have entered their minds and taken root in their hearts.

Some of the patients are extremely expert at fishing, whether with rods or nets. One in particular has devoted himself to the service of the druggists, and is a very clever herbalist. The village deplores the loss of an exceedingly knowing corn-cutter, who for many years exercised his profession with a success which ensured for him a large share of popularity.

I must mention one singular fellow characterised as a “*mono-délirant*,” who cannot be persuaded he is not an electrifying-machine—a suggestive idea, certainly—and who is an astute bird-catcher. He has a numerous collection of curious birds, which he sells, thus driving a very profitable little trade without any outlay of capital.

Within doors the women make themselves very useful—besides looking after the children—in little handy services necessary in every household, such as sweeping, dusting, preparing the vegetables, and

assisting generally in culinary matters ; they also sew, knit, embroider, and make pillow-lace.

It has been remarked that a great number of patients subject to attacks of temporary excitement, which manifest themselves in external acts of violence, often in loud vociferation, raving, or screaming, will of their own accord, on the approach of these attacks, leave the house and wander away into the fields or woods, where they can freely give vent to the inclination they have not power to restrain. It would seem as if they were ashamed of exposing their folly before those who treat them as rational beings, and retire to a distance out of hearing, in order to spare themselves the humiliation which they feel would follow such an exhibition. This is a suggestive fact, as it testifies to the existence of an important and valuable sentiment—that of self-respect.



## CHAPTER IV.

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Early Morning in the Village—Silence of Bells—High Mass at Saint Dymphna's Church at Six—Edifying Conduct of the Lunatic Congregation—Interior Aspect of the old Church—Breakfast at the Inn—A Lunatic Guest—A Visit to the newly established Infirmary—The central Position it has taken—Dr. Bulckens, Physician to the Empress of Mexico—Personated by a Lunatic—A sham Burgomaster—Details of the Institution—Conversation with the Doctor—His Ideas—His Improvement on the old Gheelois System—"Asile Patronal," "Patronage Familial"—Their Working—Effectual Efforts of MM. Ducpétiaux and Guislain—"Nourriciers"—"Gardes de Section"—Their Office—Completeness of the System—Anecdotes illustrative of its Effects—Advantages of an organised Discipline and a responsible Director—Various Schemes devised and carried out for the Benefit of the Lunatics—Their happy Result—Gentleness of the coercive Measures sometimes inevitable—Story of the murdered Burgomaster.





## CHAPTER IV.

Nimirum insanis paucis videatur, eo quod  
Maxima pars hominum morbo jactatur eodem.

I HAD been awakened but a few moments by the first rays of the morning sun penetrating through the crevices of my curtains, when I remembered that one peculiarity of the place was the absence of church bells, as the repose of the lunatics is religiously respected. As I was extremely anxious to see them at their devotions, I rose at once, and, on entering the sacred edifice at six A.M., found it prepared for high mass, while it was nearly filled by a devout and orderly congregation.

The scene was a striking one, not easily to be for-

gotten; the vaulted interior, without being rich, had a venerable aspect, and the lights and flowers on the altar, the once vivid but now half-faded tints of the banners, the carved oak confessionals and pulpit, and the effect of light and shade on the whole, not forgetting the quaint figures and peasant costumes of the worshippers, constituted a combination of form and colour eminently picturesque.

In a moral point of view I was deeply interested, as I remembered that the majority of those who knelt before me at Saint Dymphna's shrine were "innocents!"

I possessed myself of an old worm-eaten kneeling-chair, and mingled with the rest. I am bound to add that throughout the service I never witnessed a more edifying demeanour, and whenever the organ sounded there was not a voice that did not add its feeble echo to the hymn of praise.

On returning to the inn to breakfast, I found the eating-room already occupied by a gentlemanly looking man, well dressed, and of middle age, who, on my entering, rose and bowed politely. He did not



speaking, however, but sauntered through the door of communication into the kitchen, where, with his hands in his pockets, he stood near the stove, watching the process of broiling some kidneys. He wore his hat, but appeared to be decidedly a familiar spirit of the household, and no one noticed him. He addressed to me a passing remark about the weather, and then walking to the door, exclaimed :

“ Ah ! here’s the postman.”

At the same time he held out his hand for letters, of which several were delivered to him along with a couple of newspapers. Taking a chair, he proceeded to open the former, first bowing to me, and saying :

“ Vous permettez ?”

After he had read his letters, he gathered them up together, put them into his coat-pocket, and went out, lifting his hat as he left the room.

“ Who was that ?” said I to the landlord, who now entered.

“ That, sir,” said he, “ is a man of family and fortune, one who has always frequented the best society, and who at one time enjoyed a rising reputa-

tion as engineer. He is the brother of General P., a man who is a great deal about the Court."

"And why is he here?"

Mine host significantly tapped his first finger on his forehead. Anywhere but at Gheel I should have disbelieved such an imputation.

"When monsieur has talked to him a little more," said he, anticipating my observation, "he will better understand the matter."

"I am sorry," said I, "I did not engage him in conversation."

"There will be plenty of opportunity," replied he. "He will be sure to be in here again by-and-by, and if you give him a chance, he will let you have perhaps more than you require of his talk."

"Now," said I, to my pretty hostess, who appeared as I was finishing breakfast, "will you be good enough to put me in the way of finding Dr. Bulckens, as I want to talk to him, and to see the establishment he has founded here."

"Monsieur," replied she, "has only to cross the village green and keep straight down the road, and



on reaching the other end of the long straggling street, he will see a new red-brick house, ornamented with stone coins and copings, standing in a large piece of ground—that will be the infirmary, and Dr. Bulckens lives there.”

Off I set accordingly in the direction indicated. On my way I observed that the sanitary condition of the place was not very strictly attended to. There were whole streets, or rather lanes, of small dirty cottages, in front of which the pavement was much neglected where it did exist; but for the most part there was none, and the roads and paths did not offer very pleasant walking. Dutch cleanliness does not extend to Gheel, and the rubbish-heaps and offal which disfigured the outsides of the dwellings were in character with the bad drainage unmistakably perceptible within.

The shops were few and primitive; in fact, it was difficult to detect which *were* shops. The simplicity of manners still maintained among the inhabitants of Gheel was manifested in the civility with which they saluted me as I met them on the road. Among them

there were several of the patients; some imperceptibly insane, others making unmistakable grimaces and antics, but at the same time perfectly harmless. Among a party mending the road were two who, the others told me, were epileptics. Another, grotesquely accoutred, but who had as jolly a face as one would wish to see, begged hard for a little tobacco, and, on receiving it, thanked me by executing a maniacal dance.

“My good fellow,” said I to the next one I met, an elderly man of the lower class, “can you direct me to Dr. Bulckens?”

“Dr. Bulckens?” said he, without a moment’s hesitation. “I am Dr. Bulckens. What may be your pleasure?”

I was taken so completely aback by this reply, that for a moment I did not know what countenance to make. However, being unacquainted with the temper of the gentleman, who had a remarkably cunning expression, I thought it better to give in to his humour, so I said :

“Good morning, Dr. Bulckens. I am very happy



to make your acquaintance. I want you to conduct me to your establishment, which I came here to visit."

It was now my friend's turn to look puzzled; he hesitated a moment, but recovered himself surprisingly soon. It was obvious that that destination did not suit him.

"If you want 'my' establishment," said he, "you are quite on the wrong road; it is this way; follow me." And he pointed deliberately in the direction by which I had come.

I said nothing, and immediately acquiesced, taking the course indicated by this frolicsome lunatic, for I was very anxious to see how it would end. His game, however, whatever it may have been, was destined to be cut short, in limine, for we had proceeded but a very little way, when we were met by an official-looking personage, who, I afterwards learned, was a *garde de section*; immediately my friend caught sight of him, he took advantage of a turn in the road, and bolted down it, full speed.

I was so much amused at this abrupt dénouement

that I could not resist a hearty laugh, which was followed by an explanation with the *garde*, who told me that the poor fellow's peculiar mania was, whenever he had the chance, to personate other people. It was not very long, he said, since a mounted cuirassier, riding into the town with a despatch for the burgomaster, met him, and asked him where that functionary lived.

"I am the burgomaster," said he, with the utmost effrontery; "you can give me your message."

While telling me this story, the *garde* had conducted me to the gates of the "*établissement*"—a somewhat imposing building, new, fresh, and clean; and the grounds surrounding it were enclosed by a handsome iron railing.

The porter, who responded to my summons, informed me Dr. Bulckens was within, and invited me into the *parloir*, serving, apparently, also as a committee-room, for a long, solid-looking table, covered with a green cloth and supported on massive carved mahogany legs, occupied the centre, and round it were substantial mahogany chairs. The floor was of



polished oak. On the walls hung portraits of the royal family of Belgium. Dr. Bulckens soon joined me, and, on learning my errand, received me with great politeness, entering at once into a lucid explanation of the system he had grafted on the basis he already found here, and into which many abuses had gradually crept.

The house he has established at Gheel is called "L'Asile Patronal," and his system, he terms, "Le Patronage Familial;" the object of the former being to supply a temporary halting-place under intelligent medical supervision, where patients are to be received on first arriving, and one also where their condition and subsequent treatment can be determined on; while the latter exerts a salutary influence over the patients after they are placed out, and over those who receive them.

Within the last few years, and owing to the benevolent exertions of the late MM. Ducpétiaux and Guislain, whose active charity cannot be too highly lauded, a most valuable reform has been effected in the management of the insane throughout Belgium.

In 1858, these gentlemen obtained from parliament a grant for the erection of an Asile, at Gheel, capable of receiving fifty patients, and at the same time intended to constitute a nucleus and centre to the whole colony—the directing and presiding power by which it was to be governed and superintended.

Until this period, which may be termed the re-organisation of the original system, patients of all categories had been sent indiscriminately to Gheel, and had been as indiscriminately received without distinction or classification, and, although there seems no reason whatever to doubt that the *nourriciers* as a rule were efficient, kind, and conscientious in their treatment of their charges, yet there was room for much abuse, and the opportunity, at all events, gave occasion for it.

Under the new order of things, all irregularities have become impossible, as the régime under which the colony is now placed is complete and effectual.

The primary process, as matters are at present regulated, on the reception of a patient into the colony, is neither more nor less than a probationary quaran-



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tine, for all who are brought to the place *must*, on arriving, pass through the institution, in order that their case may be studied, their condition determined, and their subsequent abode regulated by the head physician.

The village with its adjacent dependencies, which are of some extent, has been taken under the supervision of the Asile, and the whole is divided into six districts. A staff of six *gardes*, all of whom have been carefully trained by the head physician, is appointed to take the surveillance of the six sections, visiting the whole, each day, so that, by night, every house and every patient has been seen, the reports being all carried in to the head-doctor, who notes them down, and, whenever needful, gives them his personal attention.

While the patients are in the Asile, they are subjected to all the doctor's closest scrutiny; if there occur among the cases, one requiring continued medical care, it is retained either permanently, or as long as may be necessary, in the establishment. In all instances the patients are discreetly watched, and, ac-

According to the nature of their malady, the doctor judges to what class of *nourricier* he shall commit him. Among the six hundred and twenty houses which receive patients, most have their recognised spécialités, and it is found that each have, from generation to generation, had the charge of those afflicted with particular forms of mental malady. Thus there are some who thoroughly understand the treatment of epileptics, others whose experience has been gained in the care of idiots; some, again, are particularly successful in managing violent maniacs, while there are others whose forte lies in coping with those of a more cunning character.

The price paid for each depends on the means of friends, but good accommodation is purchasable, and the houses in which patients of gentle blood are received are supplied with every comfort and luxury known to the upper classes of the country. The lowest price, *i.e.* that paid by the *paroisse* for the care of paupers, is two hundred francs a year, and the highest at present two thousand francs.

It has been universally admitted by all who have



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made themselves acquainted with the system, that patients of all classes are most liberally treated by the *nourriciers*, that those of the highest class are supplied with a liberal table, well-furnished rooms, clean linen, constant attendance, large gardens and gymnasiums for exercise, horses and carriages, in fact, all that they can possibly require; while among the poor, and even the poorest, who can scarcely find any pecuniary advantage in the arrangement, it is asserted that the patients are better used than members of the family; that when the latter rough it on some made-up dish with which they themselves have to be occasionally satisfied, a separate ration of a better description is prepared for the invalid. Again, if there is any dainty in the house, the boarder is always selected first to partake of it, and the others only get a taste, if there happen to be any left. In fact, their devotion to their afflicted charges is as touching as it is singular, and some of the anecdotes related in proof of it are absolutely affecting. The little ones, reared from their earliest years with, and often by, these unhappy creatures,

acquire a tender veneration for their infirmity, and the affectionate sympathy reciprocally entertained between them and the children is almost incredible to a stranger. I was assured that, so far from injuring the helpless little ones who may either be left within their reach, or whom they may accidentally meet, they always treat them with the utmost gentleness, and if at any time a patient is seized with an attack of raving mania, and is so violent as to be altogether unmanageable, the presence of a little child has been known to restore him to composure, when any other means would be futile.

A remarkable illustration of this had occurred not long before my visit.

A lunatic, subject to occasional fits of frenzy, had been visited by the doctor, who, foreseeing a crisis was about to supervene, desired the goodwife in whose house he was living to watch him closely, and not to suffer him to be alone. This restraint, the poor fellow had resisted moodily, but finding the vigilance of his *nourricière* was not to be evaded, and that she had taken up her seat resolutely in front of



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the door, where she sat at work with her infant on her lap, he worked himself into a terrible rage, and seizing a huge pair of tailor's shears, declared he would split her skull if she did not make way for him immediately. The woman, who, doubtless from her long familiarity with the various forms of this frightful malady, had preserved all her presence of mind, rose from her seat, and holding her child between herself and the weapon, placed herself in front of him, gradually making him back till he reached a low chair at the farther end of the room, into which he dropped. No sooner was he seated than she threw the child into his lap, and taking advantage of the state of surprise into which he was struck, she nimbly gained the door, rushed from the room, and turned the key upon this singular group. The babe, naturally alarmed at the suddenness of the transaction, began to scream violently, to the great consternation of the maniac, whose thoughts were thus drawn from himself; and, strange as it may seem, the voice of the lunatic was heard through the door soothing and pacifying the child.

The mother, overcome by the reaction consequent on this desperate expedient, had fallen on the floor in a fainting fit, but soon recovered at these reassuring sounds.

“It is all well,” she said, at length. “Let no one approach him, and fetch the doctor.”

On the arrival of the latter, the door was opened, and the maniac, who but half an hour before had threatened a criminal deed, was found calmly nursing the child, which he had completely restored to good humour. The attack had entirely passed away by this simple but original process.

Since the arrival of Dr. Bulckens, one of the most marked improvements he has introduced is the definition, so to speak, of the previous treatment—similar in intention, but losing much of its efficacy by the desultoriness with which it was carried out. All that concerns the treatment of the patients is now methodised and consolidated, and the presence of a responsible and directing power seems to be valued equally by the *nourriciers* and their boarders. Thus, from the succinct explanations given me by Dr. Bul-



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kens, I gathered that the important change—I ought to say improvement—brought about by the establishment of his institution in the place consisted in CLASSIFICATION, DISTRIBUTION, and SUPERVISION.

His plan is to divide the patients into two categories, the second subdivided again into four classes.

The two primary categories comprise what are termed—

I. Pensionnaires Internes ; and

II. Pensionnaires Externes.

I. The first being those placed with heads of houses (here known as “nourriciers”) within the village of Gheel, and recognised as “harmless,” whether curable or incurable, under various denominations—such as the melancholy, monomaniacs, imbecile, demented, infirm—but all, docile, tranquil, well conducted, and amenable to discipline.

II. The second category consists of those patients who—having been found, during their probationary retention at the institution, to be epileptic, turbulent, subject to arbitrary attacks of fury or screaming, and otherwise difficult to manage—are denominated

“dangerous,” and as such quartered upon *nourriciers* inhabiting the hamlets surrounding the village of Gheel proper.

The subdivision is in the following form :

1. The first zone comprehends the hamlets nearest to Gheel ; Holven, Elsum, Laer, Mael, and Willaers, and thither are despatched the insane of various descriptions, curable and incurable, whose moral and physical condition requires special and constant vigilance.

2. The second takes in the hamlets next in distance to the first, such as Kivermont, Steelen, Poyel, Larum, Rawelkoven, and Winkelom, and hither are sent the imbecile, the idiotic, violent maniacs, and paralysed persons.

3. The third class of hamlets is at a still further distance, comprising Liepel, Schemmeken, Velveken, and Goerinde, and is appropriated almost entirely to the epileptic, as they are considered to require special treatment. These spots have been selected for this purpose because there is no open or running water in or near them.



4. The fourth is composed of the most distant localities, viz. those of Bell, Aeryl, Maelis, Vyver, and Winkelomsheide or Winkelom's heath. These, and especially this last, must be a mild form of pandemonium, for hither are delegated all the most desperate cases—the violent, the furious, the dangerous, and, in short, all who require special management and enforced discipline.

As will readily be understood, this is not only the most distressing, but the most difficult phase of the malady, and the conscientious superintendent must experience serious anxiety as he contemplates this almost hopeless portion of his arduous task. Nevertheless, an immense step has been gained by sorting out and separating from the rest, these hapless creatures. The benefit is two-fold, for it is a gain to the others as well as to themselves. They no longer disturb the public peace adding, as formerly, to the excitement of the others, but the vast heath of Winkelomsheide, being covered with small farms scattered widely over its surface, is admirably adapted for the habitation of this particular description of maniacs.

Dr. Bulckens appears to have an extremely quick apprehension, and, whether from intuitive knowledge or practical experience, arrives at the most accurate appreciation of the various qualities of the *nourriciers*, to whom he confides the patients when once their classification is determined; he is also extremely careful to place in the same house, those who understand the same dialect or language, and those who share the same tastes, while he avoids placing together patients who have any tendency to violence, and patients of different sexes.

Those who have already learned a trade or occupation are, if they wish it, confided to a *nourricier* following the same business, and those who require instruction are always consulted as to the description of employment they prefer.

He is also extremely careful in observing whether the boarder and the *nourricier* take to each other, and whether there is any person in the house against whom—as sometimes, but rarely, occurs—the patient has taken an aversion. Whenever this is found to be the case, the patient is forthwith removed, and if



there be no fault on the part of the *nourricier*, he is exchanged for another.

As a rule, the doctor avoids as much as possible allowing any *nourricier* to receive more than two boarders. There are altogether 620 *nourriciers*; of whom those of the 1st class are . . . 42

„ 2nd „ . . . 120

„ 3rd „ . . . 318

„ 4th „ . . . 140

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Total . . . . 620 *nourriciers*.

The village and adjacent dependencies together number 1913 houses, of which 618 are in Gheel proper, with a population of 3312 out of 11,000. Of these 235 are *nourriciers*.

It must be admitted that this spot presents a phenomenon without parallel in any part of the civilised world—that of eight hundred insane persons of different ranks, different sexes, different ages, different antecedents, and different associations, speaking different languages and presenting every form and every degree of mental alienation, yet brought under the in-

fluence of social considerations, of religious belief and practice, circulating freely and without any perceptible restraint in the midst of a population of ten thousand inhabitants, composed of Flemish peasants, simple, honest, industrious, and well-principled, scarcely conscious of the great and important service they are rendering to humanity. It affords a suggestive contemplation, to behold this colony of male and female maniacs living in complete security, and confiding trustfulness among families which have, so to speak, adopted them, enjoying with self-respect and using with discretion the liberty accorded to them.

It will be interesting to our readers to know that, notwithstanding the long-standing and uninterrupted connexion which has existed between the people of Gheel and the afflicted inmates of their village, they appear to have in no way suffered for their philanthropic devotedness, and I could not discover that there was any preponderance of the natives among the objects of their care.

It is a singular fact that all round Gheel, and only at the distance of a very few miles, the aversion, re-



pugnance, and prejudice against mad people is more marked than perhaps in any other part of the world, and I am glad to have heard, and to be able to record here, that the contrast thus shown by the noble and generous Gheelois has not been without its reward. Public attention was in 1858 called to this highly creditable phase of their character by the late active and lamented philanthropists Dr. Guislain and the distinguished M. Ducpétiaux, whose whole life was devoted to the moral and social elevation of his country, and it was proposed to recognise it by public thanks and public tokens of approval. These were simple testimonials of no intrinsic value awarded to those among the inhabitants who had distinguished themselves by their humanity and attention above and beyond the care ordinarily required and expected of them.

The distribution of these honorary prizes took place with much solemnity, as it was intended to produce a salutary effect on the patients as well as the *nourriciers*, and it is gratifying to record that the diplomas received have been handsomely framed

and hung up in the "best parlours" of these cottage homes, so that it is to be hoped that this incentive to emulation may be periodically repeated with good effect.

The engraving which adorns the diploma, and is executed with much taste, was designed by M. François de Backer, a native artist of Gheel.

It is almost needless to say that a register is kept at the institution, in which all circumstances relating to the patients are entered, so that parents, or other relatives and friends, can at any time learn on inquiry, whether written or personal, all particulars relating to those who are or have been treated at Gheel. There must be some curious entries among the archives of this unique locality!

The diet of the patients is, of course, subject to the surveillance of the medical staff, who, however, assert that it forms a point on which they have seldom any observation to make.

In order to interest patients of the working class in their occupation, various recompenses have been devised. Those who prefer money, receive wages in



proportion to the value of their labour; others who do not understand its uses and employment are rewarded with tobacco, snuff, sugar, eggs, beer, gingerbread, or cakes. When they have behaved well, they are allowed the choice of the clothes provided for them; and I was told the women—true daughters of Eve—considered this a valuable privilege! It is most amusing to see them selecting a gown-piece, deliberating between two cloaks or shawls, discussing the merits of forms and colours, and trying on half a dozen caps.

As change of scene and of ideas forms a part of their régime, their amusements are as much diversified as their circumstances will admit; thus, by way of distraction, they are allowed to make parties to take long walks into the country, carrying their dinner with them, pic-nic fashion, in baskets; and when the *nourriciers* go to spend a day at the neighbouring farms with their relatives, their *pensionnaire* accompanies them. If there occur a *fête de famille*, the lunatic inmate participates in the domestic festivi-

ties; if there should be a fair in the neighbourhood, and when the kermesse takes place in the town, the lunatics participate with the rest both in the frolic and in the religious ceremonies which accompany it. In public processions, games, concerts, dances, all who are capable of these relaxations, join with the saner portion of the population.

Those whose condition is such as to render it probable that they will conduct themselves with propriety, are at liberty to frequent the cafés and estaminets, where they read the papers, play at cards or at dominoes, at ball or at billiards, and even try their skill in archery. The public-house keepers are strictly charged to allow no approach to excess in the matter of drink, and would be severely punished if this law were only once infringed: while the constant presence of each *garde de section* in the district committed to his care, has doubtless a powerful influence in maintaining its observance.

The lunatic population have been found, as a rule, to be passionately fond of music, which forms the principal pastime of the richer members of this singular colony.



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In the better houses there are to be found pianofortes, harmoniums, harps, and other musical instruments, for the amusement of the patients, some of whom play with great feeling, taste, and expression, and perform at the meetings of the *Société d'Harmonie*, of which they are members. Others are equally proficient in drawing, painting, and embroidery; some read sedulously; some delight in the cultivation of flowers; while others again show an intelligent aptitude for the smart little drawing-room games which form so large a part of the amusements in social country life on the Continent—among these we may reckon charades and private dramatic entertainments.

The licence thus accorded to the patients has been found to produce the happiest effects, while it has been rarely, if ever, abused.

The medical staff at Gheel appear to attribute the cures that take place, far more to the healthy influence of the regular, peaceful, tranquil—nay, almost pastoral—life led here by the patients, than to the action of any kind of medical treatment.

In religion, the same unshackled liberty is allowed them, and unless, by any unseemly conduct, they should render themselves unworthy the permission, they are free to attend all public religious exercises in the church. The great majority are Catholics. Out of eight hundred, there are but one-and-twenty who dissent from that faith, and are either Jews or Protestants. Upon these no restrictions are placed; they are treated with the same confidence, the same kindness, and the ministers of their religion are allowed access to them whenever they please.

The invisible, unobtrusive discipline by which this very considerable number of lunatics at large, are maintained in such order, that, during four years, only three casualties have taken place, must be admitted to be one of the wonders of our times. It will hardly be credited that out of the whole aggregate, sixty-eight only are subjected to coercive measures, and those of the gentlest description. A tendency to escape having been perceived in these individuals, a very simple method has been resorted to to check this propensity, without depriving them of their liberty. An appa-



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ratus, ingeniously contrived, the invention of an artist at Gheel, named Silvercruys, has been found sufficient for all purposes. It consists of a pair of anklets softly padded and covered with washed leather, fastened together by a light but strong steel chain about a foot and a half in length.

No such article as a straight-waistcoat exists in all Gheel; it has been replaced by the *ceinture à bracelets mobiles*, a belt to which the arms are attached by means of softly-padded bracelets chained to it at a sufficient length to allow of the use but not the abuse of the hands. The belt is of leather, and the whole is so cleverly concealed under the clothes as to be scarcely perceptible.

A story has obtained currency at Ghent, Brussels, and elsewhere, of the murder of a burgomaster some twelve or fourteen years ago, by one of these lunatics at large, and having heard it mentioned in support of an argument against the system, I took the opportunity of inquiring of Dr. Bulckens what truth there was in it. I found that, as usual, the story had lost nothing by repetition, and that the real facts of the

case were these. The murderer and his victim were two rival apothecaries, or rather the former set up an apothecary's business in Gheel, which he was carrying on with great success, when the latter, envying his prosperity, sought every means to undermine it. At length an opportunity presented itself; the apothecary fell ill; when the jealous rival, who was burgomaster of the town, pronounced him insane, and therefore unfit to dispense medicines, and prohibited his practising any longer. The faith of his employers was so shaken by this edict, that they, one and all, withdrew their custom, and the burgomaster, taking advantage of the opportunity, enlarged his own business, which had till then been very insignificant, and so stepped into the injured man's place. Deeply mortified at the position to which he was reduced, the hapless ex-apothecary vowed vengeance on his treacherous foe, and one day, when he was returning through a cornfield to his dinner, he concealed himself beside the path, and darting out upon him unawares, drew a long sharp knife with which he had provided himself, and stabbed him in the back.



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The burgomaster, mortally wounded, fell dead at his feet, and his assassin, still holding the reeking weapon in his hand, walked into the town and gave himself up to justice. He was tried and convicted, but let off on the plea of insanity, and sent to the lunatic asylum at Ghent to finish his miserable days.

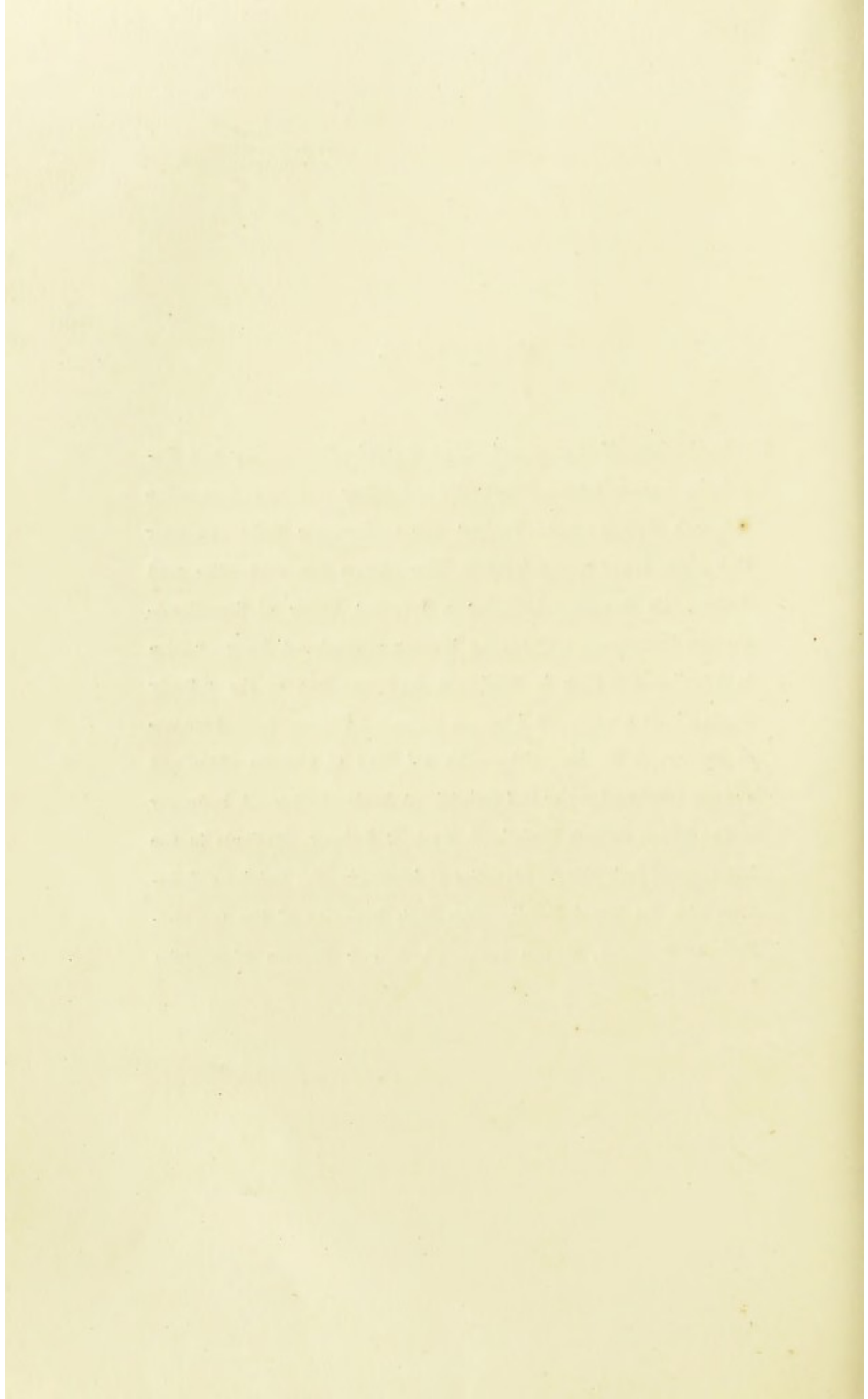




## CHAPTER V.

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The Institution—How arranged—How divided—Punctuality and Regularity—Cleanliness—Ventilation—Curious Hallucinations—The Women's Sitting-room—Various Cases—Separate Cells—Peculiar Case—The Wing appropriated to Men—Cases described—The mad Tailor—His Fancies—Ambition a frequent Cause of Insanity—Curious Instances—A Queen—A Woman of Rank—A King—"Dieu le Père" and "Dieu le Fils"—A Goddess—One of the "Early Masters"—A Creator—A Lion—A Tiger—A Philosopher—Anecdote of Balzac—A Mathematician—An old Man of Sixteen—Starlight and Moonlight—Lucifer and Gabriel—A Bible Maniac—A Reformer—The "Four o'Clock Train"—A Portrait Painter—Patients in the last Stage of Imbecility—Statistics of Insanity—Dr. Bulckens' Relations with the Royal Family—His high Estimate of the Queen—Epilepsy frequent, though concealed, among Persons of superior Intelligence.





## CHAPTER V.

—fallen far below the brute.

His reason strives in vain to find her way,  
Lost in the stormy desert of his brain.

POLLOK.

DR. BULCKENS now proposed to show me the house, and as we examined the various departments, it was impossible not to admire the excellent arrangement of the building, and the judicious regulations which constitute and maintain its organisation. Extreme punctuality and regularity form the primary basis of the moral fabric. Rigid cleanliness and effectual ventilation are evidently appreciated by the doctor, and are enforced here to some purpose.

The two wings, appropriated respectively to either sex are precisely similar, so that on either side are a common sitting-room, common dormitories, and a series of separate cells for those who require surveillance and special treatment. On both sides are excellent bath-rooms, with douches, &c. The kitchen, pantry, store-rooms, and dispensary serve for both, but the courts and gardens for recreation and exercise are not only distinct on both sides, but are separated from each other, for patients of various categories.

The house offers, besides all this, extra accommodation for those patients of a higher class who, desiring to benefit by the advantages of the establishment, wish to obtain private treatment for extra payment. Many are received here who desire simply to recruit their health, enjoying the quietude of the spot and the salubrity of the air; but the rules of the house are rigidly enforced, as the doctor lays the greatest stress on the fulfilment of such regulations as he prescribes, at the same time that he piques himself on the simplicity of his treatment; so that at Gheel all is "*à l'heure militaire.*"



In the common sitting-room on the women's side we found several remarkable cases. Among them was one suffering from epilepsy in a very aggravated form, but who, during the intervals between the periodical attacks, was perfectly calm and rational. She was employed in some knitting of a complicated pattern, employing six or eight long fine needles. They appeared to be dangerous instruments in such hands, more especially as, when not using them all, she stuck them in her hair, and I could not help feeling that, were she suddenly seized with a fit, the consequences might be serious. The attacks, it appeared, were altogether irregular, but recurred with lamentable frequency. She had been in the institution some months, and was now entered among those permanently consigned to its keeping.

Another, who had been a domestic servant, was pronounced to be of so excitable a temperament, that she was unfit to remain in an ordinary household. This restlessness had assumed a singular form, and now manifested itself in an utter inability to sleep, accompanied by an incessant loquacity. The doctor

assured me this young woman "had not slept for two years!" and the worst feature in the case, perhaps, remains to be added: although tolerably rational during the day, she passed the entire night in violent screaming, and thereby became the occasion of so much annoyance and disturbance to the others, that she was now consigned at night, to one of the separate cells. She had been in service at Ghent, and was very anxious to give us the history of the family in which she had lived: in fact, it was very difficult to avoid hearing the details of her whole life, for she was disposed to be very communicative. Her only trouble was that I could not understand her particular Flemish dialect, and she was unable to express herself with equal facility in French. She seemed to be in wonderfully good spirits, and treated the extraordinary phenomenon under which she laboured as a good joke!

Another of these could not be persuaded to eat, and was obliged to be fed by stratagem or force. The rest were peaceable enough. Some wore an idiotic expression; the others sat quietly at work, apparently interested in their occupation, and taking no notice of



us. The room was plainly furnished; a close deal floor without carpet, a stove in the centre, railed round, the casements wired, but overlooking the garden, in which, as in all the gardens, was a wire aviary, containing a few birds, but I could see nothing of an enlivening nature in the room; there were not even flowers.

When we reached the separated cubicles, we found in one of them, a poor young woman whom it was necessary to lock into her cell. The case was a peculiar one, but she seemed fully conscious of the loss of her liberty, and was making a most melancholy wailing noise, to which there was no cessation. The doctor told me she had been in this condition many weeks. She was the wife of a letter-carrier, and had two young children. She had been brought in with delirium, resulting from milk-fever, and it was evident he considered her condition serious. He did not open the door, but took me round to the corridor, communicating by long grated windows with each of these cells, so that the doctors and nurses can at any time see what is going on within. She had risen

from her bed, and was standing close to the door, crying piteously. She wore only an under-garment and stockings, without shoes, and had on the light soft manacles in use here—an admirable substitute for the strait-waistcoat, almost ignored in Gheel. Preventive measures were absolutely necessary, as she could not be prevented from undressing herself. She was quite young, apparently not more than four or five-and-twenty, and had a pretty, interesting, oval, girlish face, fair complexion, large blue eyes, and silky golden hair, which fell wavily over her shoulders, and reached half way down her back. It was a sad sight. They said her husband was broken-hearted, and came constantly to see her, but she never asked after her children.

We now reached the men's side of the building, and had no sooner entered the common room than all occupation was suspended, and all eyes were turned upon us. The doctor had been called away for a moment, and I was attended by one of the *gardes*, who proceeded to explain the histories of the individuals I saw around me, and who were employed in



different ways ; some playing at dominoes, others at bagatelle, some gathered together in groups, others in twos, or moodily pacing the room and looking out of window, alone. I had hardly had time to survey the scene before me, when I was accosted by a singular fellow, who evidently considered himself the principal person present, and came forward to do the honours.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, of not less than sixty, and had a very French type of countenance, though he was, it appeared, a native of Brussels, where he had passed his life, first as a journeyman, and then as a master tailor. His leisure he had devoted to reading and "study," and the end of it was that as he rose in his "noble profession," and got into a larger way of business, his aspirations grew loftier than his condition, which he began to despise, and it was disappointed ambition which had brought him within the walls of a lunatic asylum !

In his hand was a French book, covered in yellow paper, apparently a superannuated catalogue of a

museum, and he held it upside down. Nevertheless, ever since we had entered the room, he had been standing near the window pretending to be reading attentively, and, by a curious manœuvre, as he turned the page, which he did with tolerable frequency, he directed a furtive glance towards me to see if I observed that he was reading.

As I did not address *him*, he now walked up to *me*, and presenting the book to me, he asked me, with a very obsequious bow, whether I was acquainted with this charming work.

On my replying in the negative, he answered :

“Then, sir, let me tell you you are wrong—very wrong. This is a book of travels, and, next to travelling oneself, the most instructive occupation is reading the travels of others: I am fond of both, but I prefer the former.”

“Ah! you have travelled, my friend? Then we shall understand each other, for so have I.”

“You may have *travelled*, sir, but I—I have *lived* in other lands. Not a climate I have not experienced, not a nation I have not studied, not a



capital I have not visited, not a country I have not investigated," said the lunatic, with a bombastic air and theatrical action.

"And of all these spots, with which you are so well acquainted," said I, "tell me, which do you prefer?"

"Which! why, the Crimea, undoubtedly."

"Oh! you have been in the Crimea?"

"You ask *me* that! *Me!* Why, my dear good sir, where do you come from? Were you born yesterday, that you can make such an inquiry? Surely you knew when you came here to whom it was you were about to be presented? Nevertheless, in compassion for your deficiency on this point I will reveal myself to you. I am not only a general: I am," said he, raising his voice, and drawing himself up with mock dignity, "I am MARÉCHAL DE FRANCE! Yes, sir, what do you think of that?—MARÉCHAL DE FRANCE—and if you doubt it I will show you the azure bâton with its golden fleur de lys, the badge of my distinction, which I always carry about with me, and which I have in my locker, for, between

ourselves, I am here in disguise"—and he lowered his voice to a whisper—"no one in this miserable place is aware of my title; no one knows that it was I who gained that important victory; I, who with my own hands planted the glorious colours of France on the citadel of Sevastopol. They might well give me the bâton for such a feat; but I must allow I have been honoured by all the crowned heads in Europe; and as for Queen Victoria, she immediately proposed that I should espouse her. Her Britannic Majesty wrote me an autograph letter, to make these overtures, but I have not answered her yet; I mean to keep her a little while *le bec dans l'eau*; first, because it is more dignified not to be in a hurry; and, secondly, because I don't want to commit myself till I am quite sure I can't do better."

"A wise precaution. Have you ever been in London?"

"Not yet; I mean to go there as soon as I can get away from this place; or rather, I shall go first to Osborne, as I understand that is where the Queen



principally resides ; and as I shall maintain my incognito, and travel under an assumed name, I shall be able to have a look at her Majesty before she knows I am arrived ; and if I don't like her appearance, why, I shall quietly withdraw without making myself known. Don't you think that the wisest course ?”

“Certainly, my dear sir ; I admire beyond everything the cool judgment you display in all emergencies. In the mean time, as I shall probably reach London before you, perhaps you would like me to be the bearer of some communication to the Queen of England.”

“Not in the least necessary, I assure you. Seeing the terms we are on, no intervention is required, and I very much prefer conducting the negotiation personally, if it is to go any further.”

I was beginning to be surprised at the consecutiveness of ideas displayed in this conversation, wild as it was, when my friend suddenly stepped back, and looking at me from head to foot,

“Do you know, sir,” he said—“you'll excuse me

—but your coat is shockingly made; that cut is altogether out of date; you really shouldn't wear such a garment."

"Now, what can you know about coats?" said I, to put him on his mettle.

"I! What can *I* know about coats? Ha, ha, ha!" And he burst into a loud fit of laughter. "What can I know about coats? That's good, that's good! Why, one would think you had lived in a bottle all your life! The idea of your not knowing *me*! Why, I'm the first—yes, the *very* first—tailor in Brussels; I've worked there for all the cream of the nobility these thirty years; I made my fortune by it; I'm richer than the king—richer and happier too; *I* wouldn't be a king, not I. What's a king?" he continued, "a man like another; he's the servant of the people; they pay him as long as he answers their purpose, and when they've had enough of him, they don't turn him off and give him his liberty as they would be obliged to do to a servant; oh no, he's dismissed in a different way—they take off his head! And that's why I



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never would consent to be king or emperor, or anything of the kind. I have no wish to be *raccourci*."

"Is it true," said I, in a whisper to the *garde*, "that he has ever belonged in any way to the military profession? I understood he had always been a tailor."

"Sir," said the lunatic, who, low as I had spoken, had overheard my question, "if you have any inquiry to make respecting me, ask it of myself, and not of that idiot who stands shaking his head there. All I have told you is strictly correct; I never state anything that is not true."

And then looking round he saw that he had made himself the object of general attention, for all the other lunatics in the room (except the absolutely imbecile) had suspended their various occupations, and were listening to us; this last remark, coming after the rest, and the tone in which it was uttered, were too much even for their gravity, and they all broke out into a loud laugh, which was soon joined in by the speaker himself, who ended by laughing

louder and longer than any one else. The uproar was at its height when the door opened, and in walked Dr. Bulckens. He saw in a moment the danger of suffering this hilarity to increase, and walking up to the jovial cause of all the mirth, he said :

“ My good fellow, why don't you keep all these noisy folks in order? One of your looks, you know, generally suffices to prevent them from forgetting themselves in this way.”

The tailor thus appealed to, immediately ceased laughing, and the rest soon followed his example. He then attacked the doctor with what I understood to be his usual refrain :

“ Now, doctor, I hope you have come to bring me my discharge ; it is long enough now, since you promised it me, and I am quite ready to go.”

“ Yes, yes, all in good time,” said the doctor ; “ I haven't forgotten it, but I do not happen to have it about me just now, we'll see about it to-morrow.”

“ Ah, there you are again with your to-morrows, always to-morrow. I won't have any more of these put offs—do you hear me, satanic docteur,” he con-



tinued, shaking his fists, and becoming more and more excited.

“Now, my dear friend,” said the doctor, “do calm these agitations, and think a little of me as well as of yourself; just ask yourself, ‘How should I get on without you? How could I manage all these refractory fellows without your help?’ Think of this, and then I am sure you won’t wish to leave me.”

“Ah! doctor, doctor, that is always how you get over me; well, well, I’ll stay till to-morrow to oblige you, since you wish it so much. The fact is, I really don’t know how you *will* get on when I am gone, for as I was saying just now I am the Emperor of China, and therefore, of course, it is the bounden duty of all these slaves and vagabonds to pay me the same respect they do to you, doctor, in your absence; I shall, therefore, remain another day, because I want to study this book, which teaches the art of good government.”

“That’s right, my man,” said the doctor, “and send to me for another when you’ve finished that.” Then, turning to me, he added, “Now is our time

to be off before another fit takes him ; he will have to be under vigilant treatment for some time to come."

" Good-bye, doctor !" cried out the maniac, " and to-morrow—to-morrow—don't forget ; *I'm* in earnest, if you're not ; and good-bye to you, too, sir, I shall not fail to come and see you when I visit London."

Among maniacal delusions, the most common appear to be those which lead the patient to imagine himself some great personage. I remember at the Salpêtrière seeing several of these cases ; one was firmly persuaded she was a queen, and wore on her head a paper crown, while, by pinning two or three cotton aprons together, she had contrived to manufacture a train, to which she called my special attention ; another either imagined, or pretended to imagine, she was covered with jewels, and, bidding me examine a twopenny bead necklace she wore, assured me gravely it was made of the largest and finest pearls the world had ever produced, begging me to believe that, as a woman of rank, nothing would induce her to wear false jewels.

At Peckham, was a pompous George III., who



duly repeated three times every observation he made, and fancied himself every inch a king.

At Bicêtre were monarchs innumerable; among them one who thought himself Louis XIV.

Calling the straw his sceptre, and the stone  
On which he pinioned sat, his royal throne.

It was at Bicêtre too, I think, I saw a man who declared himself to be "*Dieu le fils.*" The medical man who accompanied me was pointing him out as we stood in the garden, when another lunatic, who overheard the subject of our conversation, approached me, and said :

"Yes, sir, what this gentleman tells you is quite true; and the best part of the story is, that the fellow in question has the impudence, or the folly, to come and tell *me* so!" "*Me!*" he repeated, tapping himself on the chest, and looking at me with an expression which seemed to say: What! don't you see the absurdity of it? "The idea!" he continued, "of coming to *me* with such a fable, as if I, who am '*Dieu le père,*' could be deceived by it!" And he walked away, rubbing his hands and laughing at the top of his voice.

At Hanwell, I saw a little dumpy Hibernian, who imagined herself to be, not the queen, but the "goddess of this island"—she was singing "Rule Britannia" at the wash-tub, and assured me seriously that it was *her* effigy which was struck on the reverse of the penny-pieces; then she asked me in an injured tone whether I did not think it an indignity that a "person of her quality should be compelled to live, two days in the week, on 'Irish stew!'"

At Madrid, I came across a poor fellow who occupied himself in drawing, and showed me a portfolio of the wildest compositions imaginable, yet not without a certain merit. *He* thought himself the greatest painter that ever lived, and could not be persuaded he was not one of the "*old masters!*"

At the asylum in Ghent I was pursued through the garden by a curiously wild and bald-headed little old man, who informed me gravely that he was the "Creator of the Universe." "You see this wretched shed (*cette baraque*)," said he, meaning the institution in which he was placed; "they call this a palace, and they built it for *me*; but, bless you! I wouldn't give a centime for it. My palace is the



whole world—its dome, the spangled sky! its carpet, the soft green turf! Equals I have none. My attendants and slaves are the whole human race. As for the fellows they have placed about me here, I don't mind telling *you*—they are mad; O yes; all, without exception, mad, mad, mad." And he capered away to my intense relief, while the Brother of Charity who conducted me, and who had had his eye fixed on him all the time, assured me that this gentleman was by no means to be trusted, and if he was classified amongst the "*dangereux*," it was not without reason. Still he was quite at large, and had the range of the extensive garden appropriated to this section.

At Bedlam, at the time I visited it, I remember one who called himself a "lion." He told me he had once been "king of men;" but "men were a detestable race," and so he preferred being "king of beasts."

"There's a fellow up there," he said, "who calls himself a tiger, but, mind you, I'm not of *his* species."

At a ball at St. Luke's, to which one of the phy-

sicians kindly invited me, I danced vis-à-vis to a very singular fellow, whose ambition it was to be considered a "great philosopher." He told me he had travelled all over Europe, but chiefly in Germany, and, while there, had collected various kinds of salts.

"Now, do you know," said he, gravely, "I brought away with me a larger proportion of the salt of wisdom, than of any other; but it has all remained on my hands, for though I have offered it freely to everybody, no one seems to care to have any of it!"

"Now, come," said I, "will you give me some of this same precious salt; I will gladly accept any quantity."

The lunatic looked at me shrewdly for a moment, but his perplexity did not last, and, recovering his presence of mind with surprising rapidity, he replied:

"Do you know you are the first person who ever applied to me for the salt of wisdom, and the simple fact of your asking for it, is a proof that you do not



require it ; so I see, between you all, I shall have to keep it all to myself."

Not so bad for a lunatic !

"Divinities," "Emperors of China," "Popes of Rome," "Great Moguls," "Monarchs of France," "Kings of England," "Legislators," "Generals," "Judges," "Millionnaires," "Artists and Authors of celebrity," may be met with to any extent in every madhouse, and we may gather from this suggestive fact the large share which pride, ambition, and vanity take—indulged till they become an uncontrollable passion—in the maladies which people our lunatic asylums. It is very rare to meet with the opposite form of delusion, and to find patients who imagine themselves to have *descended* in the social scale, or to have fallen in the estimation of their fellow-men.

It would be curious to know to what extent they are deceived themselves, and to what they are only trying to deceive others. We can but hope that they are as firmly convinced of their greatness as they try to appear ; this conviction may possibly bring

them the happiness such aspiring minds could never taste under ordinary conditions in a world where they never could be realised; still it is fearful to think of the moral suffering they must have undergone before reason was dislodged by disappointment, and desperation was succeeded by this fictitious contentment.

It is very interesting to observe how frequently it happens that these monomaniacs are perfectly rational on all subjects beside the one on which they extravagate, and how cleverly they contrive to maintain an appearance of sanity which would deceive any ordinary observer.

A remarkable instance is on record which is worth quoting because of the hero of the tale, who was no less distinguished a person than Balzac.

This eminent author was once visiting a lunatic asylum, where he was accosted by one of the inmates, who, after a few remarkably pertinent and clever observations, drew him aside, and proceeded to inform him in a confidential tone, and in the most plausible manner, that his detention in this sombre



abode was due to the heartless rapacity of his relatives, who, in order to possess themselves of a large fortune to which he was heir, had succeeded in proving him insane, and in obtaining a legal sanction for his sequestration in a madhouse. Balzac, deeply touched by the hardness of the case and the moving terms in which the injured man detailed his wrongs, determined to befriend the cause, and assured him that he would take it in hand forthwith, leaving no effort untried, by which justice could be done to the complainant. Balzac was not a man to do anything by halves; when his sympathies were once engaged no one could be more persevering in carrying out a determination. Having taken notes of all the necessary particulars, which the reputed lunatic supplied with surprising lucidity, he lost no time in pursuing his inquiries, and in an incredibly short time was in possession of facts which convinced him of the veracity of the injured man's story. Among other particulars he learned that he really was entitled to a considerable fortune, and this confirmed him still more in the judgment he had formed.

The story was one in which a romancist would find himself at home, and Balzac's sentimentality was on the *qui vive*. Having resolved to vindicate the wrongs of the unhappy prisoner, who was helpless to take up his own defence, he conducted his machinations on the most Macchiavellian principles, and pursued the cause with so much ardour, adding solicitation to solicitation, and heaping contrivance upon contrivance, that he finally obtained the release of his protégé.

Furnished with the necessary documents, Balzac determined to be himself the bearer of the joyful tidings ; he accordingly repaired to the institution, eager to communicate the successful result of his negotiations ; he informed the sufferer in whose behalf he had laboured so indefatigably of the difficulty he had had to remove error and make truth prevail. " At last, however," he concluded, " I have triumphed ; you are free ! Come, you need remain here no longer ; come and breakfast with me at the Palais Royal to celebrate your escape."

The inmate of the madhouse had listened with the most intelligent interest and satisfaction to all his



deliverer had said, but at these words he seized him by both hands.

“Thank you, my dear sir,” said he—“thank you a thousand times for what you have done ; my gratitude will be eternal : only I cannot accept your breakfast.”

“Why not ?” replied Balzac, not knowing whether to be hurt by the absolute tone of his refusal.

“If you will make it a *supper*, I will come with pleasure.”

“By all means. A supper be it. But will you tell me why ?”

“I will give you my reason, and I am sure you are too sensible a man not to acquiesce at once. If I were to *breakfast* with you I should have to go out in broad daylight, and you see, as I am *the moon*, it will never do for me to be seen except at night.”

As may be supposed, the too credulous philanthropist began to feel rather small ; he honestly admitted his error, and vowed never again to meddle with oppressed lunatics on so superficial a knowledge of their condition.

Nothing, indeed, can be more treacherous than

these and similar hallucinations, which often do not prevent the man who is occasionally or periodically under their influence from judging and arguing with perfect soundness on other subjects. I knew a man who possessed remarkable mathematical powers, who took honours at the university, and who, although able to solve with enviable facility the most abstruse problem, would look mournfully into the face of his wife and daughter, and fail in any way to recognise them. He would speak of his child in terms of the most touching affection, but his recollection of her seemed to have stood still from the time at which his mind had become affected, and he would continually ask for her. When his daughter, then grown up, was brought to his bedside, and he was assured that that was she, he would shake his head, and say, "No, no, that cannot be my child; she was small and fair, with chubby cheeks and laughing blue eyes; she had long golden hair, and wore blue shoes. I want my little girl; but I know how it is, she is dead, and you are afraid to tell me."

This instance is paralleled by one I remember in



Bedlam, and another precisely similar I met with in Gheel; the former was of an old man, the latter of an elderly woman, who, when asked their age, meekly but firmly persisted they were, respectively, "sixteen" and "twenty-three," the ages at which they had lost their reason and their moral life had come to an end! There was something mournfully suggestive in the reply.

"What makes you wear that star on your forehead?" said one of these poor creatures to me as I passed through the ward; "because if you don't want it, you might as well let me have it. Between you and me, we're kept rather short of candle in this *hotel*, and I should find it useful after dark."

The speech had some affinity to that of the poor fool in Bedlam, who being seated at a table, where he fancied he was writing, and not seeing very distinctly, called out with the most perfect sang-froid, without ceasing his occupation, "Dear me, it's getting dark; Jove, snuff the moon, will you?"

The utter confusion of ideas we frequently encounter, accompanied by a singular mixture of plau-

sibility and impossibility, is well illustrated by an anecdote given me by a friend.

He was lately visiting a lunatic asylum, and on entering the recreation-ground was met by one of the inmates, who saluted him courteously.

“Good morning, my friend,” said he, in return. “Pray may I ask whom I have the honour of addressing?”

“Certainly, sir. I shall introduce myself with pleasure. I am the angel Gabriel.”

“The angel Gabriel!” replied he. “Why, last time I was here, didn’t you tell me you were Lucifer?”

“Well, sir, and so I am; but it’s by different mothers,” answered the lunatic with wonderful quickness, as he walked on.

One man I was informed of here as having been recently removed from Gheel to Ghent, whose mania consists in an obstinate determination to strip off his clothes on the plea of conformity with biblical teaching, continually repeating as his reason, “*Nudus ambulabo in viam Domini.*”



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There is another, who never changes his shirt, but when it has been worn the prescribed time, puts on another over it. When he has on as many as six or eight, he begins tearing off the undermost, in small strips, which he throws one by one into the fire, alleging that all the evil in the world is caused by bad books; that bad books are made of paper, and paper is made of rag; that if all the rag were burned, therefore, there could be no paper, and if there were no paper there could be no bad books; and that he, for his part, will never contribute to the corruption of the world by allowing any linen that has belonged to him to be made into paper! There is no want of logic here, such as it is.

It has been said that lunatics may be permitted to communicate without danger, as they are incapable of combining for dangerous purposes, however mischievous they may be individually.

The following story, which was related to me as authentic, goes to show that, at all events, they understand each other. Two friends went together to a large lunatic asylum, one having business there, the

other merely accompanying him out of curiosity to see the place. While the former entered the house to transact his affairs with the governor, the latter was recommended to walk about the grounds, where some of the inmates were taking out-door exercise.

A gentlemanly man whom he met, and as to whose sanity he could form no opinion, addressed him politely, asking him if he was to have the pleasure of welcoming him to the "Club."

"Well, not exactly," said the visitor, somewhat mystified by this address. "I merely came down to see the place. I'm going back by the four o'clock train."

"Oh! Ah, going back by the four o'clock train. *That's* all right."

"What is that you say?" asked the gentleman, astonished.

"All right, all right; I think you said you were going back by the four o'clock train?"

"Well, what of that? So I am, I believe," said the other, consulting his Bradshaw, which he pulled out of his pocket: "London—express—four o'clock



—there it is,” and he pointed to the line with his finger.

“Oh, I don’t want to see it. The *train’s* all right enough. I don’t doubt *that*.”

“What *do* you doubt, then?”

“I doubt whether you’ll find yourself in it,” replied the maniac, and he burst into a loud laugh.

The visitor was now beginning to be slightly alarmed, and his apprehensions were not diminished when his facetious acquaintance beckoned to an elderly gentleman, who was seated on a bench reading from a sheet of blank paper folded like a letter.

“Here, Mr. Robinson,” said he; “here’s a new member come down; at least I suppose so, for—ahem—he’s going back by the four o’clock train—ha! ha! ha! he’s going back by the four o’clock train—you know.”

“Oh!” said Robinson, approaching and turning the stranger round so suddenly that he performed an involuntary pirouette, then looking at him from head to foot, he said, gravely:

“So *you’re* going back by the four o’clock train?” and then he laughed in his turn.

“Where’s the joke?” inquired the visitor, most innocently.

“Joke! Well, I’m not sure it *is* a joke. Here, Simpson,” said he, proceeding to address a third, who was busy practising swimming in an imaginary bath on the lawn; “here’s a gentleman who’s going back by the four o’clock train.”

“You don’t say so?” said Simpson, joining the rest. “Let’s have a look at him. Welcome, my friend, thrice welcome,” added he, slapping him vehemently on the back.

“Welcome! I tell you I’m going back to London——”

“By the four o’clock train?” said Simpson, finishing the sentence. “We know all about that; in fact, we’re *all* going back by the four o’clock train; the only leetle difficulty is we can’t find out the *day*.”

And they all laughed at this sally, upon which they grew excited, and forming the burden of their discourse into a chorus, they began singing simultaneously, as they pointed at their luckless victim while they danced round him:



“He’s going back by the four o’clock train—train, train, train. Back by the four o’clock, four o’clock train!”

It was in the midst of this mirth that the friend he had accompanied, having completed his business, came out with the governor to fetch him, on which the three maniacs took to their heels, and our friend was set at liberty, to his great relief.

“What *do* they mean with their ‘Four o’clock train?’” said he to the governor.

“Oh, that’s the game they have been up to,” replied he, laughing heartily. “I am sorry for any annoyance you have experienced; but as they are harmless, I hope you will excuse the frolic they have enjoyed at your expense. It so happens when they are brought here, it is the practice to entice them down under the idea that they are coming to see the place and are ‘going back by the four o’clock train.’”

At this explanation the “two gentlemen of London,” irresistibly tickled, began to laugh as loudly as the poor lunatics themselves; they were not alto-

gether sorry, however, when they found themselves safely seated in the "four o'clock train."

Among the doubtfully recoverable cases is one here of an artist of moderate merit, who had previously been detained for many months in the asylum at Ghent. This case offers another instance of disappointed ambition. The poor fellow worshipped his art; unhappily his genius had not kept pace with his aspirations; he tried flower-painting, then landscape-painting, and finally portrait-painting, and this was the rock on which he split. His performances did not come up to his fastidious ideas of perfection, and what was worse, he did not please his sitters any better than himself. He became quite unmanageable at home, and his friends, thinking the malady might be temporary, placed him in the institution at Ghent, where they hoped he might be cured; but the expected improvement did not take place. When I saw him in Ghent it was evident he had but one idea in his head—it was painting, eternally painting, if he "could but get at his brushes, his easel, his palette!" and everybody who gave him the smallest notice was immediately entreated to sit to him.



“With all my heart,” said I, when he proffered his request to me. “When shall it be?”

“To-morrow at twelve,” said he; “that is to say I will see if I can give you that hour;” and he took a book from his pocket and pretended to examine his imaginary engagements. “No. Dear me, I’m so sorry. I see I’ve promised that hour to a lady, and ladies, of course, you know—I’m sure you wouldn’t wish——”

“By no means. Perhaps we had better say three o’clock?”

“Thank you, sir—thank you. Three o’clock; yes, that will do admirably. I will write it down at once, and you may rely upon it, at three punctually I shall be at your door. You will see me drive up in my phaeton and pair from the Bois de Boulogne, where I am at present residing. I shall have with me my paint-box and my mahogany easel.”

“How many sittings will you require?” asked I, taking advantage of a brief pause.

“One, sir—one. I never trouble my sitters more than once, and that is as much as a photographer can say; only there is this difference between painting

and photography, that the former embellishes while the latter disfigures ; and you will see, sir, if you are not satisfied with your portrait. When you look at it, you will make the exclamation universally elicited from all my sitters—‘That is not a canvas, it is a mirror!’ ”

There was a woful change for the worse in the poor fellow before he was removed from Ghent ; he was scarcely recognisable, either physically or morally. His volubility had disappeared, and had given place to a silent melancholy, though he would look round him furtively and suspiciously, as if still alive to what was going on. The formation of his head was very peculiar ; his eyes, which were small, black, and piercing, were set far apart, and the upper portion of his head—always rather large—had visibly increased in size. He wore his black hair parted in the middle, and combed straight down on either side, till cropped below the ear, so that his air partook somewhat of the German-student type, but the expression of his face plainly told there was machinery loose within. His age was about twenty-six, and he had a wife and child.



Our next visit was to the department devoted to those fallen into the last miserable stage of incurable idiocy—always the saddest even where all are sad.

Aged, infirm, helplessly and hopelessly imbecile, but human still! are those consigned for the wretched remnant of their merely vegetative existences to this gloomy sequestration. Bodies without minds—brains without thought—countenances without intelligence—lives without purpose!

Here, with pained and saddened heart, we meet the vacant gaze of eyes which look upon the face of their fellow-man without any responsive expression; the negative, meaningless dulness of the glazed orb at once betrays the ghastly truth that reason has for ever fled,—that these hapless creatures have, while yet breathing, entered

—that long, dark, dark, dark night,  
That has no morn beyond it, and no star!

and that the feeble frame which survives their mental existence is no more than a living tomb!

“The grave of those we love!” exclaims Washington Irving. “What a place for meditation!”

And few that have "loved and lost" but will echo that cry of nature: to that hallowed spot we retire from the noisy, heartless world, to commune with

—the ghosts of our departed joys,

and to patch up the tatters of our remaining existence with fond hopes of a re-union which our hearts forbid us to doubt will be realised beyond it; but when we find ourselves face to face with the *moral* sepulchre, even of those with whom we have nothing in common, beyond our common humanity, we ask ourselves what, even the churchyard has, that can compare with that, in suggestiveness?

Here, indeed, a fool may frame questions which the wisest would be puzzled to answer, and those only who have contemplated this *ne plus ultra* of human degradation will appreciate the impression it leaves behind.

The half dozen human creatures I saw here, were literally more helpless and less intelligent than Chimpanzees: it was a humiliating sight. The ward—their world now!—was large enough and airy enough



for the six inmates it contained, and the door and windows sufficed for its ventilation: beside each bed was the chair into which each was barred, and before each of which was appended a little semi-circular shelf, by way of a table. Their needs were few and easily supplied now!

There they sat, in their white nightcaps and loose dressing-gowns, mute, senseless, and motionless, like superannuated infants, with drivelling mouth, with head dropping listlessly forward or on one side, and with countenance

Haggard and hollow and wan, and without either thought or emotion,

E'en like the face of a clock from which the hands have been taken!

Not a sound, not so much as a moan escaped them; they were beyond complaining, their speech was unintelligible, and seldom heard; there was, however, a melancholy satisfaction in observing that they bore every appearance of being conscientiously cared for.

It was with mingled feelings I turned from this moral charnel-house, the sight of which, I fancied, affected even the doctor, hardened as he must be to

it. As we had now concluded our survey of the institution, I followed my indefatigable conductor into the room in which he had first received me, and where he handed me a little printed report of the condition in which he found the place, and the improvements he had effected by introducing a new organisation of the long-existing system.

According to his belief, the air of Gheel is in itself peculiarly favourable to those afflicted with mental maladies; and he assured me that, in slight or incipient cases, he had known a mere sojourn in the village effect a cure without any medical treatment whatever. He also mentioned some cases which had been previously given up by the physicians who had them under their care, but which had yielded readily to the change of air and the mode of life pursued here.

Simple and regular habits, absence of restraint, open-air exercise, and moral as well as physical treatment, the manner adopted towards them by the population of the place—the result of their long intercourse with the insane—he also asserted to be,



to the mentally afflicted, of a value and importance which none who had not closely watched the malady, could estimate.

Dr. Bulckens spoke of the long and patient study he had given to the statistics of insanity, which, according to the conclusion he has arrived at, show the averages in different nations to be : “in Belgium, 1 in 700 ; in England, 1 in 600 ; and in France, 1 in 500 ; while in Norway and Sweden the present average he believes to be 1 in 300 ; and that number is, he says, rapidly on the increase.” In Greece, it has been asserted, that insanity is unknown.

In explanation, the doctor attributed these results to the following reasons : In Greece, where education and civilisation are making but little progress, a vast exciting cause does not exist. In Belgium, where the intellect is decidedly less strained than in other civilised countries, there are fewer instances of extremes, either way. In France, the majority of the insane are thrown off their balance by political excitement. In England, by hard study and commercial eagerness. In Norway and Sweden by hard

drinking, which he declares is visited not only on those who practise it, but descends from the fathers to the children, so that it is no uncommon occurrence for a child to be born idiotic, or to become so when it cuts its early teeth.

He spoke also of the health of several contemporary royal and other illustrious personages, and declared that among the most distinguished men of the day were many afflicted with epilepsy, though the public entertained no suspicion of the fact. He did not appear to believe the Pope was by any means cured, for he said it was rarely that epileptic fits ceased when once they had supervened, and they were less likely to be removed where the subject was exposed to mental anxiety and weighty responsibility. The French poet, Lamartine, he affirmed, had overstrained his mental powers, and was now suffering from the effects. He spoke of the lofty mind, noble bearing, and majestic demeanour of the ex-Empress of Mexico, and the tragic circumstances of her young career; described her as singularly gifted by nature, especially in an intellectual point of view, and traced her



present unhappy condition to this circumstance. He declared, however, that he had great hopes of her ultimate recovery, and said she was then perfectly aware of all that had taken place. He visits her twice weekly, and sometimes oftener. On him had devolved the difficult task of preparing her for the fatal news with which, on her partial recovery, it had been thought necessary to acquaint her. It was a protracted work, and when at length he considered the moment had arrived, he informed her royal relatives, and the Queen and Archbishop of Malines then went in and laid the melancholy statement before her.

She bore it with wonderful courage and equanimity, and only replied that she had feared matters were as they informed her.

The queen, he described, as a most gentle, amiable, and sensible person, and spoke very highly of the sound judgment and affectionate tact she has shown in the management of her unhappy sister-in-law. He also described her majesty to be peculiarly refined and cultivated, taking the greatest interest in the

advancement of science and in progress of every kind.

Dr. Bulckens, at parting, recommended me to examine practically the dwellings of the *nourriciers* in the village, and at my request provided me with a "*garde de section*," who, he said, would facilitate my entrance into any of the houses I wished to visit, whether of the higher or humbler class.

There are at present boarding at the institution three noblemen, one German and two French, who have come here to recruit their health, the former after hard study (and no doubt hard smoking and beer-drinking), and the two latter after the dissipations of the Paris season.



## CHAPTER VI.

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I visit the Village with a "Garde de Section"—A House of the Richer Class—Its Inmates—Singular Cases—A Frenchman—A Belgian—A Swiss, and—An Englishman—A chandler "Nourricier"—The Tailor's Shop—A modern Heraclitus and Democritus—A hospitable Idiot—A Herbalist Maniac—Curious little old Dutchwoman—Various other Cases—The Church of S. Dymphna—The Spot where S. Dymphna was beheaded—Venerable little Dwelling-house built into the Church—Its History and Description—Its Cells—Their Uses—Exorcisms—Novenas—Supposed Cures—S. Dymphna's Anniversary—S. Gerebern's Anniversary—Interior of the old Church—Its Relics and Curiosities—The De Mérode Family—Benefactors—Peter v. der Putte—His Two Portraits—Silver Box—The Gasthuis—Memorial of S. Dymphna—Return to the Inn—Visit from my Acquaintance of this Morning—Characteristic Conversation—Arrival of the Diligence—Departure.





## CHAPTER VI.

Risu inepto res ineptior nulla est.—MART.

DR. BULCKENS having sent for a *garde de section*, I started on my curious peregrination through the village.

I found him an intelligent and apparently conscientious fellow. He was a Gheelois by birth, education, association, and predilection, for he had never left his native hamlet. Like all his nation, he was eminently *casanier*, and inclined to pique himself on his home tastes. For my purpose a guide of this nature answered best, as I found him thoroughly familiar with all the history and arcana of the place.

Our first visit was to one of the richer houses, where the *nourricier*, aided by his wife, received four boarders: these were a Belgian, a Swiss, a Frenchman, and an Englishman, and each case presented some peculiar features.

The house was a tolerably handsome and well-appointed villa, standing in its own grounds, pleasantly laid out. The principal rooms were on the ground-floor, and above, were several fine, large, airy bedrooms. It was furnished much as a gentleman's residence of the ordinary class would be anywhere, and appeared to contain the average amount of comfort and luxury. An extensive fenced garden, supplied with lawns and flower-borders, shady walks and arbours, surrounded the dwelling, and formed a recreation-ground for the inmates.

In the common sitting-room, where the boarders were provided with a bagatelle-board and other games, illustrated papers, books of prints, &c., I found two of the inmates seated quietly enough, and apparently occupied in reading. The *nourricier*, who appeared much interested in his charges, and impressed me altogether very favourably, intimated to



me that of these two, notwithstanding appearances, one was very mad. This was the Frenchman. As he invited me to draw him out, I addressed him with a common-place observation on the weather. He answered rationally enough, and for some minutes the conversation went on so smoothly, that I could not help directing an inquiring glance at the *nourricier*.

“Wait a little,” was his whispered reply. And, in truth, I had not long to wait. As it happened, the subject I had mooted led straight to that in which his peculiar mania manifested itself. He had gone mad upon the intense study of physics.

“Alas!” observed he, “how little men understand the theory of nature. It is grievous to see them misapprehending her obvious workings; for when she speaks to them in language which they must have been created to understand, they mistake all her problems, and turn a deaf ear to her demonstrations.”

“And why, then, do not you, who can read the book of nature correctly—why do not you enlighten the world on its errors?”

“My dear sir,” replied the maniac, with warmth,

“that is exactly what I would have done. It was my mission, it was my occupation, my joy.” And he clasped his hands and looked upwards, like one who caught his inspirations from Heaven. “I will add,” said he, as he dropped them again, and his head sunk on his bosom—“I will add, my pride. Perhaps,” continued he, abstractedly, after a pause—“perhaps it is for this, that I have been punished.”

He stopped again: fearing he would lose the thread of his strange ideas, I aroused him from his reverie by inquiring what was the view he took of the subject.

“Sir, I will tell you,” he replied, with eagerness. “You are a just man and a reasoning man, and I see you will give a patient ear to that which hasty and illogical people have scorned, because they were not intelligent enough to apprehend it. Now, sir,” continued he, “I love warmth; I thaw and expand under its influence. I love the long bright summer days, I love the long dreamy summer nights; the tepid atmosphere of a tropical conservatory seems to give me a new life; I could bask my days away in



the sunshine that makes all nature so joyous and so happy ; for what would the world be, what would become of cultivation, without the sun ! I have often said to myself, why should not all creation enjoy the glowing delights of perpetual summer ? Why should any human beings, endowed with sense and inventive faculties, shiver away their torpid lives in the desolate frigidity of snow and frost ? Now come nearer, and listen to me, for this is the—ha, ha, ha !” said he, laughing—“the—heresy, I suppose I must call it, for which I am imprisoned in this dungeon by the—the—well, why shouldn’t I say it ?—the inquisition of our times.”

My astonishment grew every moment at the strange bizarrerie of this speech ; the mixture of sense and folly, of logic and false reasoning, which characterised it were so unmistakably the emanation of a diseased brain, and yet so plausibly intermingled, that I was very anxious to pursue the subject and see whither it would lead him.

“Pray go on, sir,” said I therefore ; “I am immensely interested in your argument, and I should

much like to know how you propose to remedy the variable temperature of the earth, and to bestow over its whole surface the blessings now confined to the temperate zone.”

“What, then, you haven’t guessed it as I went on? I was afraid you would—it is so clear, so obvious; but I see there is no mind but my own capable of conceiving the ingenious but simple plan I yet hope one day to carry out. My scheme, sir, is this: I propose to begin with Norway, Sweden, and North Russia. I would have a large glass dome which would entirely cover those countries, and thus by excluding the cold air, and concentrating the sun’s rays, I should at once produce a temperate and genial climate. . . . Hear me to the end. This process, you are going to object, I know, would be a very expensive one. It would, I admit it, but I have provided for that: the vast tracts of land which those countries possess, and which at present are but snow wastes and profitless deserts, would then be brought under cultivation, and their fertility would not only compensate for all the outlay, but would



return an enormous profit to the promoters of the project."

As the poor maniac ceased, he looked into my eyes for an approving response with an earnestness which almost brought the tears into them, instead ; I took his hand, and replied, as best I could :

"Your ingenuity surprises me : yours is, without exception, the most original notion I have ever heard of ; be assured I shall go home and ponder on it, and if I can spare time from my more pressing avocations to pay you a second visit, we will have another talk on this most interesting subject."

The old man smiled, and in his look there was something inexpressibly touching. I saw that he understood me perfectly.

"Adieu, sir," he said, in a chastened tone. "At all events, you listened to me patiently."

And with this he rose, and left the room by the glass door which opened into the garden. My eyes mechanically followed his melancholy step as he walked into an alley, on which the sun shone brightly as if to mock his delusion.

“How long has he been here?” I asked of the *nourricier*.

“Eight years,” he replied; “and always as you see him now. He is wearing himself away, but he is perfectly harmless. He goes where he pleases, and you may generally find him in some sunny spot dreaming away the hours and sighing over his misfortune that no one understands him.”

Meantime the Belgian patient had been sitting with a book in his hand, from which he had never raised his eyes, but no sooner had the Frenchman withdrawn than he remarked, with a shrug,

“Est-il drôle, celui là ! Mais, monsieur, vous ne voyez donc pas qu’il est fou, ce pauvre diable ! que ses idées n’ont pas le sens commun !”

*His* tastes were all entomological, and he showed me in his bedroom several large cases of insects he had collected and preserved with great skill. He had a theory that all orders of creation were one and the same, and that it was the result of accident whether a living creature developed into a human biped, a quadruped, a feathered fowl, a reptile, a fish, or an insect.



Thus far he was harmless, but he was subject to frequent fits of violence, and then would damage whatever came in his way. Only that morning, while the *nourricier* was in the room below, he had been startled to see a plaster statuette of a Madonna and child come tumbling into the garden, where it was broken to pieces. On his calling out to know who was the author of the destruction, this gentleman had shouted down to him,

“C’est moi, Papa Kerkhove. Je viens de jeter cet objet par la fenêtre. Je n’aime pas ce petit bon Dieu, il me fait toujours des grimaces.”

The Swiss was absent; he takes great interest in agriculture, and goes every morning to a farm about two miles distant, where he works till the evening. The *nourricier* considered him cured, and quite fit to go out. He said he had written to tell his parents so, but they seemed shy of having him back too soon, and had replied that they had rather give him a little more probation. His bedroom was in the nicest possible order, and I observed that his books were not only neatly arranged, but were classified in subjects,

and all bespoke a mind capable of appreciating regularity and harmony.

Of these four cases the most distressing was decidedly that of the Englishman. The particulars respecting him, related to me by the *nourricier* and his wife, were as follows :

Insanity had existed in his family for several generations, and as his parents were first cousins, it had come to him from both sides. The first outbreak which had exhibited itself in him had taken the form of religious madness, but the malady had grown upon him with wonderful rapidity ; he had become very violent, and the original cause was no longer apparent. He had been placed by his relatives with an English doctor who kept a private asylum in the neighbourhood of London, and there, had been subjected to a system of severity, restraint, and coercion. Under this he had become so unmanagable that the doctor at last declined to keep him any longer, and his relatives, at a loss what to do with him, and happening to hear of Gheel, sent him here. On first arriving he was perfectly furious—"fou à lier," said my informant ; but knowing how he had been treated, he



was neither surprised nor discouraged. This was before the institution was completed, and when the patients were sent direct to their protectors. No sooner had he got him under his management than he at once left him free from all restraint, according to the Gheel system. But the reaction in this case was a new feature, and the madman did not seem to take it in; he accordingly proceeded to all the acts of violence he found he could compass; and, breaking windows being one of his chief amusements, he set to work and smashed about thirty squares the first day, laughing violently at each fresh crash. Not a word was said to him. The second day he began again, but after breaking fourteen squares, finding that no notice was taken, he suddenly ceased, and never again seemed to take any pleasure in that description of sport. It required a long time, however, to break him in, and so mischievously was he inclined, that during the first eleven months he could never be left alone a single instant, night or day, and even now, after four years, he was very troublesome, but never violent or dangerous.

The rapidity with which he had learned French

was most extraordinary ; he spoke with great fluency and correctness of idiom, and with a perfectly foreign accent. Wishing to test his powers in this respect, I accosted him in English, telling him I was a countryman of his, when he replied in the same language in the readiest way ; and, what was more curious, during the time I remained, although he spoke French to the *garde* and to his *nourricier*, he always addressed me in English.

His appearance was most singular, but although his manner was greatly influenced by his mental condition, there was a certain gentlemanly air about him which gave me the idea that he must have been at some time or other in good society.

His age was about twenty-six, and he was of middle height, had a fair complexion and light hair, with reddish whiskers, but the conformation of his head at once revealed a remarkable condition of brain : his forehead projected considerably, his eyes were unusually far apart, and the wildness and vacancy of their expression seemed to proclaim his state hopeless.



He had lost all command over the spine, and stooped forward at every step with an involuntary bow. Every phrase he uttered was accompanied with a meaningless laugh; it was impossible to fix his attention, and if he did listen for a moment to what was said to him, he answered, for the most part, quite at cross purposes. He was constantly in movement, walking about the room, or out into the garden, now and then singing snatches of a French song in most discordant tones, or shouting at the top of his voice.

“So, you’re English, are you?” said he, turning to me, and shaking again with laughter, as he paced the room. “And who *are* you?” Then, looking at me from head to foot, he added, “What did you come here for? You’re the emperor, I believe, or a king at least.” And then bursting into a loud laugh, and swinging himself about, he walked diagonally across the room, after which, returning to me, he continued: “Here, take my arm, and let’s go and have some lunch; we’ll ask *that* fellow to come with us,” he said, pointing to his own figure

in the glass; then, going close up to it, he looked very hard at himself for a moment, and turning to me, said, "Who *is* that fellow? I wish you'd tell me, he's such a consummate fool; I never saw such an ass in my life." This was followed by another fit of laughter, in the midst of which he drew me aside, and said, in a confidential tone, pointing over his shoulder to his *nourricier*, "That rascal's damned. What, didn't you know it? I should have thought anybody could have seen that. It's a fact, I assure you." And then came another loud laugh. When he first arrived, his mother used to write continually to inquire about him, but of late none of his people seem to have testified the slightest interest in him. They told me he had never attempted to escape, but was fond of playing all sorts of tricks, and particularly of hiding himself, to give his hosts the trouble of looking for him.

The *nourricier* informed me he slept in the room next to his, and in fact cares for him as he would for a child. The pension paid for each boarder in this house is two thousand francs a year, or eighty



pounds. It is the highest charge made, and is inclusive. This was the only Englishman in Gheel.

Among the poorer classes, one I was taken to see was located at a shop much like that of an English country chandler. Her name was Zélie, her age between sixty and seventy, she had been fifteen years in this family, in which she saw children of the second generation. Her friends also seem to have forsaken her, though her pension is regularly paid. If they have forgotten her, however, she still remembers them, and complains bitterly that they never come to see her. She is often perfectly sane for two or three months at a time, and then the malady again makes its appearance, lasting several weeks, during which time she is very excited, but the companionship of a child always seems to soothe and calm her. She rises early, takes long walks, mostly alone, goes messages for the family, of whom she appears to be the pet, helps in the *ménage* and minds the children. She is much attached to the household. She always cleans and keeps in order her own bedroom, which they assured us was a model of neat-

ness, but she has the greatest possible objection to its being entered by any one, and when she heard we were going up-stairs to see the house, she quietly rose, passed, and preceded us, so that when we got to the landing we found her calmly but resolutely standing with her arms folded, keeping guard before her door !

A poor young fellow, chopping wood, and earning his living, was pointed out to me [as doomed to the death of a paralytic. The doctor had declared his brain was already softening, and that he had barely two years before him ; he had been a miner, and the action of the lead had been fatal to him.

At a small tailor's shop within a few doors of this, were a number of journeymen sitting at work, cross-legged, on the board, the master being in the midst of them. We bowed to him, and seeing the *garde* with me, he made no observation beyond a polite "good day." The *garde* bade me look attentively at all the men. "Among them," said he, "are two lunatics."

I looked from one to the other with interest and curiosity, but entirely failed to detect that for



which I was searching. All appeared to me equally intelligent, equally industrious, equally intent upon their occupation.

“Peter,” at last said the *garde*, addressing a steady-looking, middle-aged man, who sat next to the master, “tell us how long you have been here.”

The man looked up with a cheerful face, and replied very promptly,

“Fourteen years.”

“And your right hand neighbour?”

“Oh, he was here before I came. He came here eighteen years ago, but he is in one of his silent moods to-day; you won’t get much out of him for the next twenty-four hours.”

“Eighteen years!” said I; “why, how old is he? He doesn’t appear more than five-and-twenty.”

“Ah,” said the other, laughing, “that is a question no one can answer; his age varies with his humour, but it is true his years do not tell on him as on others. He has looked as he does now, ever since I have known him.”

At this remark, the subject of our conversation

turned stiffly round, but without leaving off his work, and said, in measured tones, "I am forty-four." He then returned as stiffly to his original position.

"That's a good joke," rejoined the other; "yesterday he was forty-eight, and before that, he has been occasionally twenty-eight and thirty-eight. I have always remarked, however," he added, "that he only deals in even numbers."

The last speaker appeared to me so rational, that I could not help asking the master whether he really was classed among the lunatics. He told me that frequently he would continue perfectly sane during long intervals, but that suddenly, and without any previous intimation, he would become so mad that it was necessary to place him under medical treatment. He was, when well, particularly cheerful, and was the life of the house, forming a remarkable contrast to his fellow-workman, so that they were known by distinguishing sobriquets equivalent to the "Jolly fellow" and the "Sullen fellow." They both worked remarkably well, and never made mistakes, earning as much as any of the others.



Turning down a narrow lane near the church of S. Dymphna, we came to a cottage displaying a very picturesque interior. On the broad hearth blazed a crackling wood-fire, and over the flames hung from a chain a large caldron containing potato-soup, which the good wife was preparing to dish up. The family consisted of the owner of the cottage and his wife, with whom lived the wife's father, an old man in a state of second childishness. They received one insane inmate, who had been with them thirty years, and whom they regarded altogether in the light of their own son. The table was prepared for the homely meal, and the four were seated round it. As soon as the idiot saw us, he rose, and holding out his hand, said, in Flemish,

“How do you do, gentlemen ; pray come in ; you have arrived just in time for dinner.” He then began making a place for us at the table, and, turning to the woman, he added : “Mother, we have enough to offer our visitors, haven't we ? if not, you can give me less. Sit down, gentlemen,” he continued, “I beg of you ; we have only bacon and

potatoes to offer you, but if you are hungry you will find it very good."

We had some difficulty in getting away from the poor fellow, who continued to press his hospitality upon us, following us to the door, and seeming hurt at our refusal; we could only pacify him by telling him we would try to come some other day.

As we were leaving this cottage, we met an old fellow—a lunatic—in a blue blouse, carrying a flat basket over his shoulder, containing herbs and simples of various sorts. The *garde* told me he was wonderfully knowing as to their various properties, and spent all his mornings in collecting them, often trudging to a considerable distance in the search. He then returned to dinner, after which he sorted his herbs and tied them up in separate bundles. The afternoon he passed in carrying them round the village to his customers, thus realising, sometimes, as much as a franc a day—a fact much to his credit. He did not seem, however, to relish our notice, and replied somewhat surlily to our salutation.

In another cottage, where the inmates were also



preparing for dinner, were two epileptic boarders: one had been there eight, the other nine years; the former has three fits regularly every day, and was, as we entered, just recovered from one. She looked dazed and hardly conscious. The other has three every week. They seemed well cared for, and the *garde* assured me were very much attached to their *nourriciers*.

One young girl's case partook much of the ludicrous: she imagined herself the victim of a romantic attachment, but was not at all clear as to who was the object of it. She carried about with her a supposed *billet-doux*, which she coyly concealed, intimating, by her manner, that she would readily yield it to the soft violence of any enterprising swain who demanded it.

In several houses we entered, the *nourriciers* inquired of the *garde* whether he could not bring them another patient, as, whenever they had a vacancy, they were of course anxious to fill it up.

I was extremely amused in one small *ménage* we visited, with the antics of a little old Dutchwoman,

who insisted on taking me into her room, which opened out of the kitchen or living-room, and there turning out all her treasures. She had once spoken French, and, finding I was not fluent in Dutch, she began a voluble conversation in what she could remember of that language.

“Moi montrer mossoure tous mes belles habits!” she exclaimed, with the glee of a child exhibiting its toys; and with this she skipped up the two or three stairs which led into her sanctum, and with great alacrity opened two old brass-bound, black-leather chests, which might have come out of Noah’s ark. She then proceeded to unfold, one after another, a succession of antiquated costumes in velvet, cloth, printed cotton, nankeen, and even brocade; all of the most singular cut, which she assured me she had worn, “lorsque moi être jeune;” for she begged me to believe she *had* been young once; “but then that was before—before” some undefined but evidently well-remembered period of her life, which (after long searching for an epithet) she at last explained as—“before she came to Gheel!”



The old Gheeloise, who took care of her, said she was a most amiable old creature, and that it was impossible not to be fond of her; it appeared that trouble, consequent on family bereavements, had occasioned her present derangement. The neatness with which these stores of wearing apparel were stowed away was extraordinary, and her room was a model of Dutch cleanliness.

In this way we visited from house to house, the whole section, each case being more or less singular, and wonderfully varied in character and detail.

We now reached the church of Saint Dymphna, and my guide entering by a little wicket, the fence enclosing the green churchyard, in the midst of which it stands, led me up to a door, and knocked; this door was that of a curious Dutch-like little tenement of very early date, built into the fabric of the church, on the north side of the apse.

An old woman opened it. She looked as if she had walked out of an old Dutch or Flemish picture, and the interior into which she introduced us was the most wonderful repetition of a Teniers or an Ostade,

I ever beheld. There was the black mantelpiece surrounding the large open fire-place, lined on either side with blue and white glazed tiles, the dogs, the logs, and the black spherical cauldron suspended by its chain; the odds and ends of delft ware, the brass candlesticks, the copper pans and skillets shining like silver on the shelf; the Dutchest of old Dutch clocks ticking on the wall, the red honeycomb tiles on the floor, the oak wainscoating half way up the white-washed wall, the black architraves and doors, the stairs in the background, and the gallery with corresponding oak balustrades, into which it led, and whence opened the upper rooms; the small panes of the latticed window and the blue checked curtains, the old wooden chairs, three-legged stools, and quaintly-shaped commode, all were there—not a feature had escaped. I had never seen anything alive so like a Dutch picture before, and I remained mute with astonishment unconsciously studying the detail, and wondering how such a relic could be existing at the present day. The woman invited us into the adjoining room, where she and her good-man were



at dinner, and through this, bid us look into three or four small cells precisely similar in character, provided with beds, the whole being exquisitely neat and clean.

The history of this humble tenement is extremely curious, and dates from the earliest period of the existence of the Shrine of Saint Dymphna. When this spot was originally frequented by those who sought her intercession, it was their pious custom to make a novena or nine days' devotion, in order to add unction to their prayers. So frequent were these pious pilgrimages, that it was found necessary to provide a free retreat to which persons might resort during their stay, and it was thus that these cells adjoining the church and communicating with it were constructed, together with a living-room for the boarders and a kitchen for the old sacristan and his wife, who, like the king, never die, and who from time immemorial have inherited the reversion of the house, and the modest income accruing from the sojourn of strangers.

In early days a form of exorcism was drawn up

for the relief and cure of those who came to seek here deliverance from their maladies, and, as far as I could make out, is still in use. I bought of the old woman a copy of these prayers, which are printed in Flemish only, in an antiquated little pamphlet. Those who resorted hither received a permission to remain, which held good for nine days only, but was renewable. The old woman complained that they rarely received any such devotees now; "that it was passing strange, but pilgrims to the shrine of Saint Dymphna seemed to have lost their faith, and now placed their trust in ignorant doctors, instead of the prayers of Holy Church; but," added she, "they are properly rewarded; in times when those who came believed, there were miraculous cures—she was sure of that, because there was a book in which they were all printed—but there were no miracles now."

It was true, she said, that on the Feast of Saint Dymphna (15th May) people flocked to Gheel from all the country round; that was a sight to see; people on horseback, people on foot—some in carts, some in calèches; then, indeed, the churches were



full, the bells rang, the carillon chimed ; former patients and their families, the friends of patients then there, those who wished to deprecate mental maladies, and, added to all these, idlers, who never missed any excuse for making holiday.

The sacristan now opened the little narrow door which led from his kitchen into the church, and reverently crossing himself, as he dipped his fingers into the holy-water-stoup beside the entrance, advanced to the high altar, before which he knelt devoutly for a few moments. He then pointed out to my notice a life-size waxen effigy of the holy patroness, handsomely costumed, and in a glass case, which he told me was carried round the village in procession on her fête-day, and with it a costly silver box, containing the bones of the saint. On great occasions it is decorated and hoisted on a richly draped *brancard* carried by four bearers. This box is of elaborate workmanship, and of some antiquity. It was given to the church by a wealthy Dutch family, in recognition of the restoration to health of one of its members, after a novena made at Saint Dymphna's shrine.

Another great family, which has always accorded

a liberal patronage to this church, is that of the De Mérodes, whose fine marble tomb, richly ornamented and finely sculptured, stands in the nave before the chancel. On either side the north door are two portraits of an idiot who was deaf and dumb, and who was cured by a novena two hundred years ago: his name was Peter v. d. Putte. One of these portraits represents the subject before, the other after, the novena, and certainly the difference in the expression of the two faces is striking. Whether either was taken from the veritable face of Mr. Peter v. der Putte, this deponent sayeth not.

Near to the Church of Saint Dymphna stands an antiquated edifice of mediæval date: its Gothic windows, arched doorways, and sculptured belfry, impart to it an ecclesiastical character, and led me to suppose it was in some way connected with the church; but on inquiry, I was told it was a "Gast-huis," and had been built in 1286, by one Hendrik Berthaul, Heer (or Lord) of Gheel, to mark the spot where the holy Dymphna was martyred.

The house was served by a fraternity of Brothers and community of Sisters, and the rules of their



order were drawn up by Willem van Henegouwen, Bishop of Kamerijk.

“Gast-huis,” it must be explained, signifies a hospital or guest-house for the reception of pilgrims and mendicants—“gast” being the Flemish for “a poor man”—and there was not a Flemish town or even village without this hospitable institution. One half the building was appropriated to either sex; that of the women being under the care of the Sisters, and that of the men superintended by the Brothers.

None who applied were turned away as long as there was room within; and it was the pious custom to receive those who presented themselves, and make them welcome to what the house afforded. In winter, the foundation supplied a cheerful fire in the common room, where stood a stout deal table and forms, and a meal was set before them; a night’s lodging with breakfast next morning was accorded to them, and they were started on their way with the gift of one penny. If their garments were insufficient they were provided with others, which, if of a homely description, were sound and serviceable.

Later times wrought a change in the habits of nations, and this usage became obsolete; the old Gast-huis of Gheel was converted into a town-hospital for the sick, and the De Mérode family, who had always been liberal patrons of the place, contributed largely to its maintenance.

In the wall of this venerable building we find a grated recess, within which, a group of carved wood figures represent the saint's martyrdom.

The sculpture is rude and primitive, and the figures quaint and angular; they represent the enraged king standing over his daughter, who kneels at his feet; with his left hand he holds her long hair, while he prepares to strike her with the sword, in his right. The painting and gilding have been recently renewed. This niche forms the centre of attraction on the feast-day of the saint; from early dawn to dewy eve this hallowed nook is beset by eager devotees, who prostrate themselves there, reciting their rosaries, pouring out their thanks, or making vows for their own recovery or that of some of those dear to them.

Below this niche is the following inscription :



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Als men screef 30 Mei zes hondered jaer  
Is S. Dymphna hier onthalst van haer eigen vaër.

Saint Gerebern, the martyr, who fell while bravely defending his youthful disciple from the brutality of her own father, is honoured here on the day succeeding the feast of Saint Dymphna.

My wanderings in the village had interested me so much that I was surprised to find how far the day was advanced, and it was evening before I got back to the Armes de Turnhout.

I had arranged to leave that day by the diligence, and having regaled my obliging guide I dismissed him with thanks. My next care was to inquire of my landlord if anything had been seen of the gentleman I had met at breakfast, and I was disappointed to find he had not appeared since.

“Make yourself easy, sir,” said my worthy host; “you may dine in peace. Mons. P—— dearly loves a chat; he will not let you off. I should not be surprised if he has been watching you in, and will shortly follow.”

My landlord was right. I was still at table when

the gentleman walked in, removed his hat, and seating himself opposite me, thrust his hands into his pockets, and in an easy unembarrassed manner entered into conversation.

“You are not a Belgian, I think?” said he; “indeed,” he continued, without waiting for my reply, “I am only half a Belgian myself. Our family was originally English, and I believe the name was spelt P——”

“Indeed,” said I. “Then there is some national affinity. *I* am altogether English.”

“Are you at all interested in the engineering line?” he continued. “That was once my hobby, and I know several of your great English engineers, especially Stephenson and Fairbairn. My brother was articled to Cubitt. Do you happen to know the Scotch physician, Dr. Coxe, and his wife? They have been here, and I was very much pleased with them; they took a great interest in Gheel and the system pursued here. You know, I suppose, that a large number of the population here, are fools?”

As this was a delicate question, I contented myself with an implied assent.



“ You have not been here before, I believe, so I thought it as well to tell you this. I suppose you have a Bradshaw? Is Gheel mentioned in Bradshaw, and what do they say of it there? Do the English know much about it?”

“ They do not,” said I; “ and I should be glad if you could tell me of any book which gives a truthful and reliable account of the place.”

“ I only know of Duval’s book,” he replied, “ which is in French, and rather of the red-tape character, but although it is dryly written, you will see there that what I tell you is perfectly true. In fact, if you didn’t know it you wouldn’t believe it, for many of the folks appear no more mad than I do, and you might talk to them for an hour without finding it out. Some of them,” he added, “ are very cunning; they are only mad on some one point, and they take care to avoid that, so that it is very difficult to detect them. Now, if you can’t get that book,” he went on, “ I dare say I can get it for you by writing to a bookseller at Brussels who supplies me; so you can let me know if you find any difficulty about it.”

On my mentioning that I had just returned from a

journey across Europe, he at once spoke of the different spots I happened to mention, the Tyrol and its mountainous scenery, the interesting cities on the banks of the Danube, the "pusztas" of Magyarland, and the characteristics of the several populations of these localities, with the acumen of a cultivated mind and the experience of a traveller.

He asked me if I knew York, Durham, Chester, and some others of our principal cities, and mentioned some of the peculiarities of those places as if they were familiar to him, but I could not make out he had visited them. He also spoke of our seaport and manufacturing cities, and said he should like to see Portsmouth, Birmingham and Sheffield; he added his brother had travelled a great deal; that he had been in China, whence he had brought him a very curious fishing-rod, and that since his return he had gone to Mexico, which had "given him a good opportunity of *seeing England*." This was the only occasion in the long conversation I had with him in which he betrayed any inconsecutiveness of ideas, for I had been remarking how very accurate his geographical



knowledge seemed to be : occasionally, however, I believe, he makes absurd mistakes. A visitor to Gheel, who met this eccentric gentleman at breakfast a short time before I was there, and who was, at first, unconscious of his condition, was thoroughly puzzled by some of his remarks.

It appears his thoughts wandered much in the same direction as when he was talking to myself, and he was in an equally sociable humour on that day. After some conversation about his family, he said, "My stepmother is just gone to the Nile; it's fine summer weather now for travelling in Egypt, and she expects to benefit greatly by the bracing atmosphere of that climate."

The gentleman he had addressed, paused, and put down his cup; he looked at him first *through* his spectacles and then *over* them, till at last the poor fellow began to perceive he had not been apprehended, and perhaps to suspect that he had made some awkward blunder.

"Eh!—what?" said he; "you understood me, didn't you? I spoke of Egypt . . . well, why

shouldn't my mother-in-law visit Egypt if she likes?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure, why shouldn't she?" said the other, who now began to perceive the condition of mind of his neighbour. . . . "That is, if she is accustomed to travel."

"Accustomed to travel!" replied Mons. P——, "why, she had been to Rome so often she was quite tired of the journey."

"Then why did she continue to go there?"

"Well, the fact is she went there to buy butter," said Mons. P——, confidentially, but with an *aplomb* which altogether overthrew the stranger's gravity.

"Butter in Rome!" said he; "that is an uncommonly good idea. And pray what does she do with this Roman butter?"

"Why, she sends it to Holland to be salted, and from there it goes to Kamschatka!"

My interview must have taken place on a particularly favourable day, as Mons. P—— certainly did not commit himself to *this* extent. He was a man of about forty, and I was told that up to the



age of twenty-four he had shown great aptitude for mathematical pursuits, and had always had the greatest desire to become eminent as an engineer. He was pursuing his studies with this object with great ardour, when, as it appears, his father, more ambitious than himself, unfortunately urged him to efforts beyond his capacity ; a severe illness was the consequence, and on his recovering, his mind was found to be so seriously impaired that he was obliged to abandon all mental work, and was sent to Gheel, where he has remained ever since, harmless but incurable ! He seemed to take a special interest in everything English, and was very proud of two or three words he was able to speak in that language.

Finding I was on my homeward way, he inquired how soon I was returning, asked me if I knew the Belgian minister, M. du Jardin, and assured me that he should be most happy to give me a letter of introduction to him, as he knew him intimately. He said he found Gheel a deuced dull place to live in. " But," he added, " one must, you know, pay for one's follies. The fact is, I have enjoyed my life—lived rather fast—

run through my means, and this, you see, is the '*quart d'heure de Rabelais*.' I am living here at a very small expense, and while getting the benefit of country air, I am retrieving my shattered fortunes; but, upon my life, I can't say much for *society* here." And he laughed aloud.

I assured him of my sympathy in his circumstances, and told him I hoped he would soon be emancipated from a position which certainly offered little attraction to a man of his attainments and antecedents, but that as he had the resource of books, he could philosophically disregard the adverse circumstances in which he was temporarily placed, and, like so many great men, console himself by converse with his mute companions.

The poor fellow listened attentively, and, when I had concluded, said with great simplicity, but also with great earnestness:

"How I wish you were going to remain here, sir!"

The idea was so far from my thoughts, that my first impulse was to express my sense of its ludicrousness; but my eye was arrested by the dejected atti-



tude and pensive expression suddenly assumed by the unfortunate being before me, and I recollected with something like a shudder that there was no law to prevent me from finding myself in a similar plight. I extended my hand to him, and he seized it with the alacrity of a man who has long hungered after the sympathy of his equals.

“*Au revoir!*” I said, rising, for the diligence was rattling up the street, “I will not say ‘farewell,’ for I hope I may one day meet you in happier circumstances.”

The poor lunatic did not reply; he mournfully shook his head. I took my place, and as the clumsy vehicle rolled away, I looked back and waved my hand; he was still standing on the same spot, watching my departure, and I saw that his eyes were filled with tears.

I had matter enough for reflection, as the lumbering old coach jolted across the Campine.

“What a singular place, to be sure!” said I to myself, for there was no one else to say it to. I turned over my note-book and jotted down all the incidents of the visit, while they were yet fresh in

my memory, and as we reached our halting-place, and the horses' hoofs clattered over the paved *chaussée* into Herenthals, I addressed myself once more :

“ If I live to reach home,” said I, “ I'll write a book about Gheel, and publish it for the information of my countrymen, and I'll dedicate it to my excellent friend, M. Ducpétiaux, to whose judicious and benevolent exertions, suffering humanity, throughout his country, and especially at Gheel, owes so much.”

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Reader, I had been invited to dine at M. Ducpétiaux's hospitable table in Brussels, only a week before the day I spoke thus ; he was in his usual health and spirits, and pointed out to me in his well-appointed and choice, but extensive library, one shelf entirely filled with his own literary labours. In the opposite corner of the room stood the elaborate, tasteful, and costly testimonial, a marvellous work of cinque-cento art, of gilded silver, enriched with gems, a truly honourable memorial of the prominent part he took in the Malines congress.

Alas ! before my account of Gheel was even begun,



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I was shocked and grieved, one morning in the middle of summer, at receiving one of those mournful "*lettres de faire part*" which travel about the Continent, carrying sorrow and affliction within their deep black borders. It announced to me that this warm-hearted friend, distinguished scholar, and indefatigable benefactor of his fellow-men, had been called away in the midst of his active and useful life, on the 21st of July, aged sixty-four—an irreparable loss to his country, as well as to his kin!

I need not say I mourned him as a friend, from whom I had received repeated acts of thoughtful kindness, and in whom I had appreciated largeness of heart, extensive erudition, and true refinement of mind.

"My book," said I, "shall be humbly offered as a homage to his memory."

THE END.

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