

NOTICES OF BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, &c.

Asylum Reports.

THESE annual visitants which so pleasantly in the spring-time remind one of many a distant friend, contain, it must be confessed, little which is new, and not much which is instructive. No one who has not like ourselves examined year after year the whole series of Asylum Reports, can have any idea of the sameness of their contents. What is said one year in one report, is said the next year in another, and so on; the same facts are stated, the same opinions enunciated, the same entreaties addressed to the local public by one superintendent after another, not from any tendency to imitate or follow each other, but simply because institutions established under the same law and for the same purpose, are liable to encounter the same difficulties, and to have occasion to make the same complaints and to address the same entreaties. Thus we find the superintendents of new asylums complaining to ears, which by old experience we know to be deaf as adders', that patients are sent to them in a hopeless state of bodily disease when asylum care can afford no help, and when their admission can only tend to swell the asylum bills of mortality; and with equal frequency the complaint is made that few of the cases sent to the asylum for treatment are sufficiently recent to be curable. It is discouraging to a superintendent anxious to be widely useful in his calling, and moved with a noble ambition to effect a good per-centage of cures, to admit case after case of chronic mania or hopeless dementia, varied occasionally by an acute case at death's door from delayed treatment and exhaustion. We observe, however, that the old superintendents don't complain of these matters, having found, by dire experience, that it is of little use, and that the main reason after all why patients are sent to the asylum is, that they give trouble out of it, a fact which we claim to attribute to a beneficent law of nature; for if, as an esteemed contributor maintains, it is a law of nature that the insane should be happy and contented under the influences of treatment which tends to their restoration, surely we have a right to name it a law of nature that they are troublesome and dangerous under neglect which tends to their destruction.

This repetition of the same subjects of discussion contained in Asylum Reports is not only unavoidable, but it is essential to their local character and purpose. To reproduce this tautology of subject matter, however, in any attempt to notice the whole series of reports, would be useless and wearisome; we shall therefore endeavour to confine our notice to that which is new or unusual, and in doing so

we commence with a report, which, so far as we know, is not published, except in a local newspaper.

Report of the Gloucester County Asylum.

We observe in the report of the visitors of this asylum to the last Epiphany Sessions, the statement that, "the permission for patients to visit their friends out of the asylum for limited periods, has been extended by the superintendent of late, with apparently very good effects."

In the report of the Visiting Commissioners of Lunacy this novelty in asylum treatment is referred to in the following terms. "The practice of taking the patients beyond the premises for exercise and recreation has been continued and extended, and visits to their friends and relatives are still permitted and encouraged. On these occasions the patients are allowed to wear their own clothes; they also in many instances use them when attending Divine service in the chapel. All these indulgences have evidently a most beneficial effect on the inmates, producing a kindly feeling amongst them, and diminishing the sense of restraint which we find is often engendered by the opposite mode of treatment."

When we read this in the Gloucester newspaper, and felt that it was something new and good, we wrote to our old friend Dr. Williams, who had instituted the practice, to know more about it, and here is what he said in reply:—"Three years ago I commenced the practice of allowing my patients to go out with their friends, and I have gradually extended it up to the present time. In only two instances has the privilege been abused. Last year 400 visits were paid from the establishment, and one patient spent a week with his friends in Somersetshire. As a general rule, the expense is defrayed by the friends, although occasionally I charge it to the institution. I always insist that the person who takes the patient out, undertakes, in writing, to bring him back at a certain time. I also keep a book in which I record every visit, I enclose you one of the leaves."

It must be observed that this sending out of patients to visit their friends is altogether different to allowing patients to be absent on trial under the authority of the visitors, exercised according to the statute. It is, in fact, an exercise of the power of the physician in the treatment of his patient without legal warrant, but just similar to that by which he permits his patients, under proper selection and care, to walk beyond the bounds of the asylum. The letter of the law is, that a superintendent who wilfully permits a patient to escape, is guilty of a misdemeanor; but the spirit of the law is, that a patient is a patient, and not a prisoner, and that in the asylum he is placed under the care and treatment and authority of the superintendent as his physician. In this relation it is evident that any degree of liberty given by a superintendent to a patient with the