

It remains to be said, in conclusion, that although no person could reasonably deny the great good that it may do in individual cases, or the fact that in medical hands legitimately employed with caution it appears to produce no direct harm, yet there may result indirect harm to a community from its adoption, from the frame of mind that it engenders among ignorant and superstitious people. In an asylum, if extensively used, it may increase and strengthen the delusions about hypnotism, and about unseen agencies in general, and we have had one case here who, when she learnt that I made use of hypnotism, although not with her, imagined that all her delusions were confirmed, and became very difficult to manage, if not positively dangerous. This objection, however, may just as legitimately be urged against the use of the battery for electro-therapeutics, or against the introduction of the electric light and telephones in our modern institutions.

The Psychological Examination of Prisoners. By Dr. JULES MOREL, Hospice-Guislain, Ghent.*

I think it is a general rule in all well-organized prisons, that, periodically, the staff holds meetings to take decisions upon the measures to be taken concerning the prisoners whose conduct is not, or has not been, following the regulation of the house.

After each meeting, minutes of transactions are made and sent to the higher authorities, and usually to the Minister of Justice. M. Lejeune, Minister of Justice in Belgium, was struck by the examination of these minutes in our country, and stated that they were almost always the same prisoners of whom complaints are made and against whom disciplinary cautions were taken.

A doubt came to the Belgian Minister, and his Excellency asked himself if these rebellions against discipline were not, in reality, signs of mental instability. M. Lejeune decided to establish a medico-psychological inquiry in one of the Belgian prisons, with the recommendation to pay special attention to these so-called undisciplined. Amongst these, there were fourteen prisoners absolutely unable to submit themselves to the regulations of the house. The examination of their

* Paper read at the Psychology Section of the British Medical Association, held at Nottingham, July, 1892.

mental state proved that, among these fourteen prisoners, there were eight who showed symptoms of such a madness that one was obliged to proceed immediately to place them in a lunatic asylum.

The medico-psychological inquiry was suspended after the examination of 291 prisoners. The Minister of Justice was then convinced that, henceforth, the medico-psychological examination of the prisoners was to be made by special physicians, and created a service of mental medicine. Three alienists were appointed, and each of them has now the charge of the psychiatric service in nearly twelve prisons.

The results obtained since the inauguration of this service in the Belgian prisons are already sufficient to allow us to judge about the importance of the new ministerial decision.

I have thought it of very great interest to make the results known, and, consequently, to conclude that the inconveniences stated in the Belgian prisons very probably exist in all the other prisons of the world.

My aim is to call the attention of the foreign authorities, in order to help and convince them that prisons always contain a certain proportion of insane people, and that it is very important a similar medico-psychological service should be adopted everywhere. I even think that it is no more possible to doubt that this service recently instituted in Belgium, and only applied to the prisoners whose mental state of health seems suspicious to the officers of the prisons, will be enlarged and spread in a short time over all the recidivists for the different kinds of crimes and offences of a certain degree. The aim of the mission of the alienists of the Belgian prisons is to remove and to certify all the prisoners whose physical state is incompatible with the habitual *regimé* of the prisons, to submit immediately to treatment all recent cases of mental diseases susceptible to the necessary care at the prison itself, and giving some hope of a relatively prompt recovery; finally, to call the special attention of the officers of the prisons to all doubtful cases.

If the medico-psychological service could, at a future time, be applied to all the recidivists and all the great criminals, it would offer many and great advantages; it would allow us to make up very complete reports of the mental state of the convicts, and these notes should become of the highest importance.

1st. It would record the psychical deficiencies of the convicts; it would allow us to class these delinquents, and

subsequently to begin an individual treatment, so far as their cerebral power allows it.

2nd. It would allow us, by these means, to make known the undisciplined and those who would simulate mental disease; it would allow us to take the necessary measures to repress their conduct.

3rd. To the guardians, officers, and even to the higher authorities, who wish to have a serious and scientific opinion concerning the convicts under their care and to employ all possible indulgence, it would be very useful, especially when they have to apply either conditional or final liberation, or special measures of protection in their favour when they leave the prison.

4th. The magistrate, instructor, and the judges would be enabled to consult these notes with profit in all cases when recidivists should be brought again before them. As a matter of fact, in most cases these magistrates were unable to form an exact opinion of the psychological state of the old convicts. The examination of the new documents would make it easy to form a more rational opinion of the degree of indulgence or severity with which they should act according to the reformation the old criminals have shown during and after the time of their detention.

We are aware that the natural conclusions of such a psychological examination would be the necessity of a grand reform in the penitentiary system, and perhaps also the revision of certain parts of the penal law.

My experience of the study of the convicts submitted to my examination since the 1st of June, 1891, till the 30th of May, 1892, completely demonstrates the necessity of the reorganization of the treatment of the inmates of prisons. It proves:—

1st. That every prison with a population of, for instance, one thousand or more convicts should have a special ward in which one could take proper care of all the criminals who have become insane during their detention and are susceptible of recovery.

The treatment of the criminal and curable lunatics in a separate building of a prison seems to me to have great advantages. On their discharge these unhappy men should not have the stigma of having been in a lunatic asylum, and consequently it should be easier to them to reconquer an honourable place in society. The special lunatic asylums for the criminals ought only to be opened for those whose mental

condition should not allow of a rational treatment in the division of the prison called the lunatic ward; they should also receive the insane criminals whose incurability is more or less established.

2nd. That each prison, and a portion in each ward destined for criminals having become lunatic, ought to have a special staff of attendants with the necessary qualities, instruction, and education required to treat rationally the convicts who become insane.

3rd. That all convicts belonging to the class called imbeciles ought to receive special physical and mental care. They ought not to be discharged before the end of the duration of their imprisonment, because it is this class of degenerates that furnishes the great contingent of recidivists. One ought also to group in this class those criminals who, by their former way of living, have weakened their body and mind.

4th. That society does not take sufficient care to preserve malefactors from relapse. In the present state of things, and almost generally, the old criminals feel themselves abandoned by those who ought to protect them in a social point of view; very often they are obliged to ask for hospitality in lodgings, nearly always inhabited by the lowest class of society. It is not easy for them to find work again, and consequently they feel obliged to spend the best part of their time in these houses of ill fame. With the little money they have they begin to drink. They make the acquaintance of bad people, and by-and-bye they begin to provoke, or are provoked, to commit new crimes.

The medico-psychological examination has often proved that these individuals on leaving the prison cured, as much as possible, physically and morally, if they are obliged to follow the course we have described, soon decline again mentally, and, above all, lose their will and their self-respect.

Lombroso's school does not sufficiently understand the importance of the moralization of the criminals and of the protection of those to whom the doors of the prison are opened. We have the proof of it in what we daily see in lunatic asylums, which have in their population numerous individuals of whom criminals can be manufactured at leisure. I may mention the degenerated cases of moral insanity and those of mental weakness. Amongst them there are many that are able to receive a sufficient education and moraliza-

tion to give them, on parole, a very high degree of liberty. I dare to say so in a country where there are so many adherents of non-restraint.

If many convicts were submitted to treatment similar to that practised in our lunatic asylums, would relapses be so frequent? I have the firm conviction that the future will solve this question, and the more promptly because governments would understand the great necessity of introducing in a short time a medico-psychological service in all their prisons.

Neural Action Corresponding to the Mental Functions of the Brain. By FRANCIS WARNER, M.D., F.R.C.P., Physician and Lecturer on Therapeutics and Materia Medica at the London Hospital.*

While working purely on the lines of physical science it will be admitted that all observations recorded should be described in terms connoting physical phenomena, so given as to be capable of repetition, and, if possible, of measurement. No forces and no causes can be admitted as potent except those known to physiology and other branches of physical investigation. It follows that in dealing with the mental functions of the brain—here termed psychosis—we have nothing to do with “mind as an abstract entity” or with processes of feeling and consciousness, and must confine our attention to neural acts without either admitting or denying the existence of other potencies with which, while working on the lines of physical science, we are not concerned.

I will confine my remarks to action in the brain of man, as it may be inferred from facts observed. It is convenient to commence with observations in the infant when the neural arrangements are congenital, and trace by observation the development of indications of psychosis under impressions received from the environment.

In the healthy and well-developed new-born infant universal, slow, spontaneous movements, particularly in the digits and other small parts, are seen; this I have described as microkinesis.† It is not at first co-ordinated by impressions from the environment. In neural action it is inferred to correspond

* Paper read at the Psychology Section of the B. M. Association, held at Nottingham, July, 1892.

† See Tuke's “Dictionary of Psychological Medicine.”