for officers who strive to do their duty under the great difficulties existing in most Irish asylums.

Unfortunately the state of the buildings in most places calls forth severe strictures. At Belfast and at Londonderry, where old asylums exist in the towns and built all round about, the Inspectors urge that the old edifices should be disposed of, and the institutions moved out to the country. In Dublin, where the same conditions are found, they have not made a similar recommendation, though we understand the medical superintendent did so two years ago. Perhaps the Inspectors find that providing a second asylum for the Dublin district is a large enough task for the present. Clearly, however, all these old "intramural" asylums ought to be done away with altogether.

The Inspectors, who, we are aware, have far more responsibility for the structure of asylums than the English or Scotch Commissioners, have clearly received a lamentable legacy from their predecessors, and as clearly have many years of steady work to look forward to before they can hope to call all the public asylums institutions of which the central authority may well be proud. We sincerely wish them success.

The Life of William Cowper. By THOMAS WRIGHT, Principal of Cowper School, Olney. T. Fisher Unwin, 1892.

We confess with shame that the "Journal of Mental Science" does not contain a single article, long or short, on the mental aspects of the life of the poet Cowper. This was brought home to us several years ago when a physician and a prominent contributor to the National Biography by Leslie Stevens referred to our Journal for help in his study of this gifted but unhappy man, only to find absolutely nothing to assist him. We purpose to seize the opportunity of a new life of the poet to supply the deficiency, and so remove the ground of complaint to which we are justly exposed.

Cowper's insanity possesses an interest not yet exhausted, first because the unhappy subject of it was a justly distinguished poet, and secondly because it teaches the public a lesson they are slow to learn, and which many excellent people actually refuse to accept.

First, with regard to hereditary influence. It is an extraordinary fact that the poet's father,* a clergyman,

* He died after a second attack of paralysis in 1756.

took great interest in suicide in consequence of an acquaintance having died by his own hand. Either from the morbid hold the subject took on his mind, or from a lamentable want of common sense, he induced his son, then only 11 years of age, to read a treatise in support of suicide, and desired the boy to state his own opinion upon it. The youth gave his opinion, and the father did not express his own views either for or against the act, but his son inferred his approval, which "*weighed mightily*" with him in after years.*

Cowper has himself recorded that a tendency to lowness of spirits existed in his family; his brother John displayed morbid tendencies. Cowper's paternal grandfather was a judge. Cowper's mother was a Donne, who died in 1737, when her gifted son was only six, and belonged to an intellectual family.

He himself once wrote a humorous letter, in which he contrasts his puny *physique* with that of his ancestors, Picts, owing to the luxurious civilization of his immediate forebears.

He was, without question, constitutionally nervous and apprehensive. Sent to school at Market Street, Hertfordshire, he endured much suffering from the tyranny of an older boy. Southey quotes the statement that his infancy was "delicate in no common degree," and adds that "his constitution discovered at a very early season its morbid tendency to diffidence, melancholy, and despair."

It is easy to understand the injurious effects of "savage treatment" at school upon so sensitive a nature. The boy was expelled and Cowper was removed.

Religious impressions assumed an unhealthy form even when he was a boy at the Westminster School. He crossed the churchyard at St. Margaret's Church late one evening, and saw the sexton at work by the light of his lantern. Just at that moment he threw up a skull, which struck Cowper on the leg. This trivial circumstance alarmed his conscience.

I became, however, so forgetful of mortality that, strange as it may seem, surveying my activity and strength, and observing the

* Mr. Wright notes that "Conversations with two persons, one at a chop-house and another at a tavern, also strengthened his determination, for each gave it as his opinion that a man had liberty to die as he saw convenient, and that it was only cowardice that prevented people in deep trouble from making away with themselves."

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evenness of my pulse, I began to entertain, with no small complacency, a notion that perhaps I might never die.

Reaction followed. He states that he "was soon after struck with a lowness of spirits uncommon at that age."

It is interesting to find the boy Cowper visiting Bethlem Hospital. His own description must not be omitted.

Though a boy, I was not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives, nor destitute of feeling for them. But the madness of some of them had such a humorous air, and displayed itself in so many whimsical freaks, that it was impossible not to be entertained; at the same time I was angry with myself for being so.

He was struck with "Cibber's mad figures" over the gateway, now preserved at the Guildhall Museum.

The legal profession which Cowper followed was not one in which he was likely to excel, or find congenial to his fine, sensitive, and retiring nature. For three years he was articled to a lawyer in London. True, his office work could not have been very oppressive, for he writes to Lady Hesketh long afterwards:—"I did actually live for three years with Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, that is to say, I slept three years in his house, but I lived, that is to say, I spent my days, in Southampton Row (his aunt's house), as you very well remember. There was I and the future Lord Chancellor. Consequently employed, from morning till night, in giggling and making giggle instead of studying the law." He was 21 when he left the office and took chambers in the Middle Temple in 1752. Here we must give at some length his own graphic description of a distinct attack of mental depression.

I was struck, not long after my settlement in the Temple, with such a dejection of spirits as none but they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached; the classics had no longer any charms for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it. At length I met with Herbert's poems; and, gothic and uncouth as they were, I yet found in them a strain of piety which I could not but admire. This was the only author I had any delight in reading. I pored over him all day long, and though I found not here what I might have found, a cure for my malady, yet it never seemed so much alleviated as while I was reading *him*.

Cowper remained in this condition for nearly a year. He says that having experienced the inefficacy of all human means he betook himself to religious exercises, and obtained relief. He enjoyed a change of scene, and one morning especially, while sitting down on an eminence near Southampton, he felt the weight of all his misery taken off, his heart became light and joyful in a moment, and he could have wept with transport had he been alone. This he attributed to nothing less than the *fiat* of the Almighty, but unfortunately he attributed to Satan his first and correct impression that change of scene was the cause of his sudden recovery.

He was called to the bar June 14th, 1754, but his professional work was evidently of a very trivial character, he "resting in indolent reliance upon his patrimonial means" (Southey).

Three years after the death of his father he was appointed a Commissioner of Bankrupts. He fell in love with his cousin, Theodora Jane, the daughter of Ashley Cowper. Her father objected to the union on the ground of consanguinity. On this occasion he wrote some lines of poetry expressive of his grievous disappointment, and the lovers never met afterwards.

It seems highly probable that this attachment, which was warmly returned, affected the poet's spirits; at any rate, it became necessary to give up his legal pursuits, although Southey produces evidence to show that his letters at that period were of a very lively description.

It may be observed that poetry was in the family. His father, his uncle Ashley, and his brother were versifiers. He speaks of himself as having dabbled in rhyme at the age of 14, when he translated an elegy of Tibullus.

His patrimony, small to begin with, became still smaller. Whether this circumstance acted unfavourably on his mind is not certain, but mental disease became well-marked shortly after.

It is noteworthy that in one of his earliest poems he speaks of poetical composition as the means of staving off mental depression. He observes that God knows that he has neither genius nor wit, and that, therefore, they do not induce him to poetize, but that he does so in order to resist the

> Fierce banditti—
> That with a black infernal train
> Make cruel inroads on my brain.
> The fierce banditti which I mean
> Are gloomy thoughts, led on by spleen.

The joint offices of Reading Clerk and Clerk of Committees of the House of Lords became vacant. The poet's relative, Major Cowper, having these posts at his disposal presented the former to him. In the state of his finances he had ardently desired one of these offices, but his anxious temperament immediately shrank from the offer made to him. He himself says that he received a dagger in his heart.

I returned to my chambers thoughtful and unhappy; my countenance fell, and my friend was astonished to find, instead of that additional cheerfulness he might so reasonably expect, an air of deep melancholy in all I said or did.

He passed sleepless nights, and at last sent in his resignation, and he sought and obtained a less valuable post he flattered himself he could more easily fill—that of clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords. Calm followed for a time, but the appointment was opposed, and another man was supported by an influential party in the House. Cowper was told that his capacity for the post would be tested by an examination at the Bar of the House.

All the horror of my fear and perplexities now returned. A thunderbolt would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence. . . . They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of themselves, on any occasion, is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horrors of my situation; others can have none. My continual misery at length brought on a nervous fever; quiet forsook me by day and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. In this posture of mind I attended regularly at the office, where, instead of a soul upon the rack, the most active spirits were essentially necessary for my purpose. . . . Many months went over me thus employed constant in the use of means, despairing as to the issue. The feelings of a man when he arrives at the place of execution are probably most like mine every time I set my foot in the office, which was every day for more than half a year together. At length the vacation being pretty far advanced I made shift to get into the country and repaired to Margate.

In writing at this time to Lady Hesketh (August, 1763), he thus analyzes his character:—

If I were to open my heart to you I could show you strange sights; nothing, I flatter myself, that would shock you, but a great deal that would make you wonder. I am of a singular temper, and very unlike all the men that I ever have conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool; but I have more weakness than the greatest of all fools I can recollect at present.

Characteristic of melancholia is the fact recorded by him, that for some time after he had been to Margate, although the first day passed cheerfully, his first waking thoughts in the morning were horrible.

He looked forward to the winter, and regretted the flight of every moment that brought it nearer, like a man borne away by a rapid torrent into a strong sea, when he sees no possibility of returning, and where he knows he cannot subsist.

His return to his post placed him in the dilemma of either retaining possession of it to the last extremity, and by so doing exposing himself to a public rejection for insufficiency, or else to fling it up at once, and by this means to run the hazard of ruining Major Cowper's right to the appointment. He graphically describes how, when alone in his chambers, he cried out aloud and cursed the hour of his birth. He consulted the well-known Dr. Heberden, in doing which he compares himself to Saul, "who sought to the witch." He says reproachingly, he was diligent in the use of drugs, as if they could heal his wounded spirit.

I now began to look upon madness as the only chance remaining. I had a strong foreboding that so it would fare with me, and I wished for it earnestly, and looked forward to it with impatient expectation.

We cannot omit the following:—

My chief fear was that my senses would not fail me in time enough to excuse my appearance at the Bar of the House of Lords. . . . Now comes the grand temptation; the point to which Satan had all the while been driving me; the dark and hellish purpose of self-murder.

He then tells us that —

I fell into company at a chophouse with an elderly, well-looking gentleman, whom I had often seen there before, but had never spoken to. He began the discourse, and talked much of the miseries he had suffered. This opened my heart to him; I freely and readily took part in the conversation. At length self-murder became the topic, and in the result we agreed that the only reason why some men were content to drag on their sorrows with them to the grave, and others were not, was that the latter were imbued with a certain indignant fortitude of spirit, teaching them to despise life, which the former wanted.

He determined to commit suicide, and in November, 1763, obtained laudanum at the chemist's, which he kept in his pocket, determined to use it when required to attend at the

Bar of the House. In the meantime he construed a passage in the newspaper to be a satire upon himself. He took a coach and ordered the man to drive to Tower Wharf, intending to throw himself into the river, but upon coming to the quay he found the water low, and a porter seated near, as if on purpose to prevent him. He returned to the Temple and drew up the shutters, and resolved to drink off the laudanum in his possession.

Distracted between the desire of death and the dread of it, twenty times I had the phial to my mouth, and as often received an irresistible check; and even at the time it seemed to me that an invisible hand swayed the bottle downwards as often as I set it against my lips. I well remember that I took notice of this circumstance with some surprise, though it effected no change in my purpose. Panting for breath and in horrible agony, I flung myself back into the corner of the coach. A few drops of laudanum which had touched my lips, besides the fumes of it, began to have a stupefying effect upon me. Regretting the loss of so fair an opportunity, yet utterly unable to avail myself of it, I determined not to live; and already half dead with anguish, I once more returned to the Temple. Instantly I repaired to my room, and having shut both the outer and inner door, prepared myself for the last scene of the tragedy. I poured the laudanum into a small basin, set it on a chair by the bedside, half undressed myself, and laid down between the blankets, shuddering with horror at what I was about to perpetrate. I reproached myself bitterly with folly and rank cowardice for having suffered the fear of death to influence me as it had done, and was filled with disdain at my own pitiful timidity; but still something seemed to overrule me and to say, "*Think what you are doing! Consider, and live.*" At length, however, with the most confirmed resolution, I reached forth my hand towards the basin, when the fingers of both hands were as closely contracted as if bound with a cord, and became entirely useless.

At this critical juncture the laundress's husband entered, and Cowper quickly started up and hid the basin, but soon after flung both phial and laudanum out of the window.

The next morning was the dreaded time when he had to appear at the Bar of the House.

About three o'clock in the morning I arose, and by the help of a rushlight found my penknife, took it into bed with me, and lay with it for some hours directly pointed against my heart. Twice or thrice I placed it upright under my left breast, leaning all my weight upon it, but the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate. In this manner the time passed till the day began to break. I heard the clock strike seven, and instantly it occurred

to me there was no time to be lost; "now is the time," thought I, "this is the crisis; no more dallying with the love of life!" He tried suspension from the corner of the bed by means of his garter, but it gave way in the two attempts he made. He then opened the door, suspended himself from it by his garter, and pushed away the chair on which he stood. He again heard a voice while he hung there. Three times it said distinctly, "*'Tis over!*" He lost consciousness, but came to himself again, and thought he was in hell. The sound of my own dreadful groans was all that I heard, and a feeling like that produced by a flash of lightning, just beginning to seize upon me, passed over my whole body. In a few seconds I found myself fallen on my face to the floor. In about half a minute I recovered my feet; reeling and staggering, stumbled into bed again. . . .

Thus ended all my connection with the Parliament office.

(*To be continued.*)

The True Story of Kaspar Hauser, from Official Documents. By the Duchess of Cleveland. London: Macmillan. 1893.

The Duchess of Cleveland evidently designs that her little book shall be the last word about Kaspar Hauser. Though this is not likely, we are pleased to have her version of the story, which may be assumed to be the same as the final judgment of her father, Earl Stanhope. Apparently it was indignation at some senseless inventions about the conduct of this nobleman in his benevolent treatment of the foundling which impelled her to write this book. Some years ago, when we had occasion to make inquiries about Kaspar Hauser, we totally failed to obtain a copy of the pamphlet published by Earl Stanhope, and it seemed as if the subject had fallen into neglect. It is too interesting, however, to disappear. We may refer inquiring readers to a paper in the "Quarterly Review" for April, 1888, and the books therein cited. It is noteworthy that the Duchess of Cleveland does not refer to this article, which takes a different view from her own. Kaspar Hauser's first appearance to the world took place on the 26th May, 1828, at the Neue Thor of Nuremberg. A man passing along saw a youth of singular appearance and staggering gait, who held a letter in his hand. He was taken to the guard-house. The letter was found to contain a statement that he was a child adopted by a poor labourer who had long kept him shut up,

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