

PART IV.—NOTES AND NEWS.

QUARTERLY MEETING OF THE MEDICO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.

A Quarterly Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Society was held in the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, on Wednesday, the 24th November, 1880. Among those present were Drs. Campbell (chair), Brodie, Brown, Clark, Clouston, Dunlop, Fraser (Paisley), Hyslop, Ireland, Philip, Rutherford, Tuke, Turnbull, Urquhart, and Yellowlees.

The minutes of last meeting were held as read.

Dr. Fraser, of Paisley, was elected an ordinary member of the Association.

Dr. J. R. DUNLOP, Woodilee Lenzie, then read a paper on a "Case of Heredity." (See Original Articles.)

Dr. IRELAND—I see there are other diseases in this case which are associated very often with imbecility, such as phthisis, goitre, and even congenital hernia; sometimes insanity and epilepsy are associates in the same family. There is nothing more interesting than tracing these genealogies; the transmission by persons of diseases which they have never had themselves is one of the most mysterious things with which we have to do. It may be accounted for, to a certain degree, in so far as that a man who transmits disease or escapes whilst his brethren are affected, is really in danger of becoming insane during the whole of his life, but does not, because he has not been subjected to the same exciting causes which have made his less fortunate brethren or offspring insane, imbecile, or affected with other neuroses. [Dr. Ireland then submitted a pedigree which he had obtained of a similar case, about which, he said, that the principal thing to remark was that the imbecility seemed to be sent through the female line, all the children being illegitimate, and each by a different father.] I was going to remark on one feature which is generally presented by French writers like Morel that there seems to be a fatal downward tendency in these cases that undoubtedly existed in the tables published, but I believe it is by no means always the case. In some families there is a tendency to recover, and shake off the neurosis.

Dr. CLOUSTON—It has been remarked that the combination of a hereditary tendency to consumption and to insanity—say the one in the male and the other in the female—results in a very bad offspring. I cannot say that I have seen imbecility specially resulting, it being rather a want of development. There is a point that strikes one in reading such histories of imbecility, viz., that imbecility and idiocy seem to be dissociated very largely from other forms of mental disease. It is surprising how much more infrequently they are associated than *a priori* theories on the subject, and especially Morel's idea would lead one to imagine. The imbecile children who have insane parents are very few indeed, considering that a vast number of our asylum patients have families, and that many of them have even married neurotic partners. Such cases as this and the one we are so familiar with, which was photographed by W. A. F. Browne, seem peculiar cases. Why the woman mentioned by Dr. Ireland should have produced by four fathers four imbecile children—why the male bit of protoplasm should not have taken some effect in any one case, seems very extraordinary. We are much indebted to Dr. Dunlop for his paper. Such papers are much needed, as the heredity of the neurosis is one of the subjects which offer a very great field for future investigation.

Dr. BRODIE—One expects that the criminal class rather than the insane would be the progenitors of the imbecile, and it would have been interesting had it been possible to get the histories in detail of the sane members of this family as to whether there was any criminal phase in the various careers.

Among the side issues of imbecility, criminality comes up in some force. There was an instance of this in the deplorable murder of a gamekeeper and his wife at Chislehurst, where the prisoner's mother knowing his tendencies had been afraid of him from infancy.

Dr. YELLOWLEES—This seems rather a case of transmitted brain defect than brain disease. In a family which runs to seed you would find altogether a different state of matters from this. Mental instability, not moral obliquity, would show itself in some members. One would be a ne'er-do-well, another would die of diabetes, another of brain disease or acute maniacal attacks in early life, another of phthisis, while another would be a genius, or probably some brilliant specimen of eccentricity.

The CHAIRMAN—I have noticed often that when a number of children in a family are imbecile, many of them are very liable to take attacks of acute excitement. There seems to have been nothing of this sort among this large family of imbeciles. Another thing I noticed in this tree was that a reasonable time elapsed between the birth of the different children, so that there seems to have been no excessive drain on the mother's health to account for these defects.

On the motion of the CHAIRMAN, the thanks of the meeting were awarded Dr. Dunlop for his paper.

Dr. BRODIE then read a paper "On the Conditions Necessary for the Successful Treatment of Imbeciles." (See Original Articles.)

The CHAIRMAN—I find imbeciles the most difficult cases I have to deal with. It would be much better if they were taken in hand and treated at the proper time in their lives than kept at home untrained and sent to County Asylums, where one does not get them until they cannot be dealt with at home, and then it is generally too late to teach them habits of cleanliness, or how to conduct themselves properly. I think it a very great mistake that in some institutions only educable lunatics are admitted, and if ever there are district training institutions for imbeciles all should be taken in.

Dr. IRELAND—I have listened with the highest pleasure to Dr. Brodie's paper. There is no authority in Scotland equal to Dr. Brodie on the education of imbeciles, and no one in Great Britain has so steadily advocated their cause both by his pen and his voice. Looking at things from different standpoints he and I might have some disagreements, but I may say he carried me with him throughout his paper. I think the question is pretty much the same as between private teaching and school teaching. We know certain men have a great capacity for teaching, and can produce better results with two or three pupils than with fifty. At the same time no one would propose to abolish our great educational institutions, because a sufficient number of men specially fitted for private teaching cannot be had. I agree with Dr. Brodie as to the necessity of an adequate staff of teachers, and this will probably be one of the difficulties in connection with District Imbecile Schools; they will not consider it worth while to have, say three teachers for fifty idiots, and pay them as well as a School Board.

Dr. YELLOWLEES thought the questions between home and institutional care depended entirely upon the kind of case and the kind of guardianship which can be secured. Some do better at home and others do better in an institution, and some cases which, perhaps, might be cared for best at home have to be sent to an institution because we can't get the ideal home care that the case really wants. For the same reason it does not seem to me possible to assign any limit to the number which should be in any institution. A large proportion cannot be benefited at all, and all that can be done for them is to look after their health and comfort. If this class is to be received into special institutions, as it must be to meet the public needs, I do not see that there should be any such limit as fifty. On the other hand, dealing with educable imbeciles, I can quite understand that fifty might be too large a number.

Dr. CLOUSTON—We all know how able Dr. Brodie is to give us some light

on this subject. The first point that struck me in this paper is, how are you to know the educable imbeciles unless you try them in some institution? What are we to do with the uneducable class which amount to three-fourths of the whole? Regarding the educating of imbeciles at the public expense, I think utilitarian philosophers would be very ready to ask, *Cui dono*. The usual argument for educating ordinary youth is that they may become useful members of society, to constitute the body politic of the State. I do not think anyone would say it makes much difference to the State whether imbeciles are educated or not. Therefore it resolves itself into a philanthropic question. Again, how are we to manage in regard to country districts? There is not a sufficient number of imbeciles, not to speak of educable imbeciles, in the country districts to support a school or teacher. They cannot be brought together every day like ordinary school children. This implies that they should be boarded. Now the State does not pretend to board ordinary children, but simply to educate them. I am afraid the boarding as well as the educating of imbeciles would be rather a difficult pill for some of our politicians and economists to swallow.

Dr. YELLOWLEES—Why worse than for incurable lunatics?

Dr. BRODIE—And it is done in America.

The CHAIRMAN—When they pass a certain limit.

Dr. YELLOWLEES—Why not before?

Dr. CLOUSTON—I was perhaps arguing on the opposite side of the question, so as to bring out the difficulties as well as the desirable points. In regard to teachers I do not think men of the philanthropic spirit which Dr. Brodie describes exist in such numbers as to be available for the enormous mass of imbeciles. I cannot imagine the country divided up into schools of fifty each, and being able to get men to look after these fifty who would be fit for the work, even if they could get sufficient remuneration.

Dr. RUTHERFORD—Nearly all the imbeciles I have are very gentle, harmless creatures. They have, however, nearly all been transferred from other institutions, and their quietness is no doubt the result of education at Larbert and other places.

Dr. BRODIE—I think I may be allowed to remind the meeting that my remarks were strictly in the direction of the educable imbeciles. The uneducable are too difficult a class for all our combined wisdom. I think it could be determined before, without difficulty, whether a child were educable, though we are not invariably correct in our judgment. We form our opinion from judging of its endowments, speech, capacity for behaviour, special developments, and whatever naughtiness may have been developed. As to the consideration of cost, the scheme cannot be worked out without considerable outlay, but we must bear in mind that the uneducated imbeciles at the present entail a very heavy cost on the country, and then we are to remember that a large proportion of our pauperism, illegitimacy and criminality, is distinctly associated with imbeciles. If we look at the matter soberly we should find it to be not a bad bargain to lay out a considerably greater expenditure than at present. I am gratified to find that the subject has attracted attention.

The thanks of the meeting were awarded Dr. Brodie for his paper.

Dr. CLOUSTON gave a *vivid voce* description of a visit he had lately paid to some asylums for the insane in the United States. He described the new institutions at Morristown, New Jersey, and at Danvers, Massachusetts, which embodied the latest American ideas as to asylum construction. They were both enormously expensive, the cost in each case being about £750 per bed. The architecture and construction, the heating and ventilating, the kitchens and laundries, are superb; but in Dr. Clouston's opinion there was far too great uniformity of construction, arrangement, and furnishing, one ward being very much like another throughout. Too little attempt had been made to adapt the house to the varying mental state of the inhabitant. The universality of the double row of rooms on each side of a corridor was also disapproved of, as

well as the lack of dormitory accommodation. Practically all the patients at Morristown have single sleeping rooms. Dr. Clouston commended the great allowance of space for each patient. It amounted to about double the British allowance in County Asylums. He spoke most highly too of the dietary in America, but preferred the British system of patients dining in a common dining hall near the kitchen. In Dr. Clouston's opinion the patients in American asylums don't spend a sufficient time each day in the fresh air, a large number even when out being entirely confined to the numerous small high-walled airing courts, and they are not kept sufficiently employed, and in consequence are more discontented and need more restraint than we use here. He praised highly the philanthropic and liberal spirit that prevailed in America in regard to the making of provision for the insane. He spoke of his visits to the Utica, Hartford, Philadelphia, Boston, and Bloomingdale Asylums; the pleasure he had enjoyed in seeing those institutions, the kindness with which he had been received, and the ability and high character, as well as the earnest benevolent spirit, of the Physician Superintendents of all those institutions. He condemned the tendency in some parts of America to mix up the management of asylums with current politics.

The meeting passed a cordial vote of thanks to the College of Physicians for the use of the room, on the motion of the CHAIRMAN.

The Members afterwards dined together at the Edinburgh Hotel.

SCOTTISH NATIONAL INSTITUTION FOR THE EDUCATION OF IMBECILE CHILDREN, LARBERT.—DR. IRELAND'S RETIREMENT.

From Dr. Ireland's report we observe that there are in this Institution 78 males and 46 females—124 in all. During last year there were 27 admissions, 16 discharges, and one death. This, with a daily average of 119 inmates, shows a death-rate of '83. Dr. Ireland, who is about to leave Larbert, after ten years' superintendence, gives an interesting review of the period. There were in 1871, 73 inmates. There have been 263 admissions, 184 discharges, and 15 deaths, giving a mean population of 100, and an annual mortality of 1.5 for the decennium.

The kinder-garten system has been found of great use, and since his visit to the States Dr. Ireland has given increased attention to training the muscles, through gymnastic exercises and the exercise of the senses. The following is well put :—

“It were much easier to dress the children like dolls and to keep them confined and miserable lest they should dirty their clothes, instead of allowing them scope and liberty, so that their intelligence and volition should have free play. I have always insisted that efforts should be made to teach even the least hopeful cases. An asylum full of idiots in which there were no teaching and no progress would be like a marsh which takes in and accumulates everything noisome and pestilential, and gives out nothing.”

Dr. Ireland anticipates the question, What has become of the 184 discharged idiots? He replies, six went to asylums as insane or unmanageable; others drifted later into the same refuge, because there was no one willing to look after them. He thinks it likely he heard least of those who were getting on best. Of those who left there were few in whom there was no improvement. In about half it was very decided, and in about five or six per cent. the improvement seemed to approach recovery. He recalls fourteen young men who were fit to earn their bread, mostly as gardeners; only six are actually known to have found employment. Those who leave generally wish to return to an institution where they have been sheltered from the world. We had intended to quote Dr. Ireland's speech given at the New Year's entertainment to the