

The improved treatment of the chronic insane lies in this direction—in removing them, when possible, from the weary imprisonment of asylum surroundings, and in placing them amid the healthier influences of home life. “Many chronic insane,” writes Dr. Maudsley, “incurable and harmless, will then be allowed to spend the remaining days of their sorrowful pilgrimage in private families, having the comforts of family life, and the priceless blessing of the utmost freedom that is compatible with their proper care.”

My experience of one advertisement in *THE LANCET* shows how ample the supply of such accommodation is. From north, south, east, and west came the replies. Moreover, the sum offered was small, only £170. Now, £300 a year is not considered a high payment in one of the best private licensed houses. I would not waste your space in contrasting the relative happiness for the patient under the two systems of treatment. I have known £600 a year to be paid for a chronic patient in a private asylum. For such patients also really magnificent accommodation can be had as single patients in the private houses of medical men. I know one medical man in this county who offers such accommodation for less than £600 a year.

I commend this whole subject to the consideration of the general physicians and practitioners, with whom the advising of relatives and friends in the placing of the chronic insane usually rests.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

C. LOCKHART ROBERTSON, M.D.

Hayward's Heath, September 8th, 1869.

ANTISEPTIC SURGERY.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—Permit me, in answer to Professor Lister's note in your impression of to-day, to state,—

1st, That I have been often in his wards, and have seen many cases treated by him with carbolic acid.

2nd, That in the trial of it which I caused to be made in the wards under my own care, the cases were dressed by pupils of Mr. Lister, who had been trained by himself, and who had faith in his plan.

I am not ashamed to state my belief to be that carbolic acid is inferior to several other disinfectants and antiseptics; and that the practice now advocated in severe surgical cases is a return to the dark days of surgery.

The sneer implied in Mr. Lister's quotation from my letter does not require further notice.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Athole-place, Glasgow, Sept. 4th, 1869. JAMES MORTON, M.D.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—In your impression of the 28th ult., Dr. Morton, of this city, gives expression in an unequivocal manner to sentiments entertained, I believe, by the bulk of the profession in Glasgow, regarding this, the latest toy of medical science, so-called.

On all hands I have heard but one expression of opinion as to Mr. Nunneley's address, that being that it was characterised by a comprehensive grasp of his subject, a fair statement of his propositions, and withal a sturdy eloquence and correct logic. It is all very fine to cry out “misapprehension of published views,” &c.; but if Mr. Nunneley has misapprehended, I wonder exceedingly who *has* apprehended the intricacies of this surgical arcanum.

There is nothing more obstructive to scientific inquiry and progress than reasoning from false premises, and confounding coincidences with necessary consequences; and there is no science or art which has suffered more, or is suffering more, in this respect than that of medicine. This may be illustrated, as Dr. Morton justly puts it, in the “unrivalled success of Dr. Thomas Keith in ovariectomy.” We can fancy how jubilant Mr. Lister and his satellites might feel if Dr. Keith had been in the habit of “imbruing his surgical fingers” in the learned Professor's oil, and making his extensive incision beneath the antiseptic screen. By what power does Dr. Keith succeed in excluding the wonderful sporules?

A distinguished physician of this city related to the Medico-Chirurgical Society his wonderful success in the treatment of typhoid fever, by the exhibition, if I remember

well, of one drop of carbolic acid night and morning. This happened within twelve months ago. Learned medicals gaped in astonishment, vowed there was an occult power in carbolic, that typhoid fever was due to sporules, that carbolic killed them, and that we were on the confines of the greatest discovery of modern medicine. We have heard nothing of carbolic in typhoid fever since!

Sarracenia purpurea, not long ago, played such fantastic tricks with “facts” and “observation” as bromide of potassium has been doing in later times. Small-pox was cured in an incredibly short space of time; pitting there was none. *Sarracenia purpurea* is defunct! The hyposulphites have had their day. Pancreatic emulsion has passed the zenith of its glory—corroborated, as its good effects are, like everything else, by thousands, and the folly of the million emblazoned in an octavo volume. The phosphates are finding their own level; and, in the general chaos, I doubt not, a revulsion must certainly set in to the good old “friends we have, and their adoption tried.”

Sir John Lubbock finds in infant life analogies to the intellectual condition of now existing savages, and he infers to prehistoric man. When a child is presented with a toy,—for instance a tin rattle—he lays it under such an amount of exercise as to terminate in a “physical degradation” of the instrument. Is it an extreme drawing of an inference to conclude that it is the primitive minds of the profession who make such a hubbub of every new toy, medical or surgical, that now and then crops up for their delectation? There is a professional criminality, I contend, in putting forward, on such a flimsy foundation, such specious doctrines as the carbolic acid theory. Fostered by the morbid *penchant* of the age for novelty, there cannot fail to be reflected on those who lend countenance to the new dodges a passing *éclat*. When a medical man produces deliberately “a retort stand and evaporating dish, with flexible tube, and gas jet, during the progress of a virulent case of diphtheria,” to kill the unseen entities of disease, can we wonder at the patient and friends feeling awestruck at the necromancy of modern science! “A deity! A present deity!” they cry. While all this is being enacted, the shrewd and justifiably sceptical practitioner shrugs his shoulders in doubt, in the face of the thousand and one panaceas that figure on the page of medical literature.

It is but recently, with a pompous flourish of trumpets, that that innocent article of the *materia medica*, sulphur, amid the general clangour of spray-producers, &c., emanated on a disease-exterminating mission from Biggar and Kirkcaldy. An infatuated public demanded a thirteenth edition of the grossest rhodomontade conceived by the mind of man, in the shape of a pamphlet by Robert Pairman, surgeon, Biggar. Cures flashed like lightning from the humble cottage, the manse of the sage divine, and the baronial hall. Human suffering and death fled howling before an offensive smell. Every home contained its quota of sulphur, and every matron toyed more with her spray-producer than with her feeding-bottle. Medical men applauded, and swelled the insane chorus. Time wore on. Marvels died away. The “sulphur cure” became known only in story. The bills of mortality were as obese as before; people suffered, people died.

It is no discredit, I contend, to the carbolic mania, to assert that we find its prototype in the above. Like it, a plausible theory, based upon false premises, and bolstered up by coincidences.

Medical men cannot be too cautious in mounting hobbies, or in being led away by the seductive influences of discovery. Than these panaceas, when the still calm which succeeds the storm arrives, there is nothing more calculated to shake the faith of the public in our art, nothing more opposed to the true progress of scientific medicine or surgery.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

Glasgow, August 25th, 1869.

D. CAMPBELL BLACK, M.D.

* * * The insertion of Dr. Black's letter has been unavoidably delayed.

THE EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY AND FEMALE MEDICAL STUDENTS.

To the Editor of *THE LANCET*.

SIR,—Pray allow me publicly to back up the views of “Scoparius,” and others who have written lately to your