

disorders; and this year by year has become more widely known. I am convinced that to the more general study of mental disease by the profession generally, to its earlier recognition, and to its improved medical treatment, we owe the gratifying fact that, in spite of the hurry and bustle of this great railroad age, the press of business, the greater wealth of the middle and upper ranks of society, insanity among them is not increasing, and we may well hope that it may be materially diminished.

#### THE CASE OF MRS. PETSCHLER AT THE MACCLESFIELD ASYLUM.

It will be remembered that a woman called Mrs. Petschler, who had been a patient in the Macclesfield Asylum, got a firm of solicitors in Manchester a few months ago to write a long anonymous letter to some of the principal daily papers, making very serious charges against the management of that institution, and its officials. The Committee of Visitors at once requested the Commissioners in Lunacy to undertake a special inquiry into the whole matter. This has now been done by Mr Cleaton and Mr Howard, and the following are the conclusions of their report:—

“According to the evidence submitted to us there can be no doubt that Mrs. Petschler was insane when admitted, and was a proper subject for care and treatment in an asylum. Within the first two months it appeared that some improvement took place in her mental condition, and the Medical Superintendent communicated with her relatives, with a view to giving her a few days' leave of absence, that she might see her children, the separation from whom she deeply felt. The relatives did not adopt this suggestion. Mrs. Petschler subsequently became worse in mind and more under the influence of delusions. Further, she refused to eat meat or potatoes, in accordance with an insane vow which she had made, and could with difficulty be induced to take sufficient nourishment. According to the evidence of the three medical officers of the asylum, under whose care she came, whilst resident there, she was at no time during that period fit for unconditional discharge, and it was not until the month of July that she became, in the opinion of the Medical Superintendent, sufficiently improved to justify him in regarding her as well enough for a month's absence on trial. Some delay, possibly unavoidable, but not attributable to the asylum authorities, occurred, before definite arrangements could be made for giving her this probation, so that she did not leave the asylum until the 21st September. Mrs. Petschler does not appear at any time to have realised the fact that she was insane and required care in an asylum; but she seems to have been mainly and principally aggrieved at having been sent to a *pauper* asylum, and at having to associate with patients beneath herself in station and education. How far circumstances necessitated this course being adopted by her friends (who, it appears, remunerated the Altrincham Union for her maintenance in the asylum) was beyond the scope of our enquiry; but we had abundant evidence that Mrs. Petschler's frame of mind was, throughout her whole residence, powerfully affected by the above-named circumstance. She was indisposed to submit to the rules of the house on the ground that she was not a pauper; a feeling of injury existed, which, coupled with her mental condition, caused her to take mistaken and perverse views of the actions and motives of those among whom she was placed, and from many of whom she received exceptional kindness and consideration. Some annoyances and discomforts which she may accidentally have suffered have consequently been magnified by her into serious grievances and have formed the subjects of complaints for which, we think, there has been no substantial and reasonable cause.

“We have, as far as possible, come to these conclusions from the independent testimony of witnesses against whom it could not be suggested that they might be influenced by interested motives. We specially refer to the evidence that was given us by the two discharged patients Miss R— and Mrs H—, at the same time it would have been manifestly most unjust to have disregarded the concurrent testimony, solemnly given on oath, of a number of most respectable witnesses, simply on the ground of their connection with the Asylum. In many instances they were the only persons, besides Mrs. Petschler, who could have any knowledge of particular circumstances. To all questions put to them they replied in an open and straightforward manner, whilst every opportunity for making the investigation as thorough as possible was afforded by the Asylum authorities. In conclusion we can say, that in the

course of a most protracted and searching enquiry, nothing was disclosed that reflected unfavourably on the general management of the Asylum."

The members of the Medico-Psychological Association, and all who are interested in the welfare of the insane, and the management of our English County Asylums, will feel sincere pleasure in reading this report. The noble institution at Macclesfield, which has been so recently erected for the care of the insane in that part of the county of Cheshire, its Committee of Visitors, and its officers, and especially Dr. Deas, are to be congratulated on the result of this most searching inquiry into this painful matter. It was supposed to be a model, not only of architectural skill and arrangement, but of careful management; its Committee of Visitors had, in the most enlightened way, adopted the most modern ideas for the cure of the insane. Dr. Deas was known to be an able, benevolent, and hard-working superintendent, and those reports were most painful to the public mind. We only hope that their complete refutation will have as wide a publicity as they had. In the interests of the insane, and of relatives of the insane, the result of this investigation should be widely made known.

#### JOHN HOWARD AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY.

At a meeting of the Psychological Section of the British Medical Association held at King's College, August, 1873, Professor Guy called attention to the fact that John Howard was appointed High Sheriff of the County of Bedford exactly one hundred years ago (in 1773), and so obtained the opportunity of making those remarkable inquiries into the state of prisons, and the physical and moral condition of prisoners to which this country and the world in general are so deeply indebted. Dr. Guy also alluded to the controversies which had arisen as to the character of Howard and his treatment of his only son; and as, in his judgment, there is no biography extant which affords such full and trustworthy materials on which to found a psychological inquiry, he offered a prize of £10 to encourage and promote such inquiry.

The following letter addressed to the President of the Section and of the Association fully expressed Dr. Guy's views:—

26, Gordon Street, August 14, 1873.

MY DEAR DR. TUKE,—Before leaving town, I must write you a line about the proposal I made at King's College.

1.—I offer a prize of £10 to be expended on books at the option of the winner—for the best essay on *John Howard as a Psychological Study*.

2.—I think this prize should be awarded by the *Association* of which I am an Honorary Member, rather than by the *Section* to which the offer was made.

3.—I should like the judges to be (if they would take the trouble) yourself and the Editors of the Journal.

4.—The advertisement of the prize should be made during the current year, and the award take place before the meeting of the Association in 1874.

5.—The advertisement should state that the essay, besides presenting an analysis of the character of John Howard, and the circumstances, physical and moral, under which it developed itself, must treat of the relation of the conduct of Howard during the infancy, childhood, and early manhood of his son, to the son's lapse into the mad state in which he died.

6.—The prize not to be awarded to any essay which the judges may deem unworthy, though it were the best. But in the event of no sufficient essay being brought forward, the prize to be offered for the next year. One of my motives in offering this prize, you will understand to be the vindication of Howard's memory (if consistent with the truth) from certain charges respecting his son, and I offer it *now* because we are living in the centenary of his happy appointment as Sheriff of Bedford in 1773.

I return to town on the 26th August, after which date (if you have had time enough for deliberation), I shall be glad to hear from you.

Meanwhile, I am,

Yours very sincerely,

WILLIAM A. GUY.

Dr. Tuke.

P.S.—I would suggest that there should be no limitation as to the profession of competitors; and that the usual arrangements as to mottoes, &c., be announced.