

The symptoms during life, as described by Dr. Mitchell, and the result of the histological examination, both accord completely, in my opinion, with this suggestion.

I am, &c.,

A. HARRISON THOMAS, M.B.

Ayrshire District Asylum, 20th July, 1882.

To the Editors of the JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE.

GENTLEMEN,—It is with extreme reluctance that I trespass on your space, and ask you to insert the following letter in your next issue of the Journal (the only organ of publication touching on the transactions of public asylums), but inasmuch as a charge of unsatisfactory management has been made against me in the last report of the Committee of the Somerset and Bath Lunatic Asylum as an excuse for dismissal, I write in self-defence to give it a public contradiction.

To be as brief as possible, I will narrate the circumstances. On June 9th, 1881, I received an intimation from the Committee of Visitors of the Somerset and Bath Lunatic Asylum that, in three months' time from that date, they would dispense with my services as Medical Superintendent and Medical Officer of that asylum, a position to which I was appointed in July, 1868, after having been Assistant Medical Officer there for eight years previously. On March 25th, 1881, I had been requested by the Committee to resign, but refused to do so, no reason being furnished to me, and no complaint being made against me justifying such a request. I asked the Committee to give me a distinct and specific statement in writing of the reasons why they asked me to resign, and were dissatisfied with my conduct. They declined to do so, and I was dismissed from a post which I had occupied for thirteen years, in utter ignorance of any adequate and justifiable grounds for the course which the Committee thought fit to take.

On seeking legal advice as to my position, I was informed that I had no redress before a judicial tribunal, the Committee, under the fifty-fifth section of the Lunacy Act, 1853 (16 and 17 Vict., c. 97), having an *absolute discretion* as to the retention or discharge of their medical officers. This enactment is not construed according to the general and righteous spirit of the law, which requires that the party to be affected by a judgment of any tribunal shall have an opportunity of defending himself; but a *discretionary power to remove* being given to the Committee, they may exercise it without notice and without any statement of the grounds of removal.

To come now, however, to the charge of unsatisfactory management made against me by the Committee let me give extracts from their reports to Quarter Sessions.

In 1881, Jan. 4th, they report, "During the past year the health of the inmates has been good, and the medical treatment, as well for the prevention of disease as for the cure and relief of it, *has been satisfactory, as also the conduct of the officers and servants of the asylum.*"

In 1881, March 25th, the Committee asked me to resign.

In 1881, June 28th, the Committee report to Quarter Sessions, "Early in this year a prevalent feeling in the Committee was shown to exist of *dissatisfaction with the general management of the asylum and of the officers and attendants in it by Dr. Medlicott, and it was plain that a change must be made.*"

With regard, then, to this charge of unsatisfactory management of the asylum, its officers and attendants, I beg to state in reply, it is untrue, and I deny that there was any cause for this alleged feeling of dissatisfaction on the part of the Committee, because the asylum was never in better working order. It is simply preposterous on their part to try and throw dust in the eyes of the public by giving the above-named charges as their reason for asking me to resign. Where, I ask, was it plain that a change had to be made in the interval alluded to (from January to March), and if so plain, why could not the Com-

mittee have given me, when I asked them a distinct and specific statement of the reasons why they were dissatisfied with my management, so that a thorough investigation could have been made? They must have known that their charge could have been easily disproved, and doubtless that was the cause of their refusal to accede to my request. Is it reasonable, I ask, to suppose that my management of the asylum, its officers and attendants, could have become so unsatisfactory in the short space of two months as to necessitate the course taken by the Committee after years of satisfactory management, as testified in their annual reports? I content myself with simply stating that the charge made against me was false, and private animus can only account for their unscrupulous behaviour towards me.

I have but little more to say on the subject, but may add had anything occurred which would not bear the strictest investigation, I should certainly in my own interest have acceded to the wish of the Committee and tendered my resignation, but I was fearlessly doing my duty, and therefore declined to resign. I may casually mention that my two assistant medical officers had been with me between two and three years, and most heartily co-operated with me in every way in my aim for the welfare and comfort of the patients and the prosperous administration of the asylum.

The Committee add in their report (presented to Quarter Sessions, 1882, January 3rd), "They have been engaged in carefully considering the state of the asylum, and have made a great many minor changes, which it is hoped will improve the discipline of the establishment, promote the comfort of the patients, and secure improved economy of management."

Now, as regards "*economy of management*," I may observe that as a part of general management I have always considered the financial not the least important, so much so indeed that I introduced the experiment of abolishing beer as an article of ordinary diet for the patients, thus saving the asylum about seven hundred a year, and yet benefiting the patients. The Committee, however, took good care not to mention this. As, however, they touch on the question of finances, it would certainly be interesting for the ratepayers of the county of Somerset to find out how the Committee "*secure improved economy of management*" in their *building operations*, and it would be still more interesting for them to know how much money has been expended by them since the outbreak of facial erysipelas and enteric fever in *taking up and relaying drains (which were defectively laid in the first instance, and this, too, in newly erected buildings)*, thus making the ratepayers pay twice over for work which ought to have been properly constructed and supervised at first.

It would be unduly trespassing on your space to enter into further details vindicating my conduct. I trust that the relation of my case may call the attention of medical superintendents of asylums to the terms of the tenure of such offices, that they are liable to be dismissed as I have been, at the caprice of their employers, and that it may lead to a change in the law. It is a monstrous thing that a man may be unjustly dismissed from an office, to the duties of which he has devoted the best years of his life, and yet have no court of appeal to apply to for redress. It appears that I and every medical superintendent are in a worse position than any menial or domestic servant, a Committee of Visitors being able to shelter itself from any action for damages for wrongful dismissal and from the exposure consequent thereon under the terms of the statute before referred to, and the judicial interpretation thereof. It is high time that some court of appeal was instituted which would make these irresponsible "Visitors" feel that after all there is a tribunal to which they are responsible, and that they are not a body which can perpetrate a miscarriage of justice with impunity.

I am, yours faithfully,

CHAS. W. C. M. MEDLICOTT, M.D.,

Late Medical Superintendent, Somerset and Bath Lunatic Asylum, Wells.
13th June, 1882.

[This letter was sent to us in June, but was too late for insertion.—Eds.]