

Lunacy Law Reform.

A Royal Commission on Lunacy would seem to be the most probable outcome of the many expressions of opinion that are finding vent in the press. Judging by the general character of these, it would appear to be advisable that it should be preceded by a commission of another kind, to ascertain whether the public is really *compos mentis*.

The great increase of lunacy is our constantly recurring note of alarm; and no amount of explanation can make the public comprehend that this accumulation in asylums is almost entirely due to the four shilling per week capitation grant which was enacted to obtain the favour and votes of the Boards of Guardians, and that these stupendous institutions are not the outcome of necessity, but are monuments of the folly of legislating for party purposes.

The Medico-Psychological Association at the time that this great crime was perpetrated strongly protested, and vigorously urged that the money grant should be applied to the maintenance of asylums and their staffs. This would not have appealed to the Boards of Guardians, but it would have made the asylums more efficient, and would have prevented their usefulness being interfered with by the enormous influx of imbeciles and senile cases, who might have been as well cared for in other ways. The boarding-out system might also have been developed instead of being absolutely arrested.

The national conscience, therefore, should not indulge in self-gratulations in pointing to these vast asylums as evidence of its abounding benevolence, but remember that in very truth they are merely stupendous monuments of the folly of legislation in the momentary interests of a political party. They are the legacy of a party move that was both a crime and a blunder.

Private Asylums.

The sea-serpent and great gooseberry season has again resuscitated a correspondence in the daily papers on the private asylum question.

Those members of the specialty who are thus attacked are, from their position, unable to reply to the baseless abuse that is often directed against them, and knowing the popular pre-

judices, feel it is useless even to controvert the errors in fact that are often advanced.

One writer in the cheapest of the halfpenny papers recently pointed out that the recovery rate in the metropolitan private asylums was only 34 *per cent.* as compared with 46 *per cent.* in the registered hospitals during the past year; he, however, discreetly ignored the fact that the recovery rate in the provincial private asylums was 52 *per cent.*, being 6 *per cent.* higher than the public hospitals and 14 *per cent.* above the county asylums.

The difference in the recovery rate in the provincial and the Metropolitan asylums is striking, and is no doubt due to the fact that the large private asylums in London deal with a population from which the recent and curable cases have been largely drained by Bethlem and other public institutions that exercise considerable selection in their admissions.

The recovery rate of the provincial private asylums, however, is strong evidence of the value of these institutions, and a satisfactory indication that the treatment therein provided is of an efficient character.

A Problem in Heredity.

Ovarian heteroplastic grafting is reported to have resulted in pregnancy and the birth of a living child in a case reported by Dr. R. T. Morris, in the *Medical Record* of May, 1906. The problems arising from this procedure are of considerable interest from several aspects.

The putative mother in such a case would be, of course, only a foster-mother, the foster-maternal function extending beyond the usual suckling stage of infant development to its earlier parasitic condition in intra-uterine life.

The practical social question is whether such a child would be a legal heir. Would a next-of-kin be able to dispute the heirship of a child springing from an adopted ovum?

The heredity questions on the scientific side are no less interesting, in regard to the effect on the child of such foster-mothering. The career of this and of other children born under similar conditions would be watched with the keenest interest, although it is probable that the actual value of the observations might not be great or convincing.