

Seventh annual report of the directors and physician of James Murray's Royal Asylum for Lunatics. 1834.

Contributors

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SEVENTH
ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN
OF
JAMES MURRAY'S
ROYAL
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SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT
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DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN
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JAMES MURRAY'S
ROYAL ASYLUM FOR LUNATICS,
JUNE, 1834.

THIS Institution is now drawing towards the close of the seventh year of its existence, and the Directors believe, there are few similar establishments of the history of which a retrospect can be taken with so much pleasure and satisfaction. The ample endowment bestowed upon it by its benevolent Founder gave it many advantages, and these, it is hoped, have not been left unimproved : originally the Building was calculated to accommodate from 80 to 100 patients, and it was then thought that many years might in all likelihood elapse, until additional accommodation should be required ; but, in the short period of five years, the Asylum has risen into such estimation, that that accommodation has been found far

from adequate to the applications for admission, and in consequence the Directors have been reduced to the unpleasant necessity of refusing many whom they could have anxiously wished to receive into the Institution. The Directors are happy to say that this source of regret is in the course of being removed, by the erection of a spacious and elegant addition, calculated to contain sixty additional patients, and affording appropriate accommodation for two classes, whose maladies are of so peculiar a nature as to preclude their being mixed with the other patients, without disadvantage to both, and for whom the suitable arrangements had not been made in the original building. Before the publication of the next Report, the Directors hope that this addition will be ready for the reception of patients, and they entertain little doubt that the Asylum will then be regarded as inferior to none in the kingdom.

Ever since the Asylum was opened, the Directors and Physician have published an Annual Report of their proceedings, and they intend to continue this practice, because it appears to them to be attended with beneficial consequences. By giving an account of the General Management of the Institution every year, the public have the opportunity of appreciating the system upon which it is con-

ducted ; while the observations which are occasionally communicated in the Reports, with respect to remarkable cases of insanity, must serve, in some degree, to diffuse useful information concerning a disease, with which we are still but imperfectly acquainted. The symptoms by which insanity may be traced are generally either disregarded, from ignorance of their real cause, and character, or, when observed, carefully suppressed from motives of delicacy, or from that habit, which cannot be too strongly reprobated, of regarding insanity “as more disgraceful than crime ;” yet there are many reasons why the obscurity in which such facts are usually buried is deeply to be regretted. The *Physician* by early and systematic treatment might avert or mitigate a disease, which, there is reason to believe, is now too generally unknown or mistaken ; the *Jurist* would have additional means of discriminating between guilt and misfortune, and of ascertaining with more precision the point where moral responsibility ends, and legal accountability begins ; the *Moralist* would acquire more accurate information respecting the nature of the human intellect, its powers and its weaknesses ; and men would be enabled to distinguish, with greater certainty, rational faith and piety, from the enthusiasm or gloom, or fanaticism of disordered

imaginations. Influenced by these considerations, the Directors and Physician consider it their duty to communicate, from time to time, the result of their experience, by furnishing brief notices of such cases as appear to be of general interest, or calculated to illustrate the peculiarities of this melancholy disease.

At present there are in the Asylum several patients who exhibit symptoms of gloomy despondency, in matters of religion, and who have their minds filled with the most fantastic notions. One of these, imagines that his body was dissected, in Glasgow, and doomed to eternal perdition, and that his soul has fled he knows not where ; and he is constantly haunted with the frightful idea, that for him there is no hope of redemption in the next world. Another patient, a female of sixty years of age, declares that she entered into a solemn compact with the devil, in consequence of which she fancies that, while her soul is in heaven, her body is in hell. All cases of religious mania, seem to be marked by enthusiastic confidence, or gloomy despondency ; but the darker shades of the picture are usually most frequent.

It is not a little interesting to observe the shrewd and pointed remarks, on passing events, which are, at times, made by the pa-

tients, in the course of conversation, and which would scarcely be supposed to come from a person who is deranged: thus, an individual, who takes an interest in political matters, on being informed that Sir George Murray was returned for Perthshire, made the following observations, “it was a wise thing, in the people of Perthshire, to return Sir George to Parliament; the County will be represented by a Tory and the City by a Whig, so that whatever change may take place in the administration, the people will always have one member on the side of the ministry.”

Insanity is occasionally manifested by the patient appropriating every thing to himself, and parting with nothing. Some years ago the Lord Chancellor issued a writ, *de lunatico inquirendo*, against a gentleman, who exhibited this singular symptom;—when strongly urged to put on a clean shirt he would do it, but it must be over the dirty one! nor would he put off his shoes when he went to bed: he would agree to purchase any thing, that was to be sold, but he was determined to pay for nothing; and his house contained a large collection of pictures, musical instruments, clocks, and other articles, all huddled together on the floor of his dining room. Similar cases have occurred in this Asylum. So strong was this propensity exemplified, by one pa-

tient, that he was in the habit of constantly stealing whatever came within his reach : he was a most dexterous thief, and shewed considerable art in concealing the stolen articles, about his person and elsewhere. Human nature is always the same, and if the bad passions are manifested by persons of sound mind, it can excite no surprise to observe the vicious dispositions which are sometimes exhibited, by those, who are no longer under moral restraint, and cannot be considered as rational and accountable agents.

It is, indeed, somewhat interesting to reflect upon the many causes from which insanity is found to originate ; amid many others must be ranked the vice of dissipation ; but, although that is certainly the exciting cause, in a considerable number of cases, the statement, made by the advocates of temperance societies, that one half of the inhabitants of our mad houses, are the victims of intemperance, is by no means made out by the experience of this Institution ; where the number of that class, cannot be rated higher than 6 per cent. Much as the Directors reprobate and deplore the vice of intoxication, yet insanity, originating in dissipation, is by no means so frequent as from the influence of religious fanaticism, and is generally more susceptible of a cure.

It would however much exceed the prescribed limits of this Report, and perhaps be beyond its precise object, to attempt an account, either of all the various causes of insanity, or of the peculiarities by which it is characterised; from the statement already given it will be sufficiently apparent how much prudence and discrimination are required, and how much vigilance, and unremitting attention, is indispensable in such an Institution as the present, in order to meet the varied maladies, and humour the numberless whims, of the patients. The time has happily gone by when it was accounted almost the only requisite of a Lunatic Asylum, to keep its inmates in secure custody, and in seclusion from the world. It is no longer the fashion to regard the victims of insanity as irrecoverably lost, by the visitation of an incurable malady; they are now only viewed as labouring under a curable disease, as a portion of our fellow creatures, who continue "as near and dear" to their relatives as ever. The system of bondage and coercion, has been changed for one of freedom and entreaty.—The keeper from being the gaoler and taskmaster, has been transformed into the protector and friend, the soother and the comforter, of the patients.

This is, indeed, the grand and fundamental principle according to which this Institution

is conducted, and, although the system owes its origin to earlier Asylums, the Directors believe there is none in which a stricter adherence to it has been enforced. The slightest severity, or harshness, to a patient, by a keeper, would ensure the instant dismissal of the latter ; nor will provocation, or violence, on the part of the patient, be admitted as any apology : he must contrive to escape such consequence, by prudence and good management, not by harshness or retaliation. It is impossible to estimate too highly the beneficial consequences of this system, when aided by cleanliness, nourishing and wholesome food, with abundance of exercise in the open air ; and a stronger proof of the kind and tender treatment shewn towards the patients, cannot be adduced, than the feelings evinced by any of them who have had the misfortune of a second attack, and been returned to the Asylum ; there is no horror exhibited at the prospect of a further period of confinement, no dread of fetters, and a dungeon, or the abuse of a keeper ; on the contrary they seem to return, as to the home of the kindest parent, and appear to experience comfort and protection, the moment they re-enter the walls of the Institution. One patient, who had been somewhat furious, on a second attack, was brought in a cart to the Institution,

tied with ropes, in the most frightful manner, but which his attendants declared to be altogether indispensable : he was instantly, on his arrival, untied and set at liberty, his first observation to the carter was “if you had told me where you were bringing me to, there would have been no occasion for tying me.” The list of cures, since the Asylum was first opened, shews the happy results by which such treatment has been attended, and encourages the Directors, more and more, to persevere in the same plan, under which the Asylum was commenced. The case of a person who was, sometime ago, dismissed cured, affords a powerful illustration of the happy results of continued perseverance in this system ; he was brought to the Asylum in a state of deplorable insanity ; he was violent, noisy, and dangerous ; he fancied he had communication with spirits, and heavenly influences, and walked about with his eyes fixed on the skies, out of which he fancied he saw chariots full of angels descending to meet him. In this state he continued for no less than four years, notwithstanding the application of every remedy which could be devised ; all hope of rescuing him from his unhappy malady had almost disappeared, but still the same unremitting attention, to his case, was kept up, and, to the delight of the Physician, and Su-

perintendent, he gradually came round, and, as already mentioned, was latterly dismissed cured. After his recovery, he stated that a fright he had received, while living alone at a bothy, was the cause of his insanity.

While, however, a steady adherence to a particular line of moral, and medical treatment is the only sure, or, at all events, the most prudent course, and most likely to bring about a cure, it is nevertheless remarkable that an important degree of relief has often resulted from accidental causes. A striking instance of this is narrated, by an eminent author, in a *Treatise on Mental Diseases*, as shewing the influence of sudden terror, in changing a disposition to suicide: "A man of letters, accustomed to free living, and who had lately been cured of an intermittent fever, was seized, in the autumn, with all the horrors of propensity to suicide, and he often estimated the different ways of destroying himself. A journey which he took to London, seemed to encrease his melancholy, and his determination to shorten his life; he fixed upon a late hour, one night, and went upon one of the bridges, in order to throw himself into the Thames; but, at the moment he got there, he was attacked by some pickpockets; he became very angry and made violent efforts to escape, which he effected, after being

considerably agitated, and greatly alarmed ; his melancholy immediately was changed, he forgot the object of his walk ; and, though he was reduced to as great distress as before, he never afterwards felt any *emotions of suicide*." Such providential instances, however, it must be confessed, are by no means of frequent occurrence, and hence the greater necessity exists for resorting to all those remedies which experience has suggested for the relief of the insane ; remedies which have happily restored many a valuable member of the community, to his friends and society.

Although a public Hospital, the Directors have felt it their duty to manage the Institution, on the plan of a private Asylum ; all visits from idle curiosity are uniformly discouraged ; the patients are carefully protected from the public gaze, and their names or connections never disclosed. The mischievous practice of admitting parties of pleasure, to mix and converse with the patients, which is said to prevail in some Asylums in England, is here never adopted, as it is found by experience that the quieter the insane are kept from visitors, and very frequently from their own friends, the greater chance there is of a recovery.

During the past year the conduct of the Office-Bearers, of the Institution, has excited

the warmest approbation of the Directors ;— they experienced, however, feelings of the deepest regret, on the melancholy and lamented death of Mrs Simmonds, the Matron of the Institution, which happened on the sixteenth day of August last. By this distressing event, the Institution was deprived of the services of one of the most zealous, humane, and upright of Office-Bearers, and sustained a loss of no ordinary magnitude ; happily, however, that loss, which, in ordinary circumstances, would have been severely felt, was greatly compensated by the valuable services of her sister, Miss Mitchell, who had before and during the illness of Mrs Simmonds, taken the active management of her department, and by whose praiseworthy exertions, since her death, the Asylum has been conducted in the same admirable manner as before.

By the Table annexed to this Report, it will be seen, that, in the course of the year now closed, there have been admitted, to the Institution, 31 patients, 21 male, and 10 female, and that the total number under treatment, in the course of the year, has been 111. Of these, 8 have been cured, 9 have been removed by their friends, more or less improved, and 5 have died. It will be seen that the number of admissions, during the past year, has exceeded that of any former year, and there

now remain in the House 89 patients, 49 males, and 40 females. The Directors feel much cause of congratulation on this Report of the year, because although the number of cures, when compared with the number of patients in the House, is not so great as in some former years, yet when it is remembered, that the great proportion of the cases remaining at the close of last year, were cases of old standing, chiefly of inveterate and confirmed madness, and that, exclusive of those removed by their friends, the number of actual cures bears the proportion of one fourth of the number admitted, the result is highly satisfactory; and when there is taken into account the vast relief afforded to many, whose maladies have not been so entirely eradicated, as to rank them in the list of cures, but who still have had the bitter sting of the distemper extracted, and have been restored to tranquility and comfort, in place of restlessness and pain, the Institution can only be viewed as one of the many blessings under Providence, provided for the most appalling of the necessities of the human race. The most sincere desire of the Directors is to render it, more and more, extensively useful, and they earnestly hope and trust, that the same degree of success may continue, which has hitherto attended their exertions.

In conclusion, the Directors have to record their warmest thanks to the Physician for the ability, and unremitting attention, with which, during the past year, he has continued to discharge his arduous duties, and to the Superintendent, for the uninterrupted vigilance, and care, which he has ever exerted, in the execution of his important trust.

TABLE FIRST.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Number of Patients remaining in the Asylum, on 9th June, 1833,.....	41	39	80
Number of Patients admitted, from 9th June, 1833, to 9th June, 1834,.....	21	10	31
	62	49	111

TABLE SECOND.

	Males.	Females.	Total.
Cured from 9th June 1833, to 9th June 1834,.....	4	4	8
Removed by their Friends,.....	6	3	9
Died,	3	2	5
Remaining 9th June 1834,.....	49	40	89
	62	49	111