

OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

The Annual Meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association.

Under the presidency of Dr. Urquhart, the Association met this year in Edinburgh after an interval of ten years.

The meeting was probably the most successful that has taken place since our annual meetings changed their character. The attendance was large, and several of the contributions were of high merit.

The members of our specialty who practise in less favoured countries visit Scotland with satisfaction. They see there much good feeling among fellow-workers, and an amount of kindness and confidence on the part of the profession generally and on the part of the public towards the labourers in our somewhat thankless branch which are often absent elsewhere.

The forenoon of the first day (July 21st) was occupied with business which will be found fully reported in the proceedings.

Dr. Beveridge Spence, who has served the Association so ably as Registrar since the formation of that office, was unanimously chosen President elect. Mr. Hine, the well-known architect to the London asylums, Professor Magnan of Paris, and Dr. A. E. MacDonald of New York were elected honorary members.

The auditors' report shows that the finances of the Association continue in a satisfactory condition.

Proposals with regard to the treatment of incipient insanity were discussed, and a resolution adopted after some opposition. We cannot think that these proposals are altogether retrograde, even if it should appear that they are not quite in harmony with the much too rigid existing provisions with regard to the care of the insane in England.

In the afternoon Dr. Urquhart, having taken the chair, delivered the Presidential address. It is already before our readers. Addresses from the chair, when they do not deal solely with some one definite question, are very generally hortatory and improving, or retrospective and self-applauding. Our President on this occasion has avoided the common stumblingblocks of such discourses, and in his well-balanced address has been instructive without being didactic, has been retrospective without either exultation over the present or derision of the past, and has dealt with present problems in an earnest, sensible, and enlightened manner. He pointed

out that the chief great reforms for which Conolly cried from the chair at the Edinburgh meeting in 1858 had now been accepted. His summary of the deductions to be drawn from the statistics of the Murray Asylum, which must have cost infinite labour to prepare, is most interesting, and shows that every generation has its own problems in treatment and management just as it has in pure science.

A very remarkable point on which Dr. Urquhart dwelt is the absurd disproportion between the increased amount of work to be done by the English Lunacy Commissioners and the stationary *personelle* of the Commission. This disproportion suggests that the law does not regard the work which the Commissioners have individually to execute as of much importance. Every year which passes sees an increase in the number of the insane, and every fresh enactment which is adopted increases the amount of restrictive routine, until it will become impossible to work the department save as a piece of State machinery, the ultimate direction of which must inevitably fall entirely into the hands of Civil Service clerks. Individual treatment is probably just as essential for us and for our institutions as it is for our patients, and insanity can no more be treated wholesale than any other disease. The notion of bulking insanity and pauperism, against which the President protests, evidently rests on the old belief that insanity is a social state, and not a disease. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* That belief is dead if not buried, and before long not even the most ignorant of the public will endure legislation founded thereon.

The President notes with just satisfaction the closer *rapprochement* of psychiatry and general medicine. The members saw a striking exemplification of this in Edinburgh, where next door to the Pathological Laboratory of the College of Physicians stands the Pathological Laboratory of the Scottish Asylums, tokens alike of enlightened liberality, of zeal for knowledge, and of kindly co-operation. Dr. Urquhart, however, is not the man to be content with this. He calls attention to the work of the psychiatric physicians attached to St. Thomas's Hospital, London, and the Sheffield Infirmary, and holds that it is a real reproach to Edinburgh that there is not a similar provision there. In this, no doubt, our President strikes a true chord. Never will the insane derive the best benefit from medical advice till they can receive it early and under conditions similar to other sufferers, before such time as their infirmities have separated them from

the rest of humanity. It is not enough for us to deplore the horrors of the old asylums. The past in this aspect may bury its dead. The danger in modern days is not premature confinement in a Bastille, but destruction of mental power resulting from neglect of early curable conditions, with all the misery which this destruction involves. We are confident that sooner or later (the sooner, let us hope, for our exertions) the people will see this for themselves, though mountains of prejudice may have to be moved, and acres of statutes repealed "drawn from the musty rolls of Noah's Ark."

Among recent enactments that are not to be regarded as sufficient or apt is that relating to habitual inebriates. The President discusses this subject in his usual broad-minded way. He is not afraid to say plainly what many of us, perhaps, have been painfully thinking for some time past, that our Association has not taken up this subject as vigorously as it should have done. He notes that it has not formed the subject of an address from the Chair. We are behind our Continental and American brethren in this particular. In spite of the frequent charge of hypocrisy levelled against the Englishmen by Continental writers, the truth is that, in this matter at least, we in our Association are too much afraid of posing among the rigidly righteous, are too shy lest we may be deemed "faddists," too much dread the reproof of adopting the nonsense of the "teetotalers." Yet our French brethren devote a division of almost every number of the *Annales Médico-psychologiques* to "Les Méfaits de l'Alcool," and surely we see not less of these misdeeds than they. Is it that we have grown accustomed to the horrors of alcohol, which have only more recently become generally known in more southern countries? If so, the sooner we imitate our Scandinavian colleagues and enter the lists against alcoholism the better. At least as much could be done here as has been done in the great northern peninsula—at least as much is wanted.

Dr. Ford Robertson read a paper of the utmost interest on "The Normal Histology and Pathology of the Nerve-cell in relation to Mental Disease." The work of the Italian school, especially of Lugaro, on the condition of post-mortem change in the nerve-cell, and on the histological results of certain poisons, which seems so full of promise, is being closely followed in the Laboratory of the Scotch Asylums, and Dr. Robertson's original work is inferior to none that has been done in this department of science.

On the second day (July 22nd) further business was discussed. On the motion of Drs. Whitcombe and Rayner a committee was appointed to consider and report upon the question of the prevention of insanity, and the reports of the Nursing Handbook and other committees were considered.

An interesting paper on "The Mismanagement of Drunkenness" was read by Dr. G. R. Wilson, of Mavisbank, which gave rise to much discussion. It was probably the desire of the reader of the paper to startle his hearers a little by the promulgation of views not now generally acceptable, and in this he succeeded. He was understood as denying almost absolutely the existence of the drink craving, and as minimising hereditary influence to such a degree as to almost forbid the assigning of this condition as a cause of alcoholism. It was also suggested that drunkenness could be checked by measures of a vigour which might be called Draconian. For purposes of discussion it is perhaps well that such views should be stated, but they are certainly not the last word on this important and difficult subject. However desirable it may be to check the tendency to mawkish sentiment with regard to drinking, however necessary it may be to inculcate self-restraint, it is clear that if the only method of dealing with alcoholism is by punitive measures, the treatment of drunkards will rightly pass out of medical hands, and we cannot think that that is a consummation to be hoped for.

Dr. Watson read a paper on "Sewage Disposal," detailing the method adopted at the new asylum at Hawkhead.

An excellent paper by Dr. Findlay, of the Crichton Institution, on the "Choroid Plexuses of the Lateral Ventricles of the Brain," brings our knowledge of these important structures thoroughly up to date. Dr. Aldous Clinch contributed a case of chorea gravis, and a case of imperfect porencephaly. The latter was carefully worked out, and forms a most important addition to our knowledge of this condition. These papers were read in the laboratory of the Scottish asylums, and were illustrated by demonstrations.

The annual dinner of the Association was held on the 21st July in the Balmoral Hotel. There was a large attendance, and the speaking was notably good. Dr. Sibbald, in responding to his health, made manly and touching reference to his approaching retirement from his seat on the Scottish Lunacy Board, a subject of universal regret among our members.