

OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

Concerning Habitual Drunkards.

In the *Scotsman* of January 19th and 23rd are two long communications treating in a very full, clear, and impartial manner of the proposed legislation for the cure and control of habitual drunkards. The writer, speaking of the joint petition of the British Medical and Social Science Associations to Parliament, very properly describes it as altogether wanting in precision, sensational in its philanthropy, as exhibiting a stupendous credulity, and as presenting in various other respects objectionable features which are calculated to defeat its object. From the beginning an evil genius seems to have inspired the advocates of measures to control so-called habitual drunkards; and we cannot call to mind any other cause which has suffered so much from the utterly indiscreet zeal of those who have supported it. Mr Dalrymple, who worked so hard to induce the legislature to grant him an Act, cared only, in collecting and presenting his data, to obtain evidence that was favourable to his views, and ignored all suggestions that did not chime with them. The proposed title of his Bill was as great a blunder as it was possible to make. It was not likely that the House of Commons would pass an Act authorising the locking up of drunkards, but a more discreet person than Mr. Dalrymple, possessed of his zeal and energy, might, perhaps, have induced it to make such an addition to the Lunacy Acts as would have allowed genuine cases of dipsomania to be certified and kept under control for a certain time. Those who have taken up Mr. Dalrymple's mantle seem to have taken up with it his want of knowledge and his want of discretion; for we regret to observe that they are going on his lines, and using the discredited evidence which he used; following which course, they will, though they are calling for a remedy for a real evil, do no good whatever, but advertise their incapacity to deal with the subject.

The writer in the *Scotsman*, after pointing out that, while there can be no real intention to interfere with ordinary drunkards, the provisions of the present law are adequate to reach cases of *delirium tremens* and *mania a potu*, goes on to make the following temperate and sensible remarks concerning *dipsomania* :—

Taking for granted, then, that there are persons with this uncontrollable craving for intoxicants—persons who, in the words of the resolution, labour under a special form of insanity, which has excessive intemperance for a symptom—do they require any special treatment? what is that treatment? and is it not attainable under the laws as they stand?

In answering these questions we have at once to point out that such persons cannot be received into ordinary asylums as lunatics, for the very good reason that they cannot be certified to be lunatics. Their insanity is not held to be of the ordinary, but to be of a special form, and to be beyond the scope of the existing lunacy laws. It is true they may enter asylums as voluntary patients, but this would not confer any power of detaining them, and the craving when it appeared, being beyond control, would drive them out. It is stated, indeed, that not many of those who enter asylums voluntarily remain in them longer than a few weeks. In no way, therefore, is their treatment in asylums possible, even if it were thought that the organisation of asylums, and the kind of life which is led in them, supplied a treatment suitable to such cases. The reverse of this, however, is the opinion held. It is said that the dipsomaniac requires a treatment of a special character. In what this special character would consist we scarcely know, and opinions might differ on the subject; but there can be no doubt of this, that its essential feature would be prolonged and compulsory detention, with enforced abstinence from intoxicants. Whatever he might gain, the insane drink-craver would certainly lose his personal liberty, and be forced to submit to a discipline which would in all probability be irksome. In other words, a person labouring under a disease, which is not lunacy, though said to be in alliance with lunacy—which is described as a special form of lunacy—would be liable to a prolonged incarceration. It is alleged, of course, that this would be done for his good, that his recovery would be the chief object; but, though still legally a sane man, he would not be consulted as to whether he wished or did not wish to be cured, nor could he interrupt a treatment which after trial he might greatly dislike. But more than this is alleged—it is also argued, though less prominently, that the seclusion of such persons is desirable in the interests of society—that the convenience and comfort of society are consulted in the matter—and that it is intended by it to save families from ruin and misery. These are excellent objects, and it would certainly not be dishonest to bring them in a clearer way to the front. Perhaps it would even be more honest. They are not motives to be ashamed of. They are, indeed, exactly those which lead to the seclusion in asylums of a large number of ordinary lunatics. And it is certain that their attainment may be much more confidently reckoned on than the recovery of the secluded. So far, indeed as experience teaches, there is little evidence that prolonged detention and abstinence would result in many cures. This is a damaging fact, and the only good answer that

can be given to it is that as yet we have possessed no means of acquiring experience, and that we cannot acquire it without the assistance of legislation. We have indeed little to go on but the reports which come to us from America. These, however, are generally regarded as too good to be true, and it does not appear that practical men in this country place much confidence in them. In short, we cannot, as yet, tell whether the insane drink-craver can be cured by any sort of treatment, and there are certainly more things to make us despair than there are to make us hope. On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that the comfort and well-being of many families would be greatly promoted by an enforced withdrawal of some member who is unfortunately in the condition of those persons in regard to whom this resolution desires legislation. Whatever prolonged incarceration might do for the drink-craver himself, it would often by universal consent confer something very like a heavenly blessing on the family to which he belongs, and it does not seem unfair that the law should be made to protect the healthy and well-doing against the diseased and ill-doing. We use the double words here to meet any theory which may be adopted regarding the condition of the so-called dipsomaniac. With no theory, however, except that which involves the idea of disease, do we see how Parliament can ever be successfully approached; and in making a demand for fresh and special legislation, it must be shown that we are only now recognising the special form of disease under which some drunkards labour, and the necessity for a mode of treating it which cannot be pursued without legal authority. We must define and specify the class of habitual drunkards, for whose cure and control we desire to legislate. We can scarcely ask that the law should set in motion a scheme for curing and controlling every one who could, perhaps properly enough, be called an habitual drunkard, because the term is loose, and in its wide embrace includes a multitude of persons who could not all be treated in one way. The law's dealing with drunkards generally can only be in the way of punishment or of preventing and regulating the sale of drink. The resolution of the 7,000 doctors does not touch that aspect of the great drink question. It confines itself to asking legislation for a certain specified class of drunkards, and it starts wisely by declaring that an alliance exists between the condition of that class and the condition of the insane, in regard to whom the law already and largely concerns itself. It thus appears to be only asking an extension of existing legislation in a new and narrow direction, without change of principle or policy. Whether this will ever be obtained is doubtful. The difficulties and obstacles are great and numerous. It is not easy, indeed, to see by what machinery the views embodied in the resolution could be safely worked out, and as yet we have not been furnished with the details of any plan. Among the hindrances will certainly be the vague, ill-defined, and unpractical views which direct the action and inspire the sensational missives of the friendly society to which we

alluded at the outset of this discussion. There is a fact, too, relating to insane drink-cravers themselves which may prove both a help and a hindrance. It is this:—The majority of them belong to the better class of society—to the educated class, that is, from the superior artisan upwards, who live in comfort and perhaps in affluence, and their whole number, great as it is, is not so great as is often supposed. There may be doubts as to the accuracy of this opinion, but careful inquiry will cause their disappearance. We refer, of course, exclusively to those persons of whom it could be certified that they labour under a special form of insanity which has excessive intemperance as one of its symptoms. Not a few of these people could thus defray the cost of a legalised detention out of their own pockets, and no aid from the Consolidated Fund, or from rates of any kind, would be needed either to establish or to maintain the institutions in which their detention would take place. Such institutions would be the outcome of private adventure, under State supervision and control, and Parliament might be asked to do nothing more than sanction (with limitations) the compulsory detention in institutions licensed and supervised by the State, of persons found after legal inquest of some prescribed kind to be in the condition which the resolution defines. If no such persons presented themselves, and no such institutions were created, then the law would be a dead letter. Such legislation would be in the fullest sense permissive. It would permit those to take advantage of its provisions who could themselves afford the cost, or who could do so through help from charitable and public organisations. At the same time it would, in a certain sense, be tentative, since it would yield that experience which is so much needed.

Conscience in Animals.

In a paper on "Conscience in Animals," which Mr. G. J. Romanes has reprinted from the "Quarterly Journal of Science," he tells the following story of a monkey's sympathy:—

Many cases of sympathy in monkeys might be given, but I shall confine myself to stating one which I myself witnessed at the Zoological Gardens. A year or two ago there was an Arabian baboon and an Anubis baboon confined in one cage, adjoining that which contained a dog-headed baboon. The Anubis baboon passed its hand through the wires of the partition, in order to purloin a nut which the large dog-headed baboon had left within reach,—expressly, I believe, that it might act as a bait. The Anubis baboon very well knew the danger he ran, for he waited until his bulky neighbour had turned his back upon the nut with the appearance of having forgotten all about it. The dog-headed baboon, however, was all the time slyly looking round the corner of his eye, and no sooner was the arm of his victim well