CLERICAL QUACKS.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—The holy war which you are waging against illiterate quacks should, I think, be extended to those whose education and position enable them to practise equally dangerous arts, and to cover their errors by virtue of their dignity and standing as members of another profession. We are troubled down here by the visitation of a clerical pretender to the art of medicine, who, to the ministrations of the spirit adds the administration of the most potent drugs—at once a mesmerist, curate, and self-constituted medical practitioner. He undertakes the treatment of the most acute cases, and when death ensues, notwithstanding the exercise of his medical functions, he closes the scene by burying the bodies of his patients *without the formalities of a legal certificate*. This, Sir, seems to me as monstrous as it is illegal. The practice of burying without legal certificates is certainly most dangerous, and if followed with impunity, might lead to the most fearful results. I abstain from any comments, for these fall rather within your department, but the course thus pursued is so injurious to the interests of society, and so detrimental to the character of our profession, that I have thought it my duty to bring these facts to the knowledge of the public, after private remonstrance had failed to check so reprehensible a practice. These proceedings call the more loudly for censure, because they cannot plead the excuse of mistaken charity, as this gentleman does not omit to complete the assumption of a medical character by accepting the fees in return for his services.

In authentication of the facts detailed, I enclose my card.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Hempstead, Essex, Dec. 1857. SALUS POPULI SUPREMA LEX.*

AIR BUBBLES IN THE BLOOD.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—On bleeding a man the other day for a concussion of the brain, I was surprised to see a large quantity of bubbles of gas escape with the blood, especially when the hand was passed upwards along the vein to facilitate the flow, which was sluggish.

Thinking the circumstance of physiological interest, I am induced to send you a notice of it.

F. W. MARSHALL, M.B., M.R.C.S.

Horwich, Bolton, December, 1857.

M. JULES DUVAL ON THE COLONY AT GHEEL.

“How this abode of suffering and of prayer, of good cares solicited and granted, has become a source of profit and of liberty for the poor alienated beings, political economy can easily explain. In this desert it was necessary to live, and the natural sterility of the soil rendered life difficult. Spite of a modest indemnity paid by the families of the patients, hospitality was a heavier charge there than elsewhere. In fault of religious charity, the spirit of saving itself advised one regimen and one table for the poor insane. Quite naturally the lunatic, having become a boarder, was admitted to the family life as a friend, as a servant himself is in the country. After the meal, what did the unfortunate creature? To shut him up, to keep him at a distance, was to lose the services of the persons charged with superintending him. Necessity, then, inspired the idea of leaving him at liberty, and of leading him into the gardens, the fields, to have closer watch over him and without expense. There in the face of the land, which solicited arms, was accomplished a third progress, and poverty this time was a good counsellor. The poor creatures held in charge, could they not, in their lucid intervals, usefully participate in the labours of the family? They were invited to do so, they were induced to do so. Many of them, seduced from previous habits of life, and by example as well as by exhortation, yielded with a good will to the desires which some had spontaneously acceded to. Thus, without violence, by the simple attraction of country labour, certain lunatics became the auxiliaries of agriculture in the fields, as others occupied themselves with the affairs of the household.”

The lunatic or insane person thus became a member of the family. He fed at the same table with the sane inmates, partook of the same fare, slept under the same roof, and often in the same chamber.

“The father of the family received, as he merited, the title

of ‘nourishing father’ of his patient; and one might see from that time, in the heart of the Middle Ages, in the time of barbarous manners, the inhabitants of Gheel putting in practice, without scientific light, by the natural development of a fact issuing from the living sources of religious faith, but fecundated by the heart and by interest, the true rules of treatment of mental alienation which medical science has only recognised in the nineteenth century—liberty of action and of circulation, field labour, active and devoted sympathy—life, in fine, far from the ordinary residence, in the bosom of the adopted family.”

Independent of the merits of the observations of M. Jules Duval on the treatment of lunatics at Gheel, his paper has a real literary merit. It is anything but a dry hospital report. His description of Gheel will tempt, we have no doubt, many a tourist and many a philanthropist, hitherto ignorant of its existence, to pay it a visit.

Patients labouring under every form of mental disease are received at Gheel, except those who require constant watchfulness and restraint. Notwithstanding the full liberty to which the patient is admitted, there has only been one case of suicide and one of homicide in a quarter of a century. The commune is Roman-catholic; but there is entire liberty of conscience, and no attempts at proselytism are made or permitted.

“There is the same paternal solicitude for the old as for the young; for all fortunes, the poor as the rich; for all educations, the ignorant as the learned. The general tone of the country being a rustic simplicity, the rich would be out of place, and, indeed, they are in a minority. There is not the shadow to be found even of those luxuries in furniture and the like, by which, in some establishments, it is sought to prolong the enjoyments and illusions of social life, in masking the rigors of incarceration. Nevertheless, there are at Gheel families whose habits answer to those of the middle classes, and in which the wealthy lunatic may find all the agreeables of ease, if not the elegance of the comfortable. Still, even in raising the price of board, there are few useful satisfactions to be gained. A person may have domestics and carriages at pleasure, and at a price incomparably less than at any other asylum. Amongst the insane at Gheel has been seen an Englishman, who dispensed very gaily a large fortune in *fêtes*, in the chase, and parties of pleasure.”

The admixture of the sexes is considered exempt from any inconvenience at Gheel. Unchastity is rare, and it always brings disgrace on the family where it is discovered. The rules forbid the lodging of men and women in the same family without especial authorization. Out of the house both sexes enjoy common rights. In the course of seven years M. Parigot has known of but one case only of illegitimacy. The chambers are neat and clean; the fare is humble, but substantial. It is never dealt out in rations. The patients may work or be idle at their pleasure, as has already been stated; but every inducement is given to labour, both on sanitary and economical grounds. Artizans—such as tailors and shoemakers—find plenty of occupation. Imaginary invalids, from the country, work in the gardens and fields. Care is taken as much as possible to settle agricultural labourers on farms. It is strange, but true, that furious maniacs are more sought after by the farmers than docile. The fact is easily explained. Fury testifies to a strong organization; the internal sap, moral or physical, is disorganised, but abundant. In their periods of calm the furious maniacs are excellent workmen, and extremely profitable to the farmers. The workmen do not claim any salary; but the “nourishing fathers” know very well that some trifle of wages is a useful stimulant. They allow their boarders about a shilling a week, a pot of beer, and some tobacco, according to circumstances. We have to repeat, that M. Duval’s article on the agricultural colony of maniacs at Gheel is most instructive, and shows what happy effects may be produced by kind treatment, under the most melancholy form of disease that can afflict humanity.—*The Critic*.

AN INDIAN DOCTRINE OF ANIMAL SIGNATURES.—Tigers’ flesh is a favourite specific amongst the wandering tribes of the Deccan, and large quantities of it are consumed in all diseases where medicine of a healing nature is required. It is also believed to predispose to anger, and swallowed from a motive analogous to that of the running footman who ate hare to make him fleet. There is always sure to be in some corner of the wallet a small bottle or gourd full of tigers’-fat, a sovereign remedy against all the infirmities of old age. The Weyds also carry quantities of jackals’-skins, which they sell to persons who believe them to be very efficacious in curing rheumatism.—*Chow Chow*, by Viscountess Falkland.