

Correspondence

LETTER FROM DR. VAN GIESON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INSANITY.

Dear Sir:—Please accept our sincere thanks for your kind letter of June 16 calling attention to the pernicious influence on public opinion which newspaper articles might exercise in regard to the relation of our institute to the work of psychiatry and the hospitals for the insane. These articles attempt to intimate that our institute has given occasion for the belief that hospitals for the insane are becoming obsolete and useless, and the work of the alienist valueless.

It seems almost needless to point out that such intimations are absurd on the very face of them. No one in his right senses can possibly deny the paramount importance of institutions for the insane, both for society in general and for science in particular. One might as well declare against the utility of hospitals in general; for what is a modern insane asylum, if not a hospital for treating aberrations and diseases of the mind? It is only in the vulgar mind that we find survivals of the mediæval mode of regarding the asylum as a prison or as a house of detention. Surely none of the psychiatric profession who have taken the trouble to read the expositions of our aims and motives in the article entitled "The Correlation of Sciences in the Study of Mental and Nervous Disease"¹ can possibly even for a moment give credence to the preposterous insinuation that our institute in any way initiates the publication of such rubbish. Those acquainted with our aims and methods as formulated in this paper on Correlation know full well that our work is based on the hospitals for the insane and that our institute is intimately linked and interwoven with the life and existence of the asylum.

It is certainly unfortunate that the seeds of discord should be sown by the careless hand of the reporter, but it is really painful to find that a scientific institution should be held responsible for the vagaries circulated by newspapers for the amusement of their readers. A scientific institution situated in the maelstrom of a great city and doing work of a nature that lends itself for a sensational subject in a Sunday journal cannot escape the ever-watchful, searching eyes of the modern Argus—the newspaper reporter—with all of the consequent evils of absurd exaggeration and grotesque caricature. It is vexatious at first to see

¹ Archives of Neurology and Psycho-pathology, Vol. I, p. 25.

one's cherished work vulgarized, but in the course of time one learns by bitter experience the simple wisdom that such incidents are inevitable; that they must not be taken seriously, but good-naturedly, and treated in the way that they are intended—as fables, anecdotes and caricatures, useful as after-dinner reading; a stimulant to digestion.

IRA VAN GIESON.

Pathological Institute of the
New York State Hospitals.

[NOTE.—The above letter was received subsequent to the printing of the editorial note in the preceding pages.—EDITOR.]