

a question of general application, and have in view the introduction of an improvement in the mode of treating certain classes of insane patients—an improvement which the writer believes is gaining ground in the minds of the most thoughtful psychologists, and to which the advancing intelligence and humanity of the age are tending. The permanent sequestration of all kinds and degrees of insanity in one promiscuous asylum or hospital, will probably be regarded, in the course of a few years, in the light of an anomaly.

The asylum plan of treatment is based, in the present state of legal and practical psychiatry, upon a theoretical uniformity which makes no distinction between the more profound and the lighter forms of insanity, or between one stage of insanity and another. It is allowed on all hands that for the former, the associate treatment and provisions of a large establishment are needful for their safety, and best adapted for their cure. For the latter, who form a not inconsiderable proportion of the insane, the proposition here advanced is that the present asylum plan is not required. The cases included in this class of mental infirmity require separation from their friends and special treatment—but for them a beneficial alteration of the present asylum plan might be made.

Great as are the improvements in the treatment of the insane already secured, and in securing which the Retreat has had no small share, these improvements have not reached the *ne plus ultra*. The direction in which further advances are to be sought, is in the way of a provision by which the barrier separating the world of insanity from that of the sane shall be reduced to its least practicable dimensions; in other words, by which the nearest possible approximation may be attained in the life, habits, pursuits, enjoyments, and social condition of the insane to those of sane society.—*The Seventieth Report of the Friends' Retreat near York, 1866.*

The Metropolitan Poor Bill.

The object of the Metropolitan Poor Bill, then, is to separate the management of the sick and impotent poor from that of the other classes claiming parochial relief. With this view, it proposes to give the Poor-Law Board powers to divide the metropolis into a number of districts, in each of which separate asylums shall be erected, as the Board shall from time to time deem necessary, for the care and treatment of the lunatic and imbecile poor, of those afflicted with fever or smallpox, and of those labouring under other forms of disease. The funds for the erection of these establishments it is proposed to raise by a general rate on the whole metropolis; but their management will be confided to local boards, one of which will be provided for each district. For the maintenance of the asylums it is proposed to follow a somewhat different system. Those for the insane, and for the fever and smallpox patients, will be supported from the general metropolitan fund; while the bulk of the expenses of those for the ordinary sick will fall on the parishes from which the patients are sent. The boards of management will be formed from the ratepayers of the several districts, and will consist of elective and nominated managers—the former to be appointed by the guardians of the parishes forming the district from among themselves, and from the ratepayers assessed to the poor-rate on an annual value not less than £100; and the latter to be named by the Poor-law Board from among justices of the peace resident in, and assessed to the poor-rate of, the district, on a similar annual value. The number of nominated managers is not to exceed one third of the prescribed number of elective managers; but the total number to be elected, their qualifications, and their tenure of office, are from time to time to be fixed by the Poor-law Board. The fitting-up

and furnishing of the asylums, and the provision of medical and surgical appliances and other requisites, are likewise to be determined by the Poor-law Board, who are further to regulate the mode of admission of the patients.

It will be seen from these details that this bill meditates most material innovations in the administration of the Poor-law. Of its general object, we most cordially approve; nevertheless, we cannot help regarding with some apprehension several of its special provisions. And, first, we are inclined to doubt the propriety of throwing the maintenance of the insane and the fever and smallpox patients on the general metropolitan fund. The reason for this proposal lies apparently in the conviction that insanity, fever, and smallpox are not likely to become sources of imposition, and that there is a necessity for separating the patients affected with these diseases from the rest of the community: but, granting this, we would nevertheless submit that if the maintenance of the insane poor is thrown upon the general fund, the result will be a speedy and enormous increase in their numbers. So long as the maintenance of the pauper insane falls upon their individual parishes, the ingenuity of the parochial medical officers is taxed to show that many forms of insanity and idiocy are but slight constitutional imperfections which do not fall within the statutory definition of lunacy; but once let it be made the interest of the parishes to regard all their weak-minded paupers as lunatics, and the parochial medical officers will soon acquire a new light on the subject, and certify accordingly. This danger should be guarded against, as well as that which will ensue from making the admission of patients into the proposed asylums too much a matter of course. In all probability, these hospitals will not be regarded by the poorer classes in the same light as the workhouse infirmaries: of necessity they will not possess the same deterrent character; and they will thus be more readily resorted to by petty tradesmen and others who ought not to come within the scope of the Poor-law. It will be necessary, therefore, to take precautions against utterly destroying the independent feelings of these classes of the community. When, in ordinary circumstances, a necessity arises for charitable aid, it does not necessarily follow that the whole burden of the pauper's maintenance should be undertaken by his parish. An allowance of two or three shillings a week may be all that is necessary; and even in the case of sickness, where the patient is treated at home, part of his maintenance is still as a rule defrayed by himself. Could effect not be given to the same principle, and the patient be made to contribute according to his means, although recourse were had to asylum treatment? We must always bear in mind that, although the disease may not be simulated, the necessity to have recourse to public charity may be, and that it is therefore proper not to diminish too much the immediate interest to detect imposition. But if the bill goes too far in widening the area of chargeability for insane and fever patients, it seems to us to err on the other side by narrowing too much the field for the maintenance of the ordinary sick, by throwing it on their respective parishes. In our opinion, a better course would be to make the area of chargeability in all cases co-extensive with the districts. This would tend to equalise the burdens without too much diminishing the check on unnecessary expenditure. A general fund, raised by assessing a population of three millions, will be too likely to be regarded as a fair field for plunder; whereas a rate borne by perhaps a tenth part of this population will still convey the impression of individual contribution and individual responsibility.

But the most objectionable feature of the bill, we think, is the unconstitutional authority which it vests in the Poor-law Board. To this body power is given to make and unmake districts, to determine what asylums shall be provided, to fix the number of managers and nominate that third which is

non-elective, to regulate the mode of admission of patients, and to prescribe what furniture, fixtures, and conveniences shall be provided. These powers are of so extensive a character, that they should be clearly defined by statute, and not left to the discretion of a board which may possibly use them in a crotchety and despotic manner. The Legislature has already seen fit to withdraw, in a great measure, the treatment of the insane poor from the Poor-law authorities, and to vest it in bodies specially constituted for the purpose. But these bodies—called asylum visitors in England, and district boards in Scotland—are elected in the former country from the Justices, and in the latter from the Commissioners of Supply, in accordance with distinct statutory provisions. With them rests the right, subject simply to the approval of the Commissioners in Lunacy, of arranging the districts, erecting the asylums, and providing for the proper care and treatment of the insane poor. In the event of neglect by the visitors or district boards to erect an asylum, the Commissioners are authorised to apply to the Secretary of State, or the Court of Session, for authority to compel them. But neither in England nor in Scotland have the Commissioners power to require that medical appliances or particular articles of furniture shall be supplied. Their functions are limited to visitation and reporting; but it is free to the visitors in England, and to the district boards in Scotland, to adopt or reject any of the recommendations which the reports of the Commissioners may contain. The results of this system, however, have been so favorable, that in no country in the world are the asylums for the insane so well conducted as in Great Britain. We hold, then, that the boards for the management of the proposed metropolitan asylums should be nominated under direct statutory authority, and nowise at second-hand by the Poor-law Board. The evils of the present system have, we believe, arisen from throwing the powers of the guardians chiefly into the hands of men of narrow education and restricted views, who are incapable of acting in an enlightened and liberal spirit. To avoid this error, the new boards should be elected by a higher class of ratepayers—by such, perhaps, as are assessed on an annual value of at least £100; but it would be a mistake to require a similar, or indeed any fixed, amount of annual assessment as a qualification for the district board. A provision of this kind might lead to the exclusion of the men best calculated for the satisfactory discharge of the duties—of professional men, for instance, who were still on the threshold of their career, with knowledge and leisure, but without funds to live in a high-rented house.—*Scotsman*, March 7th.

The Supervision of Lunatics in Private Dwellings.

Year by year, the difficulties of making proper provision for the care of the increasing numbers of the insane poor grow more and more formidable. The last Report of the English Commissioners in Lunacy, telling as it does of the frequent enlargements of existing asylums, of the building of new asylums, and of the continuing pressure for increased accommodation, repeats an oft-told tale, which has ceased to excite attention only because of its familiarity. Of forty-five county and borough asylums in England, more than half are nearly full, quite full, or more than full; while those that have yet some accommodation left are not likely to have it long, at the present steady rate of yearly increase in the number of the pauper insane. No wonder that a feeling has grown up in some minds, and is now finding active expression in different quarters, that some means should be adopted of relieving the pressure on the overgrown and overcrowded asylums, other than the multiplication of their numbers and the increase of their size. With this aim, the system of placing insane patients in private dwellings,