

II.—THE MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENTS' HALF-YEARLY STATEMENTS.

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONERS IN LUNACY,
19, WHITEHALL PLACE, S.W.; 20th December, 1864.

Sir,—The attention of the Commissioners in Lunacy has been specially drawn to the difficulty experienced by clerks to boards of guardians, in collecting the detailed information necessary to enable them to prepare their annual returns of pauper lunatics chargeable to unions and parishes on the 1st of January, by reason of some of the particulars required, relative to patients in asylums, being obtainable only from those institutions.

With a view to remove this difficulty in the most simple and convenient way, the Commissioners have communicated with the Poor Law Board, who have expressed their concurrence in the following suggestion.

The Commissioners suggest that the half-yearly statements required by the 34th section of the "Lunacy Acts Amendment Act, 1862," to be transmitted by superintendents of asylums to boards of guardians (or overseers), be made applicable to the 1st of January, and 1st of July, in each year, and that they should contain the following particulars, of which some are not within the knowledge of the union or parish authorities:—

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| 1. Name of patient. | 6. Of dirty habits. |
| 2. Age. | 7. Mental state. |
| 3. Sex. | 8. Bodily health and condition. |
| 4. Whether "lunatic" or "idiot." | 9. Observations (special, if any). |
| 5. Dangerous to himself or others. | |

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. C. SPRING RICE, Secretary.

To

Clerk to Visitors of the

Asylum.

The Royal Hospital of Bethlehem and the Charity Commissioners.

(See 'Journal of Mental Science,' July, 1864.)

The following letter has been sent to us for publication:—

To the President, Treasurer, and Governors of the Royal Hospital of Bethlehem.

Lords and Gentlemen,—We have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of a copy of an extract from the report of a meeting held before F. O. Martin, Esq., inspector of charities, containing four suggestions submitted by the inspector to your committee as worthy

of their consideration, and upon which the governors have desired our opinion. We have given the whole subject our earnest and careful consideration, and, as each suggestion involves important subjects, we will, with your permission, offer our opinion upon each in rotation.

1st. "*That the Revenues for Incurables should be amalgamated with the General Revenues of the Hospital.*"

This suggestion refers to matters so intimately connected with the departments of president and treasurer, that we cannot recognise it in our province as medical men to advise; and we feel sure the governors will view it as a question to be referred, as regards its desirability, should it be practicable, either to the committee, or a special meeting of the governors.

2nd. "*That a Branch Establishment be provided in the country for the temporary reception of such of the patients as the Resident Physician of the Hospital may consider likely to be benefited by the change.*"

We are decidedly of opinion that much benefit and advantage would result from the establishment of such a branch institution in the country. A house capable of accommodating about ten patients of each sex, surrounded by gardens, and having the advantages of country walks, and country air and scenes, would be beneficial, and no doubt would be much enjoyed by the patients during the summer months. To this establishment all the patients in Bethlehem Hospital, whether belonging to the permanent or curable list, might be sent for such a length of residence as the committee, on the recommendation of the resident physician, should direct. We presume there will be no difficulty in procuring a suitable extent of land on high and gravelly soil in an open country, abounding with fine prospects, and abundantly supplied with good water, near a railway-station, for the erection of such an establishment. Little additional staff would be required, except a good matron and housekeeper; each party of patients visiting their country-house would be accompanied by their well trained and experienced nurses and attendants, and so change of air and scene would be always at the command of the governors, both for the patients committed to their charge, and for the servants who were faithfully engaging themselves in their duties.

3rd. "*That the Rules of the Hospital be so altered as to allow the admission of patients suffering under a greater variety of forms of insanity.*"

We are of opinion that the benefits of the hospital may be greatly increased by an alteration in the rules respecting the admission of patients :—

THE PRESENT RULES.

1. All poor lunatics presumed to be curable are eligible for admission into this hospital, for maintenance and medical treatment, except—

1. Those who have sufficient means for their suitable maintenance in a private asylum.
2. Those who have been insane more than twelve months.
3. Those who have been discharged uncured from any other hospital for the reception of lunatics.
4. Those who are pregnant.
5. Those who are in a state of idiocy, or are afflicted with any form of paralysis, or are subject to epileptic or convulsive fits.
6. Those whose condition threatens the speedy dissolution of life, or requires the permanent and exclusive attendance of a nurse.
7. Those whom disease or physical infirmity renders unfit to associate with other patients.

N.B.—“A preference will be given to patients of the educated classes—to secure accommodation for whom, no patient will be received who is a proper object for admission into a county lunatic asylum.”

THE RULES WE SUGGEST.

1. All poor lunatics presumed to be curable, are eligible for admission into this hospital, for maintenance and medical treatment, except—

1. Those who have sufficient means for their suitable maintenance in a private asylum.
2. Those who have been insane more than twelve months and are considered by the resident physician to be incurable.
3. Those who are in a state of idiocy, or are subject to epileptic fits, or whose condition threatens the speedy dissolution of life, or requires the permanent and exclusive attendance of a nurse.

N.B.—“A preference will be given to patients of the educated classes—to secure accommodation for whom, no patient will be received who is a proper object for admission into a county lunatic asylum.”

4th. “*That with the view of extending the experience requisite for the efficient Medical Treatment and Management of the Insane, a limited number of young medical men who have recently completed their other medical studies, and have obtained their several diplomas, be received into Bethlehem Hospital under such regulations as to residence, duties, and allowances, as shall be adopted for the purpose.*”

We feel very strongly the value of this suggestion, and unhesitatingly appeal to the governors to give it support. At the present time no institution offers any assistance to the medical student in search of practical knowledge as to the treatment of mental disease, beyond some scattered lectures delivered at a few asylums, and an annually published invitation to attend the Physician's Practice and Lectures at St. Luke's and Bethlehem Hospitals, at a very moderate fee, which invitation is almost entirely neglected. There are many reasons why it is so disregarded. Experience has led to the conviction that a visit to the hospital, or a walk through the wards two or three times a week, added to the clinical instruction of the physician, will not alone teach the student how to grapple with the violent and often sudden paroxysm of mania, any more than to remove the morbid self-accusations of the melancholic, and restore his bright eye and cheerful smile.

Such occasional observation will not teach the student how to lighten the heavy dulness of the demented nor how to dissipate the vacant foolishness of idiocy. This necessary information can only be obtained from constant observation at all hours, and under every variety of circumstance. The daily habit of mixing with the insane, watching for all their feelings, desires, passions, and emotions, will alone give the student a true knowledge of the disease, or teach him how to mitigate the awful sufferings it involves. We, therefore, strongly recommend the governors to authorise the admission for a limited period of two resident students, who have completed their other medical studies, and have obtained their diplomas; that they be provided in the hospital with lodging and board, and held subject to such regulations, as regards their official work, as shall be submitted by the resident physician, and approved of by the governors. Very little difficulty need be anticipated in providing the necessary accommodation, some rooms at the south side of the first floor of the building might be made available and comfortable (at a trifling expense), and we recommend that this suggestion be carried out with as little delay as possible, and the advantages offered be at once made public; since we feel sure the resident physician will very shortly be able to assure the governors, not only that the advantages of the hospital are accepted and prized by the profession, but that his own labours are materially lessened by the additional assistance thus rendered him. We have now offered you our mutual view on all the subjects upon which you have honoured us by seeking our opinion, and in conclusion have only to express regret that there has been so much delay in placing this report before you. The time of year, and the pressure of very heavy professional duties, may, we trust, be accepted as some apology for this tardy reply to your communication.

We have the honour to be,

Lords and Gentlemen,

Your obedient humble servants,

W. CHARLES HOOD, M.D.

W. HELPS, M.D.

24th November, 1864.

[We published in our July number a report (copied from the 'Lancet') of the inquiry into Bethlehem Hospital, held by Mr. F. O. Martin, one of the Inspectors of Charities, in the Court Room of Bridewell, New Bridge Street, on the 9th of April. As the result of that inquiry, Mr. Martin would appear to have addressed a communication to the Bethlehem Committee, making four suggestions for the more efficient management of the charity. These suggestions are given in the above letter of Drs. Hood and Helps to the governors.]

Although very far from meeting all the requirements of the case, or indeed the most urgent, viz., the removal of the hospital out of London, Mr. Martin's suggestions and the recommendations of Dr. Hood based thereon are worthy of every consideration. Mr. Martin must in his inquiry have learnt many valuable facts connected with the administration of this charity, while of Dr. Hood's zeal for and ability to counsel on any real improvements in the management of Bethlehem we are well assured.

The suggestions of the Charity Commissioners relate—

- I. To the better management of the revenues of the hospital.*
- II. To the provision of a branch establishment in the country.*
- III. To a relaxation of the rules so as to allow the admission of patients suffering under a greater variety of forms of insanity.*
- IV. To the admission of pupils at Bethlehem.*

We would add one word on each of these points.

I. Whether it be by amalgamation of the revenues for incurables (as suggested by Mr. Martin) with the general revenues, or by some other means is immaterial, and a mere question of detail, so long as the principle is admitted that a hospital with a revenue of £22,000 a year should afford relief to the largest possible number of the insane of the middle class, instead of as now to an average of 210 only. We do not share Dr. Hood's feeling of reverence for the departments of president and treasurer which induces him to avoid the discussion of this question. We share herein the opinion of the Earl of Shaftesbury, which we have more than once quoted in this discussion,—“That the public have a right to ask from the Governors of Bethlehem the full benefit of the magnificent revenue in their possession.” We must add, that the maintenance of 210 patients out of this revenue does not accord with our conception of the full benefits which should be realised by the public.

II. The second suggestion of the Charity Commissioners refers to a branch establishment in the country. Dr. Hood takes the mildest possible view of this suggested arrangement. Country quarters for twenty patients, with “a good matron and housekeeper,” meet all his aspirations in this direction.

We have again and again, in the pages of this Journal, argued and asserted our opinion of the unfitness of conducting a hospital for the curative treatment of mental disease in the vicinity of Newington Causeway; and no mere addition to the present system of country quarters for twenty patients will meet the requirements of the case as we view them.*

In this year's (1864) Report, the Commissioners in Lunacy on this question of the site of Bethlehem Hospital remark:—

** See ‘Journal of Mental Science,’ for April, 1863; July, 1863; October, 1863; and July, 1864.*

"In our last Report we spoke with confidence and satisfaction of the fair prospect which then existed of effecting the removal of Bethlehem Hospital from its present unfavorable locality to a better one in a rural district. A new site being required for St. Thomas's Hospital, the governors offered at least £150,000 for the premises and grounds of Bethlehem Hospital. It appeared to us that an offer so favorable could not be refused, and we anticipated with a considerable degree of certainty that the Governors of Bethlehem Hospital would avail themselves of this opportunity to transfer their patients to some site affording better means of treatment and cure. We regret to learn that no immediate prospect exists of effecting an arrangement in every way so desirable, and we again express our conviction that most important benefits are derived by the insane from a residence in the country."

III. The revisal of the rules for the admission of patients.

Dr. Hood concurs in our opinion that the benefits of the hospital may be greatly increased by a relaxation of the rules respecting the admission of patients. His suggestions (see above) are good and wise; yet why should Bethlehem exclude a case of insanity simply because the symptoms are so severe as to require the permanent and exclusive attendance of a nurse? The county asylums must take such cases with less means at their disposal.

IV. The admission of pupils at Bethlehem.

Dr. Hood, it will be seen, sets little store on the clinical teaching of insanity. "There are many reasons (he writes) why it is disregarded at Bethlehem." Such is not the result of experience elsewhere. In Edinburgh, in Paris, and in Vienna, the systematic and clinical teaching of psychology is regularly followed. Moreover, in the rules which were drawn up in 1852 for the guidance of the resident physician of Bethlehem, he is required to give, during each term, a course of lectures; and it is also provided that, at the close of the session, the most successful pupil shall be recommended to the Committee for the appointment of Clinical Clerk.

We cannot believe that these intentions of the Governors and the claims of the London students in medicine on the resources of Bethlehem, will be allowed to end in the excellent yet disproportionately small recommendation of Dr. Hood for the appointment of two resident students. If the Resident-Physician of Bethlehem is prevented by his arduous duties, or otherwise, from giving the desired clinical instruction, surely some lecturer may be found to supply the want, and the funds of Bethlehem are ample to pay the small additional cost.

In the pages of this Journal for October, 1863, we thus stated the reforms necessary to place the Royal foundation of Bethlehem on a satisfactory footing:—

"1. The removal of the site of Bethlehem some twelve miles into the country.

"2. The erection there of a hospital adapted for the cure of the insane in place of the present prison-like structure.

"3. A revision of the rules for the admission of patients to the benefit of the charity, and the removal of the present restrictions which exclude a large majority of those for whom its benefit is most needed, and would be most valuable.

"4. The extension of the numbers by a wiser application of the large revenues of the charity, and by the admission of patients paying a portion of the cost of maintenance.

"5. The systematic and clinical teaching of Psychology, as followed in Paris, Vienna, and Edinburgh."

And we added to this summary the following words by Dr. Conolly :

"A new Bethlehem, judiciously situated and planned, might be a model, a school of instruction, and a benefit for ever. We should then possess a public asylum in which the intentions of the charitable founders, and the exertions of humane and scientific physicians, would not be frustrated; and where, above all, the amplest possible means would be furnished, and their application perpetuated, for the relief of the most terrible of all forms of human misfortune."

It will be seen that the Charity Commissioners and Dr. Hood already, to some extent, have accepted our programme. The value of a country site is acknowledged in the suggestion of the branch establishment in the country; the rules for the admission of patients are to be relaxed, and some attempt is to be made to render Bethlehem available as a school for the clinical study of mental disease. Let us hope that a farther consideration of the views which we have felt it our duty strongly to insist on may lead the governors of Bethlehem and their adviser Dr. Hood to enlarge the boundaries of that noble institution, which already owes so much to the skilful organization of its late resident physician.]

Recent Suicides.

"Among the many mysteries of human life few things are more mysterious than those moral epidemics of which our universal self-knowledge now informs us. Like physical diseases, they seem to sweep from time to time through the moral atmosphere with a course so irresistible and uniform that philosophers have been led to doubt whether we have a free will in moral matters any more than in physical. In both alike we seem creatures of circumstances, unable to avoid, to resist, or to remedy our inevitable evils. One of the most remarkable of these epidemics appears to be running its course now. Our readers cannot have failed to notice the number of suicides which have been reported lately. Our impression of Thursday contained accounts of five, one being an aggravated case of combined murder and suicide.