

THE COTON HILL INSTITUTION FOR THE INSANE.

Near to Stafford is another institution for the insane, called the Coton Hill Institution. This asylum is for the reception of two classes of insane patients, viz.—1st, patients in more or less affluent circumstances who shall contribute, according to the accommodation required, such weekly sum as may be agreed upon; and 2nd, patients in limited circumstances, though not paupers, who shall be received at such reduced rates of payment as the Committee, upon a consideration of their circumstances, may in each case determine; the deficiency being made up out of the surplus moneys received from the patients of the first class beyond their actual cost, assisted by annual subscriptions, donations, and legacies. For every two guineas subscribed annually, subscribers are entitled, during payment, to recommend, subject to the powers reserved to the House Committee, one patient within the year for admission into the second class; donors have the same privilege during life for every twenty guineas.

The medical officers attached to this institution are—a Visiting Physician, who receives a stipend of 100 guineas a year, and a Resident Superintendent. The former office—now, I believe, vacant—has been held until recently by Dr. Wollaston, a relative of the great physicist of that name; the latter is held by Dr. Hewson.”

A Voice from Derby to Bedlam.

“WITH the ostensible object of deprecating the language employed, and the *animus* assumed to be felt, by the authors of a recent pamphlet on the Townley case, the author of ‘A Voice from Derby’ reopens the question as to the guilt or innocence of the murderer of Miss Goodwin, with the evident intention of vindicating the evidence as to his insanity given at his trial by Dr. Forbes Winslow. The able report to the Home Secretary, which finally decided the fate of Townley, so carefully drawn up by Dr. Bucknill, and endorsed by Dr. Hood, Dr. Meyer, and Dr. Helps, had, as we thought, set at rest for ever the question of Townley’s sanity. The convict himself felt the searching force of the examination to which he was last subjected, and anticipated its result. ‘They think me sane,’ said Townley, as the commissioner left his cell; ‘still, it is very hard if they hang me now.’ Although there is nothing new in the pleas brought forward by the author of ‘A Voice from Derby,’ the question as to the insanity of Townley is treated with considerable ability; the manageable facts being dexterously handled, and awkward and damaging ones judiciously left unnoticed. Thus we are referred to the *opinion* of the counsel for the prosecution, that there was no evidence of any premeditation on the part of the prisoner; but the fact of Townley’s having three knives upon his person—one a large clasp-knife, newly bought, the instrument with which the murder was committed—is not explained. We cannot say that the ‘Voice from Derby’ is distinguished by either temper or moderation; and we regret to find in it an attack upon an estimable provincial physician, whose talent and character should have protected him from such language. We cannot see anything in the conduct referred to that justified such language; and certainly the reproach cast upon that gentleman, that he has never been concerned in any of the great lunacy trials, is far from being any disgrace to him. He has at least escaped the imputation that so many have incurred; viz., of merging the medical witness in the paid advocate. The ‘Voice’ takes great pains to vindicate

the motives as well as the views of Dr. Winslow. But this was surely unnecessary. All that can, in our opinion, be said in the matter, is, that Dr. Winslow made a mistake in diagnosis, as others have done before him, and will do to the end of time."—*British Medical Journal*, June 4.

Professor Laycock on the Medico-legal relations of Insanity, with reference to the Townley case.

"On a former occasion I called attention to the case of Mr. Windham, and showed how faulty the English system of jurisprudence was in cases like his, inasmuch as it made no proper distinction between mental diseases and deficiencies. The question put to the jury was whether Mr. Windham was insane—a highly theoretical question in itself, but wholly inapplicable to his case, inasmuch as the true question was whether he was competent or not to manage his large property. The result of the trial was plain enough from the first. He was found to be not insane, and was left to his own discretion, or rather indiscretion, to do with his property as he pleased, and which he appears to have wholly squandered since the trial. Now, if the true issue had been put to the jury, founded on the scientific distinction between mental diseases and defects, Mr. Windham would have been protected, just as a minor in law is protected, from the evil consequences of his youthful defects in judgments. At the same time I called attention to the case of Clark, a lunatic, who was condemned at Newcastle to be hung, but whose sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life, owing to the most obvious defects in the English principles of jurisprudence in regard to the responsibility of the insane. A similar case has very recently attracted public attention. George Victor Townley was tried at Derby on 11th December last for the murder of a young lady who had been engaged to marry him, but had discarded him for another. He was found guilty, and sentenced to be hung; but the judge (as in Clark's case) immediately communicated to Sir George Grey his doubts whether the sentence should be carried into execution. Two points arose in this case—first, whether Townley was insane at the time he committed the murder? secondly, whether he was insane at the time he was condemned? Dr. Forbes Winslow gave his opinion in the affirmative as to both these questions, and this view was confirmed by other competent observers. Mr. Gisborne, surgeon to the prison; Mr. Harwood, a medical practitioner; four Derbyshire magistrates; and three Commissioners in Lunacy, accustomed to investigate such cases, all concurred in opinion that he was at least not of sound mind when condemned. Execution of sentence was therefore deferred, and the patient was sent to Bethlehem Hospital for the Insane, or Bedlam, as it is popularly termed. Here, however, he was subjected to other examinations by four eminent and experienced practitioners in insanity—namely, Drs. Hood and Bucknill, Chancery Visitors in Lunacy; Dr. Meyer, Medical Superintendent of the Criminal Lunatics' Hospital at Broadmoor; and Dr. Helps, resident physician to Bethlehem Hospital. They also carefully examined the official documents bearing on the case, and arrived unanimously at the conclusion that George Victor Townley was of sound mind. Like Clark, he was then sent to penal servitude for life. It is not surprising that these contradictory opinions expressed in the highest quarters, medically speaking, have caused both controversy and serious reflection. If men so eminently qualified differ, how can less experienced practitioners be expected to sign certificates of lunacy which shall not be open to doubt? And how will they fare in courts of law? That much may be said on both sides is proved by the discussions for or against