

*The Lanchester Case.*

The details of this case have been widely published in the daily press and are fully reproduced in this Journal.

Dr. Blandford, it appears, was called in by the relatives of this young lady to inquire into her mental state, the principal reason for this inquiry being the fact that Miss Lanchester had expressed her determination to live with a man without any marriage contract, and to enter on this connection in the course of a day or so. Dr. Blandford, after an interview with the young lady, signed an urgency certificate of insanity, and her father signed an order for her admission to the Roehampton Asylum, whither she was at once removed by her relatives, not without some struggling and force.

The family doctor visited Miss Lanchester at the asylum, signed a second certificate, and a petition was duly presented to a magistrate, but before he could interview the patient she had been discharged from the urgency order by two of the Commissioners in Lunacy, who had visited Miss Lanchester on the representations of Mr. John Burns and others.

A Lanchester Consultative Committee was at once formed to consider what steps should be taken in the case, and at one of the meetings of this Committee a "legal opinion" is reported to have been read, which is printed in full in our report.

A letter from Miss Lanchester was also read, expressing the view that in face of this opinion legal proceedings would be useless, and up to the present date no legal steps have been taken.

The motives actuating this drama are of considerable interest. In the first place, Miss Lanchester viewed her intended action as a protest against "marriage," which she considered to be "immoral"—a view which she had long held and expressed.

Miss Lanchester's relatives obviously considered her proposed act to be the outcome of insanity by calling in the aid of Dr. Blandford, who states that he regarded the forming such a connexion by an educated lady with a man greatly her inferior in position as practically "social suicide," and he further expressed the opinion that in Miss Lanchester's case it was the outcome of unsoundness of mind, in which opinion he was strengthened by a family history of mental disorder and other reasons which have not yet transpired.

Dr. Blandford, bravely rather than wisely, disregarded

the judicial advice to give judgment, but not reasons, by publishing his views of Miss Lanchester's case. His statement does injustice to himself, from his being unable to exhaustively describe or disclose all the reasons on which he formed his conclusion.

Dr. Finney, Miss Lanchester's family attendant, who has been a medical officer in two public asylums, gave grounds for his certificate differing from those used by Dr. Blandford.

The Superintendent of the Roehampton Asylum, Dr. Chambers, does not appear to have reported her as not insane, and must therefore be regarded as concurring in the allegation of mental unsoundness.

The Commissioners in Lunacy, possibly stimulated to promptitude by Mr. Burns and special editions, having visited and examined Miss Lanchester, came to the opposite conclusion—that she was not insane, and accordingly discharged her, without having heard the history from her relatives or medical attendant.

The actual question at issue, as usual in evening edition excitement, has been obscured. The question has not been whether the holding or the acting on such views in regard to marriage constitutes insanity, but whether in Miss Lanchester's case they were not the outcome of or associated with mental unsoundness.

Gross injustice has been done to Dr. Blandford in attributing the first of these propositions to him—it is one that is quite untenable. In the second (*viz.*, whether these ideas were the outcome of or associated with insanity), even if Dr. Blandford is in error, it must be remembered that he is a man of unquestionable integrity, of extensive experience, and that there can be no question of his good faith; moreover, that he was supported in his opinion by the patient's family, by her customary medical attendant, and probably by the asylum physician.

No question, therefore, can arise of conspiracy, collusion, or other malpractice against the liberty of the subject.

The outcry against the lunacy laws based on this case is obviously misplaced, since it illustrates the promptitude with which a person may be discharged (in any case in which reasonable doubt exists), much more markedly than the undue facility of admission to an asylum.

The protection given to medical men in signing certificates is most forcibly brought out. The opinion drawn up by a barrister and approved by the late Home Secretary, Mr.

Asquith, is most conclusive on this point, and shows that the safeguarding of medical men in the performance of this duty is most complete. No more convincing proof could be given than by the fact that such a committee, formed for the express purpose of legal prosecution, should have been thus completely restrained from taking action.

The duty of signing certificates of insanity imposed by law on the medical profession is probably the most repugnant and objectionable function which a medical man has to discharge. The written disclosure of professional secrets concerning a patient, which in other circumstances would constitute a libel, is utterly opposed to the ethical feeling of the profession, many members of which already decline on this and other grounds to certify insanity. The extension of such a feeling would lead to great difficulty in placing those suffering from this form of disease under appropriate treatment, indeed many instances might be quoted in which it has already been productive of disastrous results.

We must hail with satisfaction, therefore, this proof of the protection afforded by the law to the medical men who undertake this obnoxious function.

A humorous side to the affair is shown in the combination of the "individualists" and "socialists" supporting Miss Lanchester's "protest against marriage." The "reasons" for this community of feeling amongst divergent atoms would be interesting reading. We learn that Lord Queensberry expressed great admiration of Miss Lanchester's conduct, while Mrs. Weldon is reported to have said that she sympathised with the parents.

The case may even yet appear before the tribunals, and we will therefore abstain from any direct expression of opinion as to the question of sanity or insanity. We must, however, reiterate that the allegation of insanity was not based, as a portion of the lay press alleged, on Miss Lanchester's views in regard to marriage, but on the question whether in her case they were associated with or were the outcome of mental disorder.

---

#### *The Four-Shilling Grant.*

We observe that the important question of the Government Grant has been again before the Lancashire Asylums Board. It would appear that the resolutions of the County Councils' Association were in favour of extending the four-