

*Remarks on some of the Large Asylums of Italy.* By JOHN H. DAVIDSON, M.D. Edin., Medical Superintendent of the Cheshire Asylum.

While on a recent autumnal tour through the Italian peninsula, I availed myself of the opportunity which it afforded of visiting some of the Lunatic Asylums of that delightful and most interesting country, when I chanced to be not far from their vicinity, and made the following brief jottings:—

*Asylum of Santa Maria della Pieta, Rome.*

This *manicomio*—a plain, substantial stone building, with no great pretensions to architectural beauty—is situated on the Vatican side of the Tiber, adjacent to the large infirmary and founding hospital in that locality, and is only a few minutes' drive from the Ponti di St. Angelo. Upon arriving at the Institution I was courteously received, in the absence of the physicians, by two of the *fratelli della misericordia*, several of whom are there employed in the management of the male patients. At the time of my visit the asylum contained 345 males and about the same number of females; and I was informed by the *religieux*, who conducted me over the establishment, that the medical staff consisted of a Medical Director and three assistant physicians; but from my visit being rather late in the day, I unfortunately had not the pleasure of seeing any of these gentlemen. The inmates of this asylum are of all social grades, and are divided into three classes—first, second, and third—the first paying 250 lire a month, but I now forget the amount charged for the maintenance of those belonging to the second and third. The dormitories and single rooms were large, well ventilated, and irreproachably clean, and, in fact, everything appeared to be in excellent order; but the amount of mechanical restraint I witnessed far exceeded my anticipation. I had ocular evidence of the fact of its being more liberally used here than in any of the asylums I had previously and have since visited in France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, and Hungary. The *camiciola di forza*, coercion chair, leathern muff, and *entraves* were in full use, while numbers were tightly tied or strapped down to their beds, some of the males giving unmistakable indication of being rather ill at ease. Several of the men were engaged at the ordinary trades and in the

garden, from which a delightful view of the city and neighbouring country is obtained ; while some of the females were occupied in weaving and sewing. In going through the male wards I saw several engaged in pencil drawing, which seemed to be a favourite amusement. One patient presented me with his *chef d'œuvre*, a Madonna and child, in the conception of which he said he had been engaged for the long period of 3000 years ! There was little noise or excitement observable in any of the wards, and everything I must say was conducted with the greatest order and regularity. On the male division the attendants are under the control and supervision of the brothers of mercy, whose duty it is to see that the physicians' directions are all fully carried out. On the female division there are also several *religieuses* engaged, who belong to the order called the *suore di San Carlo*, and they exercise a careful supervision over the nurses and female servants. Of the zeal and energy which the *suore* as well as the *fratelli* displayed in the performance of their important duties, I carried away a very favourable impression.

*The Asylum of Florence.*

This asylum stands in the Via San Gallo. It is a very old building, having been founded for a general hospital as far back as the year 1387, by Bonifazio Lupi, of Parma, but for many years it has been used as a hospital for the reception of the insane. The first person who conceived the idea of founding a special *ricovero* for the mentally afflicted of Florence was the Carmelite Padre Alberto Leoni, of the Convent of Santa Maria Maggiore, whose device for such an erection was given effect to in the year 1645. He, however, died, leaving the work unfinished, but it was taken up and carried to completion by Padre Giovanni-Antonio Diciotto, a colleague of the Padre Leoni, and also a member of the Carmelite order. There thus sprung up in the Via Ghibellina al Canto alla Melo, Florence, a little asylum which was regarded as the second in Italy, that of Santa Maria della Pietà in Rome having been founded towards the close of the year 1518. It was managed by twelve lay gentlemen, and received, with few exceptions, only those who could pay the rate fixed for the treatment they received, the indigent insane continuing for some years to be kept in strict quarters in the *pazzeria* of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. The present Florentine Asylum contains 600 patients, and is under

the able superintendence of Professor Bini, who is assisted by a resident deputy Director, and four other medical gentlemen. Dr. Bini, in addition to his duties as Medical Superintendent, delivers at the asylum a course of lectures on mental and nervous diseases, for which he receives a honorarium of 1,000 lire in addition to his salary of 5,000 lire per annum. The internal arrangements of this Asylum are much the same as those of the Asylum at Rome, but at the time of my visit some structural improvements were in progress. Many of the common trades are followed: I, however, could not fail to observe that here, as in the other Italian Asylums I visited, the means of out-door occupation is very limited, there being only a small patch of garden land of about a couple of acres in extent attached to the Institution. As to the mode of discharge here practised, I may remark that when the Medical Director considers a patient in a fit state to leave the Asylum, he writes to the Procuratore del Re, informing him of the fact, whereupon, application is made, by the latter, to the *Tribunale* (a court consisting of three Judges), and a decree ordering the patient's liberation is forthwith obtained. Dr. Bini speaks very highly of this judicial mode of discharge, as he is thereby saved from much importunity and annoyance. First class patients pay 3 lire per diem, second class 2 lire, and third class 1 lira 60 centesimi. The pay of good male attendants is 68 lire a month, without board, and that of the female attendants is 43 lire. Here there are no special night attendants, but a certain number of the staff take night duty in rotation. On inquiry as to the ratio of cures, I was informed that calculating on the admissions, the recoveries gave a per-centage of about 38; while the proportion of deaths, reckoned on the total number under treatment, amounted to rather more than 12 per cent. It appears that marasmus and diarrhoea are the most frequent causes of death in this Institution, 30 per cent. being often due to these alone; while the proportion from congestion of the brain and serous and sanguineous apoplexy is frequently 20 per cent. To phthisis pulmonalis 8 per cent. are not unfrequently due, while 6 per 100 is sometimes the proportion ascribed to cancer. In cases where forced alimentation is necessary the nasal tube is preferred. My attention was directed to a patient who had refused food for three months, and who was being fed three times a day through the nose. I was also informed that a patient in this Asylum had been

fed by the nasal tube for the long period of thirty-five months.

*The Asylum of San Servolo, Venice.*

This asylum is situate on a little island of the same name, near Venice, and has fulfilled the functions of a hospital for the insane since 1715. After sundry alterations it became the central male and female asylum for the Venetian provinces, in the year 1797, but in 1833 it was used exclusively for the treatment of patients of the male sex. An asylum for females has, however, been recently erected in the lagoon, not far from San Servolo, and at the time of my visit was expected to be ready in a few months for the reception of patients. It can be easily reached by gondola in five or ten minutes, either from the town or the male asylum. On my gondola reaching the San Servolo, I was respectfully received by one of the employés and conducted to the reception room to await the coming of the director. Upon the wall of this chamber there was an intimation to the effect that all visits to the asylum for philanthropic motives, or for scientific purposes, were cordially welcomed, but such as were made out of mere curiosity were not by any means looked upon with favour. I had not to remain long before the arrival of the Medical Director, Dr. Salerio, and one of his assistants, who both gave me a hearty greeting. In the medical and moral treatment of the patients Dr. Salerio is zealously assisted by four physicians who, together with himself, belong to a religious order called the *Fate-Bene-Fratelli*, and none of these gentlemen, I was told, receive any pecuniary reward for their services, which they freely give out of charity. On going through the several *riparti* of this institution, which has accommodation for about 500 patients, my attention was arrested by the uncommon height of the bedsteads, and remarked that they appeared to me to be rather dangerous for epileptics, should they unfortunately fall out of bed in a fit. This observation elicited the reply that such an occurrence could not take place as patients of this class when in bed are securely tied so as to guard against this and other possible mishaps. The means of amusement I saw consisted of cards, dominoes, the megalithoscope, and a good library. Musical entertainments also take place twice a week, but during the carnival time these are more frequent and prolonged. There being no space for airing courts—the waters of the Adriatic coming close up to the building—the *passeggio* is the only place for

exercise. But there is a small garden plot to which the patients can resort to smoke. The attendants here are considered to be liberally remunerated, having 45 lire a month, with board, but they are of necessity obliged to lead a very isolated life. Four of them are always on duty at night. The hydro-therapeutic treatment being regarded as one of the most efficacious remedies, the baths and bathing arrangements of this asylum are admirable, and a plentiful supply of both fresh and salt water can always be obtained. No bath is given to a patient but by medical order, and this work is always performed under the personal direction of the doctor. Wet packing is frequently adopted, being considered highly beneficial in cases of melancholia and dementia, as well as among the *pellagrosi*. In going through the asylum I was very forcibly struck with the large number who suffered from pellagra, which, I was given to understand, is the most frequent cause of insanity in the patients brought to this asylum. These pellagrous cases have all an anxious, timid, dull, melancholic look, and for the most part belong to the agricultural class. Before being brought to the asylum they have generally undergone great misery and hardships, and suffered from insufficiency of food. The *pellagrosi* are looked upon by many as very prone to commit suicide; but Dr. Salerio informed me that among the large number in San Servolo, there were comparatively few who exhibited this tendency. He also stated that they, of all others, are the patients who derive most benefit from the bath, but who shew the greatest dislike to it. Arsenic, the warm bath, and a generous diet is considered the best treatment for this disease. The asylum also contains a large number of general paralytics and epileptics, the former being most frequently brought for treatment when in an advanced stage of the disease. The Medical Director observed, with regard to the subjects of progressive paralysis, that they were almost all habitually great smokers of tobacco. As regards the causes of death in this asylum, I would remark that general paralysis is the greatest, next comes marasmus, then phthisis pulmonalis, pellagrous marasmus, and epilepsy. Not more than five or six patients wore the *camiciola*, or were restrained by the *centurone di "Haslam."* Indeed the patients here appeared to me to enjoy a greater amount of liberty than those in any of the other institutions I visited, and they were evidently all well cared for by the kind-hearted medical superintendent and his colleagues.

*La Senavra, Milan.*

This building is within a mile of the city, and is about 125 years old. It was originally a Jesuit convent. As at Rome, my visit was made about mid-day, and consequently I had not the pleasure and advantage of finding any of the medical officers. I, however, was kindly received by the Secretary and the Inspector, and the latter conducted me over the whole establishment. This asylum contains between five and six hundred patients, and its medical staff consists of a Medical Director and four other physicians. The Inspector informed me that the Director, Dr. Castiglioni, had been dead for some months prior to my visit, and that a successor had not been appointed. Not having seen any of the medical officers I was, of course, unable to obtain much desirable information regarding the treatment pursued. The Inspector, however, stated that the prolonged warm bath, with cold embrocations to the head, was considered a great remedy, and very frequently had recourse to. Although the building is large and capacious, I thought the dormitories and corridors gloomy and sombre. In some of the wards there was much noise and turbulence, and it was in this asylum that restraint appeared to me in the most repulsive form—numbers of the patients of both sexes being confined to the disgusting restraint chairs, while not a few were strapped up to the walls of the corridors and dormitories; the very *pots de chambre* were secured to the bedsteads by means of leathern belts of about three or four feet in length. I must, however, state that I was much pleased with the cleanliness everywhere visible. The beds and bedding especially were remarkably good and scrupulously clean. In connection with the Senavra there is the *succursale* of Mombello, some few miles from Milan; it is said to be a model institution, and that its surroundings are exceedingly beautiful and pleasant. I, however, had not sufficient time to visit it.

In closing these short desultory remarks upon the above asylums, I have only further to observe that the windows of all of them are either barred or grated. But as it is the custom, more or less, throughout Italy to have the windows of private dwellings and even of palatial residences so protected, the construction of the asylum windows in the way mentioned can only be regarded as a fashion rather than a means devised to guard against escape.