

Seventeenth annual report of the directors and physician of James Murray's Royal Asylum for Lunatics. June 1844.

Contributors

James Murray's Royal Asylum for Lunatics.

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OF THE
DIRECTORS AND PHYSICIAN
OF
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ROYAL ASYLUM FOR LUNATICS.

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IT is now the pleasing duty of the Directors and Physician of this Institution to present to the Public the Seventeenth Annual Report of its proceedings.

This duty is, happily, as simple as it is pleasing. The increasing experience acquired during each succeeding year by the different persons entrusted with the more immediate management of the Establishment, while it has rendered their services more valuable, has also tended to give greater efficiency, as well as uniformity and simplicity, to the performance of the duties of their respective departments. As a consequence of this, it will readily be seen, that the Report of one year cannot now be expected to differ greatly from those of former years. Both the external and internal arrangements of the House have, in the course of years, acquired a great degree of perfection. The grounds around the House have all, long since, been laid out in the way considered most advantageous for the professed object of the Institution, so as not only to render the Asylum attractive, from the beauty of its scenery, but substantially useful for all practical purposes. Full scope is thus afforded to the insane of

every class for receiving the benefit of those remedial measures so essential to their welfare, consisting in the enjoyment of walking in the open air, and other suitable exercises and sports, apart from the bustle and excitement of public life. The internal arrangements of the House are equally complete, and embrace the greater part of the best approved and most recent improvements introduced into similar Institutions both in England and on the Continent, with such modifications as experience has shown to be necessary. From what has now been stated it must be evident, as already said, that the details in the management of the Institution can vary but little during the past year from those of some of the years immediately preceding.

A few details, however, may not be unacceptable. During the past year there have been admitted into the House 32 patients, viz., 17 males, and 15 females. In the course of the year, 12 have been cured, 4 males and 8 females; 11 have been removed by their friends, more or less recovered, 5 males and 6 females, and 7 have died, 6 males and 1 female. In June last year there were in the House, in all, 143 patients, while at the same period this year the total number of patients is 145—82 males, and 63 females, showing an increase of 2 patients this year as compared with the preceding.

At all recurrences of popular commotion, or when any event happens which excites the feelings of people more than usual, it is found that the number of the insane is increased, or, at all events, during such seasons, more cases of insanity shew themselves than at other times. The excitement which has of late prevailed to so great an extent in the Church of Scotland, has not proved any exception to the general rule, but has contributed to swell the list of the insane. Three, out of ten patients, admitted during the first quarter of the present year, were cases arising from this cause; and the Physician has been consulted in regard to others whose insanity has proceeded from the same

source. The effects are much the same, whether the excitement arise from a religious or political movement in society, or partly from both. In corroboration of the truth of this remark, reference may be made both to the first and second French Revolution, which were both a fruitful source of insanity, from the extreme excitement and fear necessarily produced in the public mind. The excitement attendant on the Reform Bill in this country sent also its victims to the several Asylums, of which the present had its own share.

The character of those affected with insanity, and the different forms in which the malady presents itself, is greatly diversified,—no two cases of the one hundred and forty-five at present under treatment, being, perhaps, in all respects, the same. It were in vain, therefore, to attempt, within the limits of this Report, anything like an analysis of the cases of the various patients now in the Asylum; nor, perhaps, though it were practicable, would it answer any good purpose. Let therefore two cases suffice. It is observed by a learned author,* in speaking of a certain class of the insane, that their “*memory* is often remarkably retentive; but it appears to be merely a power of retaining facts, or words, in the order and connexion in which they have been presented to them, without the capacity of tracing relations, and forming new associations. In this manner they sometimes acquire languages, and even procure a name for a kind of scholarship.” No fact is better ascertained than that just referred to, yet in our Courts of Law it is constantly reared up as a bugbear to frighten Judge and Jury in those cases where a person is cognosced, with the view of testing his sanity, to deter them from bringing in a verdict of insanity. Many cases might be referred to in proof of this, and the author just quoted refers to one, quite in point, where the evidence, in defence, in substance was,—that the party, under trial, had been,

* Dr. Abercromby on the Intellectual Powers, p. 344.

when at school, an excellent scholar in the languages, and had repeatedly acted as a private Tutor to boys. There is a patient at present in this Asylum, whose case is almost precisely the same as that of the person just referred to. He has been in the House for five or six years, and may be about thirty-six years of age. He is possessed of a very powerful memory, and it is understood that, when at school, he made considerable advancement in the classics, and carried off various prizes. He carefully chronicles in his memory, without discrimination, the most trifling, equally with the more important, incidents, which fall within the range of his observation in the House; and, in reference to all such matters, his memory may be relied on with almost the same assurance that an almanac is trusted to in the ordinary business of life. Yet the slightest provocation will throw this patient into the most violent and uncontrollable paroxysms of rage, during which he threatens vengeance to all and sundry. There are other symptoms attending this case, on which it is unnecessary to enlarge.

There is another patient in the House whose case affords a good example of "zeal without knowledge," and of industry without a suitable object. His industry, in fact, is worthy of an age long gone by; when the only substitute for the wonder-working power of the printing-press was the laborious penmanship of pious monks. The patient referred to has made a manuscript copy of the *entire Scriptures*; a feat, it is believed, not very common in the present day. But the most curious fact of the case, and what must have rendered the execution of the work much more laborious, is, that instead of transcribing the words and letters in the order and manner in which they are usually printed or written, he adopted the somewhat novel plan, (whatever may be thought of its ingenuity,) of writing *the letters of each word in the inverse order in which they should have been written*. For example, the first verse of

the Bible, which is, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," would, according to the patient's version, read thus: "Ni eht gninnigeb Dog detaerc eht nevaeh dna eht htrae." Whatever other people may think of this invention, the laborious penman himself is perfectly satisfied, that if he had an opportunity of treating with a publisher, he would have no difficulty in realizing a handsome fortune!

As has already been hinted, this Asylum possesses grounds attached to it of sufficient extent to admit of every variety of exercise being obtained by the patients. Every encouragement and inducement is held out to them to engage either in manual occupations or field sports. For the former, the large garden attached to the house is of great use, and the green in front of the house is equally convenient for the latter. From the conventional rules current in the genteel society of modern times, it is found that patients from the upper ranks of life are almost invariably averse to engage in manual occupations of any kind, such as digging or anything connected with gardening. If the inclination of such patients could be brought to think favourably of these, there can be little doubt that they might frequently prove of considerable benefit to them. However, when any aversion is seen to such employment, the patients are never urged to engage in it, but are left to follow such harmless amusements as may be more congenial to their habits—such as throwing quoits, or playing at the cricket, or on the bowling-green. No such aversion as that referred to, to engage in manual labour, is found in patients from the humbler ranks of life. They are usually quite willing to engage in every kind of work. But, however willing an insane person may be to engage in work, it requires considerable attention from the person superintending to keep his mind steadily to his task, as it has a constant tendency to wander. The consequence is, that one

good labourer, of a sane mind, would easily perform as much work as three insane persons, accustomed to work, could do.

Besides the occupations and amusements referred to, it has been the practice in this Asylum for several years, not unfrequently, to allow such of the patients of both sexes, whose cases admit of it, to meet together for some hours in the evening to listen to the piano, or the violin, and likewise to engage in dancing. The patients look forward to such occasions with great delight, and when from any misbehaviour they are threatened with exclusion from such happy meetings, it often operates beneficially in making them improve their conduct. A stranger unacquainted with the character of those present on these occasions, would certainly never dream that those whom he saw were other than sane men and women, and would marvel when he was informed that those before him were the inmates of a Lunatic Asylum. The harmless pleasantries which pass on these occasions would often do credit to wiser heads, and one would almost be tempted to think that, for the moment, they had been emancipated from the thralldom of their sore malady.

These amusements are considered to exercise a beneficial effect on a certain class of patients, and of course discrimination is used in selecting those who are allowed to take a part in them.

After glancing at the numerous contrivances which the ingenuity and humanity of Europeans have made for the benefit of the insane, and which are calculated, in such a great degree, to alleviate the distress both of the unhappy persons themselves, as well as of their relatives, it may not be uninteresting, by way of contrast, to look for a moment to the description given by a modern traveller* of a mad-house in Cairo, the modern capital of Egypt.

* Egypt and Mohammed Ali, by James Augustus St. John,—vol 2, pp. 309-10. 1834.

“ From the Convent we proceeded to visit the Mad-house, forming one of the wings or outbuildings of a spacious mosque, through the principal entrance to which we were conducted into the court where the insane are confined. In all countries, a Lunatic Asylum constitutes a fearful spectacle, shocking to the feelings, and humiliating to the pride of humanity. But nowhere perhaps on earth can any thing so terrible, so disgusting, be witnessed, as the mad-house of Cairo, where, as may be certainly inferred from the ferocious aspect of the keepers, and the appearance of the victims, lacerated and covered with wounds, scenes of cruelty and suffering occur not elsewhere exhibited out of hell. In the centre of the court is a square pool, sometimes dignified with the name of a fountain, but which, in smell and appearance, rather resembles a cess-pool, or a portion of a common sewer. The atmosphere, impregnated by its noxious exhalations, is consequently more offensive and corrupt than that of a dissecting-room in July; and the walls and pavement are covered with a green ropy matter, and most dismal hue, which prepares the mind for the horrors to be witnessed in the cells. In the face of the dingy wall surrounding the court are a number of square iron-grated holes, which would appear to lead to so many old neglected dens of wild beasts, but that within each, closely pressed, perhaps, against the rusty gratings, a human being is beheld, generally stark naked. From the heavy iron collar encircling his neck is suspended a massive chain, which, issuing through the grating, and running like a festoon along the wall to the mouth of the neighbouring den, connects him with his next companion in madness; so that, when one retires into the cell, the other at the opposite end of the chain, is necessarily dragged forward in proportion.” The person who witnessed this sad spectacle justly observes in regard to it, that “ the mere appearance and economy of the place are a blot on the character of Mohammed Ali, and prove him to be

destitute of the ordinary feelings of humanity. His lions and elephant in the citadel are better housed." But, from such a picture as this the mind at once recoils with instinctive aversion. It should certainly make us prize more highly those quiet and soothing retreats which enlightened humanity has provided for the insane within our own happy land.

In conclusion, the Directors would take this opportunity of recording their approbation of the assiduous attention of the Physician and House-Surgeon to their important duties, and also of the conduct of the Superintendent and Matron in their respective spheres ; and they trust that this Institution may long continue to enjoy that prosperity, and to secure that unbounded public confidence which, by the blessing of God, it has now done for these seventeen years.

TABLE FIRST.

	Males.	Females.	Total
Number of Patients remaining in the Asylum, on 12th June, 1843,.....	80	63	143
Number admitted from 12th June, 1843, to 10th June, 1844,.....	17	15	32

TABLE SECOND.

	Males.	Females.	Total
Cured from 12th June, 1843, to 10th June, 1844,	4	8	12
Removed by their friends,.....	5	6	11
Died,	6	1	7
Remaining 10th June, 1844,.....	82	63	145