

*Tenth Report of the Inspectors of Lunatic Asylums in Ireland.*

WE have received the Tenth Report of the Inspectors of Lunatic Asylums in Ireland, and we only perform a very pleasing duty in submitting a brief review of that important document to our readers. It is scarcely necessary on our part to do more than give extracts from it, in order to do it justice, since the clear and concise style of the document itself is its own best commentary.

The inspectors briefly point out in their opening paragraphs the great change that has taken place for the better, in the original asylums, built thirty years ago, "Losing much of their original gloominess and prison-like appearance, while modern improvements, tending to the comfort, well-being, and efficient treatment of the patients in them, have been introduced or are in process of being so."

The report goes on to state the labours of the inspectors in attending on grand juries "for the purpose of placing before them the requirements of their respective counties, and the advantages likely to be derived from breaking up of large districts, or those where two or three counties had but one asylum between them;" or, in other words, to limit an asylum district to a population bordering upon 200,000 souls.

The result of the labours and recommendation of the inspectors has been as follows:

Orders in council have issued for the erection of asylums in Wexford, Clare, Mayo, Donegal, and Monaghan. An auxiliary asylum for Tipperary at once, and a further subdivision of this extensive district, as well as that of Cork, as soon as an Act of Parliament can be passed permitting such desirable objects being attained. Additional room is also strongly recommended for the metropolitan district, which labours equally with our own chief city under the pressure of applications at the present time.

We thus find that an absolute amount of accommodation, to the extent of 1600 beds in new asylums is in progress; which, added to 4500 already in existence, and increased by the contemplated alterations in several of the old asylums, will, in the words of the report, "bring up the provision for the insane poor of Ireland to about 6400 beds." An account taken in relation to the population (in round numbers now about 5,500,000), equivalent to one bed for every 860 of the entire population of the island.

The above brief analysis of the accommodation existing and in progress is highly satisfactory, and shows an amount of activity on the part of the Irish authorities, for which we candidly say, we

were not at all prepared, and it is not without some degree of just pride that the inspectors add :

“ Reverting to our statement, relative to the extension of asylums now in progress or to be immediately undertaken, coupled with the existing accommodation, it will appear that Ireland is likely to stand in a foremost position, certainly equal to, if not decidedly above, any other country in Europe, as regards her extent of regular asylum provision for the insane classes, and the curative advantages thus prepared for them.”

As to the treatment of the insane confined in the existing asylums, the inspectors speak of it in terms of very marked approval. The cures, calculated on admissions, have been on the average of 46·64 per cent. ; the mortality, chiefly from pulmonary and cerebral affections, has been only 6·56 per cent. ; ten inquests have been held within the two years over which the report extends, while the number under care or treatment appears to have been 10,740 ; the official visitations of the inspectors, on an average, to each asylum have been from five to six visits, involving an amount of travelling duty which certainly exceeds anything on the other side of the channel.

The report speaks in the most hopeful terms of the ministration of chaplains, and in a mild but painful tone alludes to the fact, that Belfast alone excludes the services of regularly appointed chaplains.

We would suggest that these officers be called on to give, at the close of their official year, a summary of the result of their ministrations, as is the case in the English asylums ; the adoption of a rule of this kind might do much good, and could lead to no possible disadvantage.

We cannot do better than give the entire paragraph which relates to the social condition of the patients in the Irish asylums, differing, as it does in many respects, from the population of English asylums, and calculated to modify the views which seemed to have existed in the minds of the English commissioners in lunacy when reporting on the want of those luxuries that are frequently met with in the asylums of Great Britain.

“ But desirous as we are to promote in every way the amusement of the inmates of our district hospitals, and to afford them every means of in- and out-door occupation suited to their antecedents, it should not be forgotten that a large proportion of them is composed of agricultural labourers, and of individuals from the humblest walks in life. In England, on the contrary, while the insane of a similar position are located to a considerable extent in licensed houses, or, for the sake of economy, in the lunatic wards of union buildings, the regularly constructed borough and county asylums, erected at a cost fully one third greater than ours, are peopled, for the most part, from the artisan and better-instructed classes, and from the shopkeeping

and farming communities—both alike accustomed to many domestic comforts, and to which the rural population of this country, it must be admitted, are as yet strangers in no small degree. Nevertheless, although for all practical purposes there may exist an equal amount of substantial advantages in Irish asylums, as shown in the average scale of dietary, clothing, &c., which obtains in them, as well as in the attention paid to direct personal necessities, remedial and other, but above all, in an undeviating humanity towards the insane, it should not be a matter of surprise if, considering the relative social condition of their inmates, a deficiency of furniture, carpeting, and ornament is noticeable in them, as contrasted with many of the more expensively supported establishments in the sister kingdom. Comparisons having occasionally been made between these similar institutions of either country, with reference principally to their interior arrangements, wishing to uphold, but in a spirit of candid emulation, the character and usefulness of our own, we have entered on these explanatory remarks; and would further state for your Excellency's satisfaction that, while many of our institutions are kept with a most creditable taste and neatness, no longer presenting that nakedness hitherto so much complained of, *in all*, under the careful superintendence of their resident medical officers, order, regularity, and a regard to outward comforts, are steadily progressing from day to day, with an extension of certain improvements originated in this, and which are being adopted in other countries."

The above remarks deserve the calm and kind consideration of the authorities and the public, and will on future occasions, we trust, be kept in mind.

The report gives very valuable information as to the increase of lunacy in the workhouses of Ireland—for instance, in 1859 there had been in the Irish workhouses 2047 lunatics of various grades; in 1861 the numbers are 2534, notwithstanding the steady decrease of population in these institutions. The concluding remarks of the inspectors upon the state of the insane in many union workhouses, deserves serious and solemn notice on the part of the Irish authorities. "In fact (say these gentlemen) we cannot imagine a more melancholy existence than a prolonged confinement within the dark and narrow precincts allotted, in some unions, to lunatics who, under more favorable circumstances, might be restored to society."

If the state of lunatics in workhouses be reprehensible, their condition in gaols in a moral point of view is far more to be deplored; and we grieve to find, by the document before us, that no less than 1365 lunatics of both sexes have been sent as "dangerous" within two years, to the various gaols of the country. In fact, in the words of the report, "Gaols may be almost regarded as subsidiary asylums." There appear to be 100 lunatics confined in the

prison of Dublin, thirty in Wexford, and twenty-six in Castlebar. The central or criminal asylum at Dundrum, near Dublin, appears to be in a most efficient condition, but badly (as is the case in all other parts of Ireland) requiring additional accommodation.

We will now glance at the tabular information supplied as to the condition of Ireland from police and poor law points of view, as the inspectors seem to have left, to use a common term, no stone unturned to obtain the most correct, and at the same time comprehensive information on the subject.

On 1st April, 1861, the police summary of idiots, lunatics, and epileptics for all Ireland appears to be 4956 males, 4032 females, or in full numbers, about 9000; not one of whom is in a gaol, workhouse, or asylum! Certainly this, if correct, is a most fearful account of irresponsible human beings at large in Ireland, or at least under no control beyond that of domestic life. The inspectors themselves feel the terrible force of the police returns, and almost recoil before it, since at page 12 they state that in the early part of the year Sir Henry Browning, inspector-general of constabulary (probably the best organized and most efficient force in Europe) issued an order to the effect that returns should be taken in the police districts (160) of every case, and to make marginal notes of their results. No class was exempted, rich and poor being alike included. The aggregate shows an increase of 1379, principally among the idiotic and imbecile. We do not attach any paramount importance to these returns, which, from the mode in which they were collected afford no absolute data. They merely show, or profess to show, the total number of persons *reputed* to be more or less mentally affected, or, in other words, the stock from which lunacy may be engendered. Of the 8991 reported, 5469 are represented as being idiotic or imbecile, 1871 epileptic, and 1651 insane. We are induced to think that these returns "are approximately correct."

The report next refers to the returns from poor law officials, and gives the numbers in these institutions. The total number residing in workhouses at the close of the period for which the report had been drawn up being 2534, of which 635 are stated to be lunatics, idiotic 1020, and epileptics 879.

We will not follow the report through its other and more complicated tabular labours, but content ourselves with a few remarks upon the general bearings of the lunacy question in this island, as suggested by the condition of those into whose care this suffering class has been handed over by the wisdom of Parliament. Upon looking over the appendix, page 40, we find that the medical management is of the most varied kind, both in expense and degree, and our English brethren must be prepared for a statement with which we have from time to time endeavoured to make them familiar, and which has more than once puzzled our own poor brains.

The medical management of the Metropolitan Asylum in Dublin appears to cost the large sum of £1169, while the resident doctor or manager, under existing regulations, cannot perform a single medical duty. There is an office attached to the Irish asylums called that of "visiting apothecary," and which involves the making up of medicine on the part of an officer living a mile (often more) from the asylum, and who alone can perform this duty—a truly Hibernian mode of transacting an important and often an urgent duty.

The inspectors at page 6 allude in delicate terms to the unfortunate misunderstanding at Maryboro', between the resident physician and visiting medical officer, and while we respect the manner in which the report deals with a state of things, which were given in full in the January number of the journal, we cannot but feel pain that the new regulations promised for nearly ten years to the asylums of Ireland, and which were guaranteed to Parliament by Mr. Cardwell in July last, have not yet made their appearance. Let us hope that the able, energetic, and straightforward chief secretary, who has succeeded Mr. Cardwell, will at once issue that important code, and thus put an end to a state of things that seems to court dissension, by leaving in and attached to every asylum, officers ignorant of the extent and amount of their responsibility, and whose ignorance of that responsibility, may give rise at any moment to a state of things calculated to mar or counteract all the benevolent intentions of the executive or its chief officers. If the government desire to establish as the chief officer of the lunatic asylum of a district in Ireland, a medical man, who, according to parliamentary returns, may only devote three or four hours a week to the duty of superintending its complicated duties, let the fact be so stated and accomplished. If, on the contrary, the government of Ireland really intends that the chief officer shall reside, as he does in England, under acts of Parliament, let this be so stated, and let him be so recognised at once, not only by the executive as he is at present, but by the community at large, and a state of things such as exists now in Maryboro' Asylum, and which covers it with something worse than ridicule, will cease almost as a matter of course.

From Lord Carlisle and Sir Robert Peel we confess we expect a good deal, and God grant, so far as the reform of the Lunacy Code in Ireland is concerned, that we may not be disappointed.