

merits ; indeed, to us it seems that its merits are not so much poetical as psychological. There can be no question that it is an exceedingly neat and most carefully finished piece of art ; but whether it is really, from a poetical point of view, the highest art, or not rather wonderful artifice, must be left to the determination of those who feel themselves competent to decide what is and what is not true poetry. Already a great deal has been written concerning it, in vague, eulogistic fashion ; but amidst the general and indiscriminating admiration we can scarcely call to mind an instance of true critical appreciation, or even of clear recognition of its meaning. Whatever else it may be, it is certainly a most subtle psychological representation ; the character of Lucretius's philosophical speculations is admirably preserved in the fragments of his reflections, and the invasion of his madness, its distressing features, the alternations of comparative calm in its course, and its termination in suicide are displayed with equal truth to nature. The style and imagery, though finished with an almost excessive care, and the treatment of the subject, chaste and simple as it is, hardly seem to rise to the height of the matter ; suggesting nothing which is not explicitly and indeed elaborately expressed, they yield no range of activity to the reader's imagination, but rather constrain the intelligence to occupy itself with the details of the art. There is no background of the unconscious ; all is conscious elaboration — deliberate, artistic execution. Then, again, we cannot help a feeling that the description of the shrieking, breast-beating, hair-tearing of the repentant wife detract somewhat from the beauty of the piece, and should have been left to the reader's imagination. Doubtless this picture is very real—real almost to commonplace ; but is it not the aim of high art to be, not a copy, but an idealization of nature ?

State Medicine.

A memorial presented to the Duke of Marlborough, Lord President of the Council, by a deputation representing a Joint Committee of the British Medical and Social Science Associations, deserves an attention which we fear it is not likely to get from a government, all the energies of which are required to preserve its own "frail and feverish being." The memorial set forth the evils which result from the present ineffective mode of conducting medico-legal inquiries ; from the im-

perfect registration of causes of death, and the absence of any registration of cases of diseases, and of children actually, or reputed to be, still-born; and from the absence of even a semblance of sanitary organisations in many of the towns and districts of the country. The memorialists pray for the appointment of a Royal Commission to institute a thorough, impartial, and comprehensive inquiry into all these matters. They append to their memorial a memorandum by Dr. Rumsey, of Cheltenham, whose exertions have now for many years been given to the praiseworthy endeavour to bring into a better position all matters connected with State Medicine. Dr. Rumsey's proposition, which is endorsed by the memorialists, is that specially skilled medical officers should be appointed to act in districts of extent sufficient to engage the whole of their time and attention. Their functions would be the following:—

1. To examine and revise all registers of births and deaths in Registration districts; to verify the fact of death in certain cases; to investigate and record accurately, in all uncertified or doubtfully certified cases, the cause of death.

2. To bring special knowledge and experience to the conduct, under authorized rules, of *post-mortem* examinations for coroner's inquests or other medico-legal inquiries; and to examine before burial the bodies of infants alleged to be still-born.

3. To act as medical assessors or referees in obscure or disputed cases—sanitary or medico-legal—which require forensic adjudication.

4. To advise and assist local authorities in carrying into effect regulations for the removal and burial of the dead, especially in crowded populations, and in times of pestilence or great mortality; and to inspect mortuaries or other places for the reception of corpses before burial.

5. To advise and aid local authorities, building societies, and other public companies, in regulating the site, construction, and sanitary arrangements of dwelling houses, especially of those proposed to be erected for the poor, and to certify satisfactory completion of such undertakings.

6. In all populous districts, to direct and aid the execution of measures concerning the health of women, within the meaning of the Contagious Diseases Prevention Act, 1866—when the main provisions of that Act shall be extended to the civil population of the kingdom.

7. Aided by skilled pharmacians or scientific chemists, to

inspect establishments for the sale and preparation of medicines, and to detect adulterations of drugs.

8. When directed by a proper authority to inquire into and report upon offences against the Medical Act, especially "infamous conduct in any professional respect" of medical practitioners, in their respective districts.

9. To inquire into the qualifications of midwives and nurses in the same districts; and to aid in carrying into effect any law which may be enacted for the examination and license of women intending to act in such capacities.

As things are at present, any registered practitioner is thought competent, and may be called upon, to undertake these duties; he may have to give scientific evidence in a court of justice respecting the cause of death of a person suspected to have been poisoned by arsenic, when he has never in his life before seen the morbid appearances of arsenical poisoning; or he may have to give an opinion on a difficult question of lunacy when he has never seen and treated a single case of insanity. The consequence is that he frequently makes a painful exhibition in the witness-box, and helps by his professional evidence, not justice, but the miscarriage of justice. The opposing barrister knows quite well what he will say before he opens his mouth, and prepares himself accordingly: he will simply talk Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence*, which he has studied for the occasion. It is manifestly unfair to expect every one who is engaged in general practice to give skilled evidence on questions requiring special study and experience; and it certainly does not conduce to the ends of justice to make such a demand on the ordinary practitioner. There can be no dispute as to the urgent necessity of some reform.

How the reform should be practically effected is by no means so clear. We may venture to dismiss at once the opinion held by some, that by an improved system of medical education the practitioner may be rendered equal to the performance of such diverse and difficult duties. The real knowledge necessary for the satisfactory discharging of such functions cannot be obtained from lectures or by reading; it can be acquired only by special experience and study. And it is plainly impossible for any one who enters upon general professional work as soon as he finished his medical education, to obtain the opportunities of special experience in cases which will be quite exceptional in his practice, if they ever occur at all. Dr. Rumsey's proposition that skilled medical

officers should be appointed for certain districts, and that they should not have any private practice, but should devote all their time to the duties of their office, may be met with the objection that these duties are of such widely different characters that a man is not likely to be found competent for all of them. He may have qualifications fitting him for recognising the signification of *post-mortem* appearances, or of testing chemically the contents of a stomach, without having the necessary qualifications for giving evidence in a case of insanity. The obvious reply to this objection is that he will, at any rate, be much better qualified for such diverse duties when he has been specially educated for them, and when he has nothing else to do but to attend to them, than the busy general practitioner, who is, under present circumstances, called upon to perform them at a moment's notice. Moreover, it would be quite possible to institute an examination for specially testing the knowledge of those who wished to become candidates for these offices, and for conferring upon them some diploma or certificate of fitness. Thus armed with a special preliminary knowledge, they would not be long in office before gaining the skilled experience necessary for the satisfactory performance of most of their important functions. We say *most of their functions* as these are specified by Dr. Rumsey, because we think that they should not be called upon to act as medical assessors at trials. It is obvious that their functions before the case came on for trial must often place them in the position of public prosecutors, and thus incapacitate them from acting as independent and unbiassed referees. The selection of competent medical assessors should be left to the judge, or to some other competent authority, and should be made from men eminent in the particular branch of science of which special experience was required.

It is now some years since we brought the subject-matters of this memorial before the Annual Committee of Convocation of the University of London, with the aim of getting a recommendation to the Senate that a special examination in them should be instituted, and a special certificate of proficiency therein granted to those who had passed it; but our efforts were all but fruitless. In face of the opposition displayed, the results dwindled down finally to a recommendation that candidates for the 2nd M.B. examination should have their attention specially directed to the necessity of acquiring a knowledge of insanity, and that an

attendance of three months in the practice of a recognised asylum should be accepted in place of three months' attendance on hospital practice. We rejoice, therefore, to see that Dr. Rumsey's strenuous and persevering labours have now been successful in bringing the whole subject of state medicine so prominently into notice that there appears some likelihood of effective action being taken in the way of a very much needed reform.

Female Nursing in Asylums.

Why should female nursing be banished entirely, as it almost always is, from the male wards of our lunatic asylums? Is it a practice founded on valid reasons, and in harmony with the humane spirit of the modern method of treating insanity, or is it really a relic of the old and barbarous system under which the insane were cut off from all human sympathy, and dealt with as savage creatures outlawed from all human rights, and not amenable to any but the harshest treatment? These questions are now being asked; and that they are so, may be taken as evidence of the continuous progress of the humane and enlightened spirit which has all but abolished the means of mechanical restraint in the treatment of insanity. In the second edition of his work on the "Physiology and Pathology of Mind," Dr. Maudsley writes:—

"It may well be questioned whether the practice of banishing all female nursing from the male department of an asylum, and of leaving the patients entirely to the care of men, is not prejudicial. An elderly female nurse, of a kind and sensible disposition, could not fail to be a great comfort to those of the patients who require gentle and sympathetic attention, and might be expected often to exert a very beneficial influence over them. Assuredly some would yield to woman's persuasion more readily and with less feeling of humiliation than to the dictates of an attendant of their own sex."

Similar ideas are expressed more fully in the last report of the West Riding Asylum, by Dr. Crichton Browne, who has, moreover, tried the practice of introducing a female nurse into the male wards, with a successful result exceeding his anticipations. We quote the whole of Dr. Browne's remarks on this subject:—

"How to provide suitable and trustworthy attendants is certainly the great problem of the day in the management of our lunatic asylums,