

the act he committed, and that he was therefore responsible in the eye of the law for it. Fortunately, however, the jury found that the prisoner was of unsound mind when he committed the act.

If it be said that there is a distinction between asking a medical witness his opinion as to the state of a prisoner's mind at the time he committed the criminal act, and the time when he is called upon to plead, it is noteworthy that, while Mr. Justice Day refused to accept the latter, Mr. Justice Field implied that he would not have rejected a medical opinion as to a prisoner's sanity had it been a question of whether the prisoner was in a condition of mind which rendered him capable of pleading. There remains, therefore, a puzzling inconsistency between the ruling of different judges on a most important question in respect to which one would have thought uniformity might have been attained, so that counsel might know what questions they are permitted to put to mental experts.

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#### *Lunacy Acts Amendment Bill.*

This Bill has been once more brought in by the Government. What amendments may be introduced in its progress through Parliament we do not know. None were introduced when the Bill was read a second time in the House of Lords (March 2nd). The alterations made by the Lord Chancellor are very slight. The Bill is substantially the same as that which was introduced by Lord Selborne in 1883, by Lord Herschell in 1886, and again passed in the House of Lords by the present Lord Chancellor in 1887.

The objections made by the Medico-Psychological Association to the leading features of the Bill remain unaltered. The main modifications in the clauses of the previous Bill have reference to registered hospitals. It is greatly to be regretted that some important points to which a deputation from the Association drew the attention of the Solicitor General (Sir Edward Clarke), the objectionable character of which he did not deny, have not been recognized in the present Bill.

Very little discussion followed the introduction of the Bill into the Upper House by the Lord Chancellor. The Earl of Milltown hoped that the Bill might become law, and that no

obstruction in the House of Commons would prevent so important a measure being passed. He returned, however, to his former attack upon private asylums. "He regretted that the Government had not taken steps to put an end to the scandals which were alleged to exist in connection with licensed houses. As long as what Lord Shaftesbury called 'the evil system of profit' continued to exist, as long as the incarceration of a fellow creature should result in profit to anyone, so long might they expect a continuance of the scandals to which he alluded. He noticed, therefore, with regret, that existing licensed houses were not to be interfered with. The only way to prevent scandals would be by a thorough system of visitation, but the present system could not be thus described, the Lunacy Commissioners being too few in number to inquire closely into the cases of 80,000 lunatics. He favoured a scheme under which county authorities should establish houses for paying patients. The authorities, he felt sure, would be the gainers. There was a large number of persons in asylums who were supported at the public expense, and who were able to support themselves; and if provision were made for receiving paying patients at moderate rates the expenditure of the counties might be considerably reduced."

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#### *Weak-minded Children.*

In the last number we advocated certain intermediate schools for the weak-minded (Jan., 1888, p. 552). We are glad to receive the support of so experienced and intelligent an authority as Dr. Shuttleworth, the medical superintendent of the Royal Albert Asylum, Lancaster, who communicates the following observations upon *The Education of Children of abnormally weak mental capacity*:—

The reference in the last number of "The Journal of Mental Science" to the "auxiliary" schools established in Germany for exceptionally backward children\* may serve to draw attention to an important hiatus in our English educational system. Whilst exceptionally quick children are in every rank of life well provided for, and amongst the poor facilities for higher education are given (at any rate, in large towns) in connection with the Board Schools, no systematic effort has so far been made in this country for the special train-

\* Occasional Notes of the Quarter, p. 552.