

Dr. Forbes, when alive, could write English, and speak the truth. He seems to have deteriorated in intellect and morality since he became a spirit, for he writes now like a charity school-boy, and tells a lie in saying that he was Physician to the Queen. Mr. Serjeant Cox is the Deputy Chairman of the Court at the Middlesex Sessions, and describes himself as President of the Psychological Society of Great Britain. A doubt naturally suggests itself whether one who has such faculty of observation and such notions of evidence as Serjeant Cox has displayed in his above quoted letter is in his proper place when engaged in the trial of prisoners. And it may, perhaps, suggest itself to those members of the Psychological Society who have self-respect, that they could consult that best by relieving their President forthwith of his onerous duties in attending *séances*, or by their retirement from a Society which imposes such tasks on such a worthy man. Serjeant Cox may be an amiable and good man in all his private relations, but he is plainly, as Deputy Chairman at the Middlesex Sessions, giving to the services of a petty Court talents which were intended not for the correction of the criminal, but for the edification of the idiotic portion of mankind; and, as President of a Society which assumes to be scientific, he seems to be doing his best to make his Society ridiculous. At the meeting of this so-called Psychological Society, if we may trust a report in the papers, he spoke of the prosecution of Slade as evidence of a conspiracy of the materialists who wished to crush spiritualism. We hope that he has been mis-reported, for we should be loth to think that Mr. Serjeant Cox thinks it decent to imply that a brother magistrate, in sentencing a rogue and vagabond to imprisonment, has lent his authority and office to promote the purposes of a nefarious conspiracy.

Responsible Imbecility.

We extract from the *Scotsman* of October 31st the following paragraph:—

PECULIAR CASE OF THEFT.

The case of the Lord Advocate against John M'Lean having been called, the Lord Justice-Clerk said this case was tried at the recent Circuit Court at Aberdeen. The prisoner was accused of theft by means of housebreaking, committed on the 21st or 22nd July, and the jury found him guilty, but recommended him to the leniency of

the Court on the ground of his mental condition. In regard to that matter, the circumstances were peculiar. The prisoner had been an inmate of the Lunatic Asylum of Aberdeen for a considerable period, whither he had been transferred from the poor-house of his parish. He made his escape on the 1st of July, and three weeks afterwards he committed the offence of which he had been convicted. It appeared that for a considerable time previous to his being taken to the asylum, which was in 1874, he had been of weak mind, and had been two years in the asylum before he made his escape. The medical men who were examined, however, were of opinion that he was not of unsound mind at the time they examined him. He had been three times previously convicted—once sent to a reformatory, once imprisoned for six months, and once for 18 months. It occurred to his Lordship that this was a peculiar case, and required to be dealt with somewhat out of the ordinary course. Accordingly, he certified the case for sentence to the High Court of Justiciary, and directed that a report be obtained from Dr. Mitchell, one of the Commissioners of Lunacy, on the mental condition of the prisoner. Dr. Mitchell, it may be stated, reported that the accused “is not insane in the sense of being free from responsibility to the law, but he is of very weak mind.” Lord Deas, taking the prisoner’s state of mind into account, was of opinion that a much smaller sentence might satisfy the ends of justice than in ordinary circumstances it would have been right to pronounce. His Lordship suggested six months’ imprisonment. The other judges concurred, and the Lord Justice-Clerk passed sentence accordingly, remarking that he thought the Court should add to it a direction to the effect that the previous history of the prisoner and the report of Dr. Mitchell should be brought under the notice of the prison authorities.—Prisoner: Thank you, my Lord.

The Court then rose.

It strikes us very forcibly that in any similar case of the kind Dr. Mitchell would do well to leave the question of legal responsibility to those whom it concerns. Otherwise, he may do his office as little credit as the English Commissioners in Lunacy did their office in the Townley case. If a person “of very weak mind,” who has just escaped from an asylum, is to be punished as an ordinary criminal, though happily not to an extent not quite ordinary, it would be well that a Commissioner in Lunacy should have nothing to do with it. We hope that Dr. Mitchell has been misreported, and that he really did not give an opinion about legal responsibility; but if he only declared that the prisoner’s weakness of mind did not incapacitate him from knowing that theft was wrong, he was bound to have added that it was a very weak-minded

knowledge. If he is correctly reported, it seems to us that he might feel himself called upon, as a Commissioner in Lunacy, to urge in season and out of season the instant discharge from asylums of all very insane or very weak-minded persons whom he may believe to be "not insane in the sense of being free from responsibility to the law." There will not then be many insane persons left in Scotch asylums.

PART II.—REVIEWS.

The Lunacy Blue Books.

1. *Thirtieth Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy, 1876.*
2. *Eighteenth Annual Report of the General Board of Commissioners in Lunacy for Scotland, 1876.*
3. *Twenty-fifth Report on the District, Criminal and Private Lunatic Asylums in Ireland.*

The past year was happy in leaving no eventful annals of lunacy behind it in Great Britain or Ireland. The lunatics, the doctors, and the Commissioners all seem to have enjoyed a period of comparative rest and calmness. No great questions in regard to the insane stirred the public mind, and no scandals or abuses roused the indignation or sympathy of the philanthropic world. One or two of the weekly medical journals did admit a paragraph or two directed against the Scotch Commissioners, but as these clearly emanated from some one who was paying off an old score, and only brought charges of doing too much statistical work, they fell very flat. The *Lancet*, ever burning to be the pioneer of progress, it is true, got up an inquiry of its own, dubbing a gentleman "Commissioner," and sending him on a tour round a few of the asylums near London. But when it was whispered that the real object of this proceeding was to educate one of our future masters, and to train his prentice hand to rule with dignity, it was impossible to do other than laugh, with the naughty, uncharitable people who get up such stories, at his "Reports," and to wish oneself a protégé of a journal with a taste for "Commissions."

The same journal taking its cue, as well as deriving its information, from Dr. Bucknill, made a serious attack on