

spinal cord. It is only in such an institution that such accompaniments of an epidemic are apt to be observed. One case, or a few cases, of cerebro-spinal meningitis might have occurred in a town, and there would have been no means of discovering the pathological lesions found in all the cases of other disease that died in the town about the same period. This was, in fact, an epidemic on a small scale, where all the ill effects of the morbid influence could be observed. It seemed as though the cold, raw, spring weather of that time did not, in that locality, produce the usual catarrhs and inflammations, but instead of these a peculiar and fatal form of morbid action, affecting chiefly the coverings of the brain, spinal cord, lungs, and heart.

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#### OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

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##### *A Social Blot.*

We have satisfaction in submitting to the Medico-Psychological Association, and especially to those members of the British Medical Association who signed the following protest against the offensive article entitled "A Social Blot," which appeared in the "British Medical Journal," for 27th October, 1870, the reply of the President of the Committee of Council to the same:—

##### TO THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL OF THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

We, the undersigned members of the British Medical Association, who are engaged in the care and treatment of the insane, desire to call the attention of the Committee of Council to an article that appeared in the Journal of October 22nd, entitled "A Social Blot."

Believing that the Journal of the Association was instituted for the advancement of science, and for promoting and upholding the dignity and interests of the Medical Profession, we venture to hope that the Committee of Council will agree with us in the opinion that, in criticising the public acts and conduct of any of its members, due care should be taken that no representation or statements injurious to the reputation of any member of the profession be admitted into its pages, unless they are indisputably true, and unless the good of the profession and of the public will be served by their publication.

In the article referred to not one of these conditions is fulfilled. Extracts from the Report of the Commissioners in Lunacy are given in a mutilated form, with the evident purpose of producing an impression which, if entire, they would not warrant, and are then falsely presented as samples of what every column of the Journal might be filled with. By this means, which appears to us quite unjustifiable, the character and reputation of a considerable section of the profession, including many members of the Association, are wantonly assailed. The whole article seems, indeed, to be inspired by the sensational spirit of the worst sort of writing in the daily press, and to be entirely unsuited to the pages of the recognized organ of a scientific association.

We extract a few paragraphs which are fairly illustrative of the general style and tone of the Article :—

But rib crushing, though the favourite, seems not to be the only mode in which lunatics are hurried out of existence. It will be remembered that in the report for 1869 a patient at Northampton was boiled in his bath. The example so set has been followed no less than four times in the ensuing twelve months.

Another means by which lunatics are allowed to escape from their misery is rather less novel, being none other than suicide. No fewer than eight cases have been reported.

Now it will probably occur to any impartial person that, considering the many hundred cases in which a determined suicidal propensity exists admitted annually into our Asylums, eight deaths from suicide is not a very high proportion, especially when compared with the number which figures in the Registrar-General's return among those who have not been victims of asylum mis-management. And even assuming that all the eight cases were due to neglect and carelessness on the part of those who had charge of them, is no credit to be given to the unremitting attention and watchfulness which have prevented the others from carrying out their purpose? Those who can form any conception of the unceasing anxiety which the care of suicidal cases entails will be able to appreciate the good taste and feeling of such language as we have quoted. Again—

At Fisherton House the patients complained to the Commissioners that blisters, tartar emetic, and shower baths were used to quiet them.

We think it right to complete this paragraph as it appears in the Commissioners' Report :—

It appeared that the use of blisters and tartar emetic ordered in each case as medical treatment for the purpose of allaying maniacal excitement had not been frequent; that in every instance it had been duly recorded; that the doses of tartar emetic given each time varied from a quarter to half a grain; and that shower baths had not been employed.

The omission of the latter half of this paragraph renders comment on the spirit of the article unnecessary.

We refrain from using the only epithet which could accurately characterize the following assertion :—

We might fill all the columns of this number with details, so black is every page of this report; but more is unnecessary.

We confess our inability to comprehend the meaning of the first sentence in the following paragraph. With regard to the latter, the truth or falsehood of the assertion may be easily inferred from the "Medical Directory:"—

There are certainly some very able men among the Asylum Superintendents; but the fact arises from the accident that most medical appointments and lunatic asylums are commonly regarded as a refuge for the destitute. Necessity, rather than choice, induces a younger man to take the post of assistant medical officer.

Lastly—

Our experience of the men (attendants) who take such situations is, that they are half Herculean, half brute, almost uneducated, and without qualities or feeling above the animal appetites; often they are old soldiers, who only understand being driven, and are by habit neglectful. It is not to be wondered that they naturally conclude if a person, whether lunatic or not, is troublesome and unruly, the shortest and most certain means of controlling him is by knocking him down.

This we believe to be an extremely unjust description of attendants as a class. Their duties are most arduous, anxious, and sometimes dangerous, demanding qualities of the highest order, and it is not to be greatly wondered at, however much it may be regretted, that individuals should occasionally prove unequal to the difficult and harassing position in which they are placed. To hold the whole class up to public execration because of the sins of a few is not likely to render the service more popular, but can hardly fail to increase the difficulty which medical superintendents have in procuring well-trained and efficient attendants.

Into the question of the morality or expediency of private asylums for the insane we will not enter, but it ought not to be forgotten that the founder of the British Medical Association, the late Sir Charles Hastings—a name to be held in honour by every member—was himself the proprietor of a licensed house.

We are far from deprecating criticism, but we have a right to expect that it shall be honest and competent, and that we, as members of the British Medical Association, shall not be slandered in the Journal which is its organ.

We believe the effect of the publication of the article, which has the sensational title of "A Social Blot," in a presumably scientific Journal to be, apart from its injustice to a large body of men, in the highest degree mischievous, as tending to make the separation between the specialty and the general body of the profession still greater than it is at present, to the disadvantage of both, and as strengthening popular prejudices which are injurious to the true interests of the insane and of the medical profession.

36, Bootham, York,  
April 22, 1871.

DEAR DR. MAUDSLEY,

The representation of yourself and other members of the British Medical Association respecting an article in the Journal which you and they think to reflect unjustly on those specially engaged in the

treatment of insanity, was read and considered at their last meeting held at Birmingham.

I was requested by the Committee of Council to express their regret that any article should have appeared in the Journal, which could be considered to cast a slight upon men engaged in so responsible and difficult a work as the treatment and management of the insane.

I may be allowed to inform you that the article was not written by one of the ordinary staff of the Journal, but by a gentleman himself engaged in the treatment of insanity, and having large experience in its various departments, and to remind you that in the Journal of Jan. 7th the Editor expressed grief that a wider application had been given to the article than was intended.

Believe me, dear Dr. Maudsley,

Yours very truly,

W. D. HUSBAND,

President of Council of the British Medical Association.

In the "British Medical Journal" of April 29th last, the following resolution of the Committee of Council was also published:—

That the President of the Council be requested to communicate with Dr. Maudsley, expressing the regret of the Committee of Council at the appearance of the article referred to.

It is gratifying to us to find that the Committee of Council and the Editor of the "British Medical Journal" alike disclaim the diatribe of the writer, whose article, we think, certainly does not warrant the assertion of the Committee of Council as to his large experience in the various departments of insanity. If we might be allowed to venture a guess, it would be that it is to one of those disappointed men who have failed to secure a position in scientific or practical psychology, and who hang on its skirts solicitous for "a good patient," that the Editor of the "British Medical Journal" is indebted for his recent elevation to the stool of repentance.

The "Lancet" last year employed the facile pen of a gentleman presumably of this class to write a series of ill-considered articles, directed chiefly against the value of skilled medical experience in the conduct of our public asylums and in the treatment of the insane. The writer was of opinion seemingly that in such matters it is the inspiration of ignorance that best giveth understanding. This opinion had doubtless the value of personal experience; a man never writes so well as when he writes from the heart; and so it did not seem desirable at the time to contest the writer's

opinions of the true source of knowledge. It was sufficient that he was satisfied with the fountain of his inspiration; and if the Editor of the "Lancet" was satisfied with his *employé*, though we might regret it, we felt that it was his concern, not ours.

The British Medical Association and the responsible Editor of the Journal occupy towards the profession a different position. The Journal is the recognised organ of the Association, and it is of great importance that the tone and character of its articles should not be unworthy of the members. In this instance the Council have properly disclaimed the offensive article, and we therefore, while regretting that such an article should ever have been allowed to appear in the Journal of the British Medical Association, have now only to express our satisfaction at the result.

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#### *Age and Work.*

Dr. George Beard, of New York, one of the authors of the work on "Medical Electricity," which we have noticed in this number of the "Journal," has been engaged in some interesting inquiries into the age at which the best work of the world has been done. He maintains that the period of life during which man does his best and most effective work is that between the ages of 30 and 50. Basing his deductions upon facts derived from the lives of 800 statesmen, authors, men of science, and representatives of every department of human effort, he divides life into five decades of mental activity—the golden decade being between 30 and 40, the silver between 40 and 50, the brazen between 20 and 30, the iron between 50 and 60, and the tin between 60 and 70. Before 45 at least 70 per cent. of the original cerebral work of the world has been done, and before 50 more than 80 per cent. The golden moment of life, when the enthusiasm of youth is at the maximum and the experience of age tends to support and systematize effort, without manifesting a tendency to retard it, is between the ages of 38 and 39.

Dr. Beard applies these views to legislation, reform, and professional and business life. Statesmanship is intrusted too much, he thinks, to age, to the exclusion of youth, and, as a natural consequence, the science of government, which should be in advance of all sciences, is in reality behind them