

*English Patients in Foreign Asylums ; a Sequel.*

In the 'Journal of Mental Science' for April, 1863, we published some general observations, condemnatory of the practice of sending insane patients from England to the Continental asylums.\*

Our remarks have recently received a practical illustration in a case which, under the sensation title of "the alleged abduction of a nun," has been the theme of comment in the daily papers, and the subject of correspondence with the Home and Foreign Offices.

Among the passengers who embarked in the Dover night mail, on the 7th Sept., were two Sisters of Mercy, in charge of a young girl of unsound mind, whom they were conveying, with the aid of an attendant of Bethnal Green Asylum, from the hospital of S.S. John and Elizabeth, in Great Ormond-street, to a Belgian Asylum (St. Julian at Bruges), and whose struggles to get loose attracted the notice of the other passengers.

The occurrence was very fully commented on by the daily press. On the 21st of September the case was, in consequence of a communication from the Home Office, brought by the Mayor (Captain Noble, R.N.) before the Dover Town Council, at a special meeting, ('Daily Telegraph,' Sept. 22). Captain Noble informed the Council that he had received a letter from Dr. John Millar, of the Bethnal House Asylum, informing him "that he was called upon, with other medical men, to see a lunatic patient, the poor girl in question, as it was believed, who was suffering from acute mania. Her friends were Roman Catholics, and they were desirous that she should be kept in an asylum where the rites of that religion were solemnised; and there being no such asylum in this country, it was determined to remove her to the well-known *maison de santé* at

\* This question of *English patients in foreign asylums* was thus referred to by Lord Shaftesbury in his examination before the Parliamentary Committee of 1859:

"12. *Mr. Coningham.* Are not a great many patients taken abroad?—Yes; I understand that of late a certain number have been taken abroad, both single patients and others who would have been in the licensed houses; it has not been to any great extent, but still to a greater extent than I should desire to see.

"13. You have no check over that?—We have no check over that, although the law of the country to which they may go is sometimes very stringent.

"14. Have you any reason to suppose that there is that kind of superintendence over the patients who are taken abroad, which you say is requisite?—Yes; there is very considerable nominal inspection and authority exercised over them. All those things appear upon paper, and if you read the accounts of the system under which lunacy is governed in France, you would think that nothing could be more perfect; but when one comes to examine into the matter, I think it is very doubtful whether it is so. I had heard a great deal about foreign asylums, but when I examined into them, I thought them wonderfully inferior to our own, and very deficient in things that we in this country consider to be absolutely necessary."

Bruges, founded for the reception of religious persons of the Roman Catholic persuasion. He explained that he should have written earlier, but he thought the matter might drop without any explanation of this kind being required."

On the 8th of October the Vicar-General of Westminster, Dr. Edward Hearn, D.D., addressed the following letter to the 'Telegraph,' giving the official (Roman Catholic) version of the story:—

SIR,—Although it would have been better, in my opinion, if the above question had ceased to be publicly discussed until the result of Sir George Grey's inquiry had been announced, I think it due to the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth, against which institution some disparaging remarks have been thrown out, to give a short statement of the facts of the case. The facts are these:—

1. Towards the end of August one of the Sisters of Mercy residing in the Commercial Road, a lady 27 years of age, became insane, the attack being one of acute mania.

2. She was seen at first by Mr. Mahony, the ordinary medical attendant of the convent, and subsequently by Dr. Millar, the physician to a large lunatic asylum in Bethnal Green, who also sent one of his attendants to assist in taking charge of the patient.

3. These two gentlemen certified that the patient was suffering from acute mania, and ought to be removed at once to some asylum.

4. It was determined that she should be sent to Bruges, to the well-known institution of St. Julian's—an asylum under the inspection of the Belgian Government—where, during convalescence, should she recover, she would have the advantages of the consolations of religion and the society of persons of her own faith.

5. The superioress of the community in the Commercial Road, worn out with anxiety and a fortnight's care of a violent lunatic, requested the superioress of the Sisters of Mercy, under whose care the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth has been for several years placed, to give her the advantage of her counsel and assistance.

6. The superioress of the convent in Ormond-street, proceeded accordingly to the Commercial Road on the evening of September 6, and with great kindness volunteered to assist in taking the patient to Bruges.

7. It not being possible to take the patient abroad that night, the superioress, in order to relieve the community in the Commercial Road, with the help of Dr. Millar's attendant, brought the patient to Ormond Street, where she remained in a separate room until the following evening. On the evening of September 7 the superioress of the convent in Ormond-street, together with a lay-sister and Dr. Millar's attendant, took the patient to Bruges, *via* Dover and Ostend.

Such are the facts of the case. If there have been any technical illegalities in the proceedings, Sir George Grey will doubtless inform us. Of this, however, I feel sure, that nothing has been done of which any concerned need feel ashamed, or which they have the slightest wish should remain concealed. As far as the hospital is concerned, an irregularity was without doubt committed. It is against the rules for any patient to be admitted without the sanction of the Medical Committee.

I remain, Sir, yours, &c.,

EDWARD HEARN, D.D., Vicar-General.

24, Golden Square, Oct. 8.

On the 15th of November Sir George Grey addressed the following letter to the Mayor of Dover :—

WHITEHALL, Nov. 15, 1864.

SIR,—With reference to the correspondence which has taken place respecting the removal to Belgium of a British subject, named Mary Ryan, otherwise "Sister Theresa," a Sister of Mercy, from the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem and St. Elizabeth, No. 47, Great Ormond-street, Queen-square, London, I am directed by Secretary Sir George Grey to inform you that he has caused all the papers on the subject to be submitted to the law officers of the Crown, for their opinion as to the liability of persons concerned in such removal to prosecution, and that they have given it as their opinion that *the removal of the said lady from this country under the circumstances stated was illegal, and that all parties concerned in it are liable to an indictment for the offence of forcibly abducting her to parts beyond the seas.*

Inasmuch, however, as those concerned appear to have been actuated by no improper motives, Sir George Grey has intimated to the lady superintendent of the said hospital, who is reported to have superintended the removal, that he does not propose to institute legal proceedings in the present instance ; but that he considers it his duty to warn her of the consequences of taking part in any similar case which may hereafter occur.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

H. WADDINGTON.

The Mayor of Dover.

On the 23rd of November the Protestant Alliance wrote to Earl Russell, saying, that although Sir George Grey had made known the opinion of the law officers of the Crown on the case, to the effect that the removal was illegal, yet, as he had at the same time intimated that, for reasons stated, he was not prepared to take proceedings to punish the guilty parties, they now urged that measures should be taken to restore to her country and to liberty the young person who had, in the judgment of her Majesty's legal advisers, been so illegally and violently carried off into a foreign land. To this letter they received the following reply :—

FOREIGN OFFICE, Nov. 26, 1864.

GENTLEMEN,—I am directed by Earl Russell to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 23rd inst., and to state to you in reply that by his lordship's directions inquiries have been made by her Majesty's consul at Ostend into the condition of Mary Ryan, now an inmate of the lunatic asylum of St. Julien at Bruges. From these inquiries it appears that Mary Ryan receives most kind and considerate treatment, that she declares that she has no subject of complaint, and appears to have confidence in and to be attached to the persons attending her, and that free access to her is permitted to those who may, upon sufficient grounds, desire to communicate with her. *From the certificate of the physician upon which she was placed under restraint and removed from England,* and the certificate of the Belgian physician which authorised her being detained at the asylum of St. Julien, no doubt can be entertained of the condition of the lunatic.

Earl Russell is further informed that the laws affecting the treatment of lunatics in Belgium are very strict, and that with a view to the more special protection of foreigners against abuse certain formalities are required to be observed, the duplicate of the regulations is communicated to the representa-

tive of the country of which the patient may be a native, and that the civil authorities would upon suitable representation and precaution at once facilitate the removal of patients to their own country.

I am further to state that no representations have been made to Earl Russell by the family or friends of Mary Ryan on the subject of her removal to Belgium or of her detention in the asylum in which she has been placed.

Under these circumstances his lordship does not at present consider it advisable to take any further steps in the matter.

I am, Gentlemen, your most obedient humble servant,  
(Signed) A. H. LAYARD.

To the Secretaries of the Protestant Alliance,  
7, Serjeants' Inn, Fleet Street, London.

The case rests for the present here. The law officers of the Crown have given it as their opinion *that the removal of the said lady from this country, under the circumstances, was illegal, and that all the parties concerned in it are liable to an indictment for the offence of forcibly abducting her to parts beyond the seas.* Sir George Grey, determined, as he says, by the motives of those concerned, does not propose to institute legal proceedings; and Earl Russell goes farther, and in his letter to the Protestant Alliance rather seems to approve of the whole proceeding.

The Protestant Alliance will doubtless, when Parliament meets, take measures to bring the whole case before the House, and obtain official copies of the papers and correspondence relating to the transaction.

One question we would ask—*Who was the English physician, alluded to by Earl Russell, who signed the certificate?* Dr. Hearn states in his letter of the 8th October, that Mr. Mahony, the medical attendant of the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in the Commercial Road, and Dr. Millar, of Bethnal Green, both saw the patient and certified that she was suffering from acute mania, and ought to be removed at once to some asylum, and he adds that one of Dr. Millar's attendants accompanied the patient on her journey to Bruges, on the night of the 7th of September. On the other hand, the following note in the 'Lancet' of the 26th November, appears to give a formal denial to Dr. Hearn's statement as it relates to Dr. Millar:—

**THE LATE ALLEGED ABDUCTION OF A NUN.**—We understand that Miss Ryan was removed to Belgium solely upon the authority of the lady superintendent of the Hospital in Ormond-street. It is only an act of justice to Dr. John Millar, the superintendent of Bethnal House Asylum, to state that he neither signed a certificate nor sanctioned her removal. Dr. Millar is a gentleman of the highest respectability, and we are glad to know that he was no party to the proceeding which has naturally given rise to severe and condemnatory observations.

In the 'British Medical Journal,' December 3, the denial is still more explicit. "*Mr. Millar, we are informed, neither signed a*

*certificate nor had anything to do with her removal."* The medical officers of the hospital from which the patient was removed have also denied all knowledge of the certificate referred to by Earl Russell :—

The medical officers of the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth present their compliments to the Editor of the 'Daily Telegraph.' In a leading article of the 17th instant, he has commented upon the case of a patient who, labouring under insanity, was being conveyed to an asylum in Belgium, and referred to her as having come from the hospital to which they are attached. They beg to be allowed to state that she was not a patient of the hospital, nor a member of its community of nursing sisters ; nor was she ever seen by the medical officers, who, indeed, only learned the occurrence from the notice in the papers. They understand that the patient was merely at the convent for a few hours before proceeding to her destination.

St. John's and St. Elizabeth's Hospital, 47, Great Ormond Street,  
Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, Sept. 20.

From the 'Tablet' of the 26th November we learn that on the 19th, Cardinal Wiseman preached a sermon on the festival of St. Elizabeth, at this hospital, at the conclusion of which he made some observations on the so-called "violent abduction of a nun." After correcting some errors in the accounts which have gone forth, he emphatically declared that, should either of the proposed courses be carried into effect of a parliamentary or of a judicial investigation, he, and whoever acted on his behalf, would put no obstacle whatever in its way. For he was perfectly satisfied that any impartial examination of the entire case, even though there might have been any unintentional errors in the course of it, must end in a complete vindication of the conduct of all concerned in it. His Eminence, in the most explicit manner, declared that none of the medical gentlemen who so disinterestedly gave their services to the hospital, were, in the remotest degree, involved in the transaction, as the *Religieuse* in question did not in any way belong to the community attached to the hospital.

There can be little doubt but that the Protestant Alliance will procure from Parliament the inquiry which the Cardinal desires. It is evident that Miss Ryan, the sister in question, was of unsound mind, having been certified as such by Dr. Millar. Moreover, as a Roman Catholic, she would be likely to benefit by treatment in an asylum where the offices of her religion are performed, and where the whole system of treatment is assimilated to her previous convent life.

So far, therefore, as the removal of Miss Ryan to the asylum at Bruges is concerned, we are disposed to endorse the Vicar-General's statement in his letter to the 'Telegraph,' "that nothing has been done of which any concerned need feel ashamed, or which they have the slightest wish should remain concealed ;" and the Cardinal's

assertion, that any official inquiry must end in a complete vindication of the conduct of all concerned in it, is doubtless true.

A full description of the Asylum of St. Julian, at Bruges, will be found in the 'Journal of Mental Science' for April, 1857. ("The Belgian Asylums for the insane.") It is a large private asylum owned by an ecclesiastic, the Canon Maes, and is situated in the ancient city of Bruges, having two branch asylums in the country. It contains over 300 patients, and would appear to be well conducted. It was visited by Dr. Webster in 1856.

One may also fairly assume—beyond the good faith which appears to have actuated all those engaged in the removal of Miss Ryan—that they were ignorant of the illegality of the proceeding.

Roman Catholics place great value on the services of Sisters of Mercy and other religious orders in the case of the sick and of the insane, though the physicians attached to the continental asylums certainly do not endorse this opinion. They have now a good opportunity of showing what their religious organisation can do in the management of the insane. The removal of their patients abroad is found to be illegal; let them now open a middle-class Roman Catholic Asylum in the vicinity of London, on the full ecclesiastical system. They will not want for patients, and if success attend their efforts the experiment will repay all its expenses. In a Roman Catholic periodical, the 'Month' for November, 1864, such a project is indeed mooted and urged, both on the religious ground and also on the greater efficiency of the sisters in the care of the insane, as contrasted with hired attendants. The rejoinder at present is, that the English asylums, with their hired attendants, are conducted with more humanity and skill than are the foreign asylums with all their brother- and sister-hoods. The most superficial inspection of the asylums of Belgium or Italy will show that the theoretical superiority of the religious orders, as guardians of the insane, to the paid attendants of England, has hitherto not been realised in practice. We should be glad to chronicle the attempt in England, practically to work this ecclesiastical system.