

Correspondence.

"Audi alteram partem."

LUNACY IN EGYPT.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—A most interesting problem in the treatment of the insane is at present being worked out under very trying conditions in Egypt. About 20 years since a start was made by Dr. F. M. Sandwith at the disused palace of Abassia near Cairo. The palace was badly adapted for the reception of lunatics, but by degrees it has been brought into shape, fresh buildings have been added, and quarters for the medical staff have been built, but every visit to the place impresses the visitor with the great difficulties, structural, economic, and administrative, which have had to be overcome. The governing authorities looked upon the whole matter as a nuisance, because there were constant calls for money for work which they considered unremunerative. There was at that time no real lunacy department, the asylums being under the Department of Public Health. Much was attempted and a great deal done by Dr. J. Warnock, who for 18 years has been struggling against enormous odds. It is wonderful what he has managed to do. The method of the working of the large and crowded asylum is splendid, and to this I shall refer later. His work now stands a good chance of recognition and, what is more to him, of receiving genuine support. On April 1st the then head of Public Health in Egypt handed over the asylum work to the Ministry of the Interior. Dr. Warnock continues to be the head of Abassia, and will also be Director in Lunacy for Egypt. It is anticipated that some definite sums of money will be specially provided for the regular development of the care and treatment of the insane.

The overcrowding and overwork have caused delay in producing the annual reports, so that the reports for the years 1911 and 1912 have only just been received. During that time the chief matter of importance has been the starting of what one may call the relief asylum at Khanka, on the other side of Cairo. This is only begun, but in due course will develop into a very large asylum. Another matter of general importance is that the criminal lunatics have been removed from Tura to Abassia. This involves extra work and extra risks to the officers and staff, and I cannot help thinking this can only be a temporary measure, for the English experience is that criminal lunatics should be separated from the non-criminal ones.

The great difficulty of obtaining trustworthy nurses, male and female, is felt. The lack of Egyptian women who are in any way trained or trainable makes it imperative that the backbone should be trained English nurses. This deficiency, after years of effort on the part of Dr. Warnock, has been partly met this year by three English asylum nurses being obtained. As is pointed out, too, the pay at present for the men is not sufficient to attract those who are suitable. When it is shown that the majority of the nurses can neither read nor write, nor in fact recognise the numbers of the doors of the bedrooms, it will be seen how grave is the task of working with such material.

Special attention is called first to the overcrowding of both the parent and the second, or relief, asylum. Many patients have to sleep on

the ground, though this certainly is not felt to be a hardship by the natives. Next, as a result of the crowding, patients have to be discharged as soon as they cease to be actively dangerous. One consequence of this has been that a certain number of these unstable persons have committed crimes, and it has been said that the Abassia patients have contributed to the serious crimes in Cairo; but Dr. Warnock shows that this is not true, and that criminals have found it convenient to plead past or recent lunacy and thus have hoped to escape their full punishment. Doubtless some of the convalescent patients have committed crimes, and as so many of the patients admitted have been suffering from abuse of alcohol or hashish, it is not surprising that on their release they return to the habit and again become dangerous.

Another point of interest is the very large number of recent injuries from which the residents in the asylum suffer. The numbers would astonish the English Commissioners. They are partly to be attributed to the untrained attendants and partly to the infusion of criminal lunatics and the hashish maniacs. The number of sufferers from pellagra is noteworthy, and Dr. Warnock contributes interesting pathological observations on the post-mortem changes which he found. He is certainly convinced that maize is not the one and only cause of the disease.

The reports give in most elaborate detail all the facts and statistics which can be wanted, and must have involved an enormous amount of work. Tables are given showing the admissions and discharges, the forms of malady, duration of disorder, the causes of the disease, and the cost of maintenance, with all the details of the costs of administration. One can only admire the clear and definite way in which every part is explained.

One, therefore, feels now that there is a fair prospect before the Director of Lunacy that this work, so well started and developed, will be continued under his direction until the whole of lunacy can be treated along fixed and definite lines. The two asylums are not enough, for though the relief one at Khanka will in time receive 1000 patients, yet that will not suffice for all Egypt. In the report it is shown that many insane pass through the various general local hospitals, but the medical officers at these institutions have as a rule a very limited experience of insanity, and are not competent to treat or even advise as to the need of asylum treatment for the cases which are sent to them. It is certain that there ought to be a well-established criminal lunatic asylum not far from Cairo, and probably some hospital asylum for the paying cases and for Europeans. There is no fully recognised system of lunacy law in Egypt, and for this there is special need of the practical experience of Dr. Warnock.

Before concluding this letter on Egyptian lunacy one must make a special reference to the asylum at Khanka, under Dr. H. W. Dudgeon, who has had over ten years' experience in Egypt. A large farm has been taken, and it is determined to try to work this farm by quiet and harmless patients so that it shall produce the vegetables for both asylums, and later possibly produce profitable crops such as cotton. The space is ample. The general want being water, it is hoped that soon communication will be established by the Irrigation Department with a canal near, thus giving a more regular supply at all seasons. At Khanka the difficulty of overcrowding exists, for with ample space the

buildings are still wanting. The administration is difficult, for though they receive the quiet cases, yet as soon as these become useful workers the pressure of space requires that they should be discharged, though it would be better for their future if they could remain longer under care. The isolation of Khanka is a trial for the resident officers and their families which makes prolonged holidays necessary.

I must conclude by expressing satisfaction at the work done and the prospect of its further encouragement by the Government.

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Devonshire-place, W, April 21st, 1914.

G. H. SAVAGE.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND EXTERNAL DEGREES IN MEDICINE.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Your editorial note to Dr. A. Percy Allan's letter in THE LANCET of April 18th challenges a reply which has been delayed owing to my absence from town. In that note you reaffirm the correctness of a statement made in your leader of March 21st which had been so definite that I had concluded that you had received information not at my disposal; but the sole authority which you give for the statement is the report of the Commission, and I submit with all courtesy that you have misread the latter.

The statement to which I refer reads thus in your leader of March 21st: "..... the spokesmen from all the London medical schools but one, and a number of other witnesses, urged the abolition of the external degrees in medicine." The reference in the report, which you give as your authority in your editorial note, runs thus: "Moreover, with the exception of the witnesses from St. Hospital Medical School, all the witnesses from the London medical schools, *who referred to this matter*, and a number of other witnesses, urged the abolition of the external degree in medicine."

I submit that the omission of the qualifying clause, which I have italicised, makes your version much more sweeping than that of the report; and that it is not supported by the facts is evident from an inspection of the footnote to the reference, in which the schools which are instanced as having given hostile evidence are specified by name. Omitted from this list are not one but four schools, whose importance may be measured by the fact that they contribute 547 University students as against the 454 such students contributed by schools which are included in that list. Dr. Allan will be pleased to know that "Guy's" is not named with the hostile schools; in fact, the representatives of Guy's made it clear that there was a majority at their school in favour of the retention of external degrees, but this is not mentioned in the report of the Commissioners, who are anxious to draw attention only to the opinions of critics hostile to the external side. Indeed, they are apparently not above twisting expressions of hostility out of evidence which does not sustain that imputation, as in an instance I give immediately below.

The "other witnesses" referred to both by the report and your leader are also specified by name in a succeeding footnote in the report. As so much has been made of these it is of some importance to analyse this list in turn. There are seven names cited. The first is Lord Moulton. A perusal of his evidence, which in its general tenour is an impressive appeal for continuance of external

degrees, shows that the only countenance for including him in a list of "witnesses who urged the abolition of external degrees in medicine" is to be found in his admission that "tuition and residence" are necessary in the case of medical students who cannot qualify by "private study." But he nowhere says that the tuition and residence must be restricted to London schools.

I have before me as I write a letter from Lord Moulton, dated April 20th, 1914, in which he says: "I remember nothing that I said in my evidence before the Commission which could justify the use of my name as supporting the abolition of the external degree in medicine." I submit, therefore, that Lord Moulton is quite improperly included in this list, and I have his authority for publishing the categorical denial quoted above. Of the remaining six witnesses, five are Professors or Fellows of University College. This is surely a noteworthy preponderance, and inevitably leads to the inquiry whether this college has any material interest in the suppression of the external degrees in the University, an interest which would make this collective hostility of its members a mere act of laudable patriotism towards their college, but which would at the same time necessarily detract from its moral force as a protest against those degrees. There is abundant evidence for answering that inquiry in the affirmative.

"It is openly avowed," says Dr. Waller (himself a purely internal representative on the Senate), "on the internal or College side that the existence of the external side of the University of London is an intolerable hindrance to their development. To the disinterested spectator the position of the Colleges now incorporated in the University of London of 1898 has been one of steady progress towards the acquisition of an unimpeded monopoly. During the last ten years the Colleges have become incorporated by the University, and have steadily drawn the clothes over to their side of the bed and steadily complained of the intolerable pretensions of their external bedfellow. In this respect we may certainly admit that the policy of University College has been a continuous and unchanging policy."¹

I claim to have shown that the extent of the opposition to the retention of the external degree in Medicine has been greatly exaggerated, and, further, that where it exists it is very largely an interested opposition. May I, in concluding, compliment you on the generosity of your reception of my letters, a generosity which has, indeed, justified your proud motto of "Audi alteram partem."

I am, Sir, yours faithfully,

Wimpole-street, W., April 27th, 1914. E. GRAHAM LITTLE.

THE EFFECT OF THE INSURANCE ACT ON NATIONAL NUTRITION.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—May I put in a plea for a more careful consideration of the economic effects of the Act than it generally obtains in the medical press? It is often forgotten that the problem of the public health is mainly economic. If the poor were well-to-do their death and sickness rates would rapidly fall to the level of those of the classes above them; and the question that confronts a statesman is not to deal

¹ A Short Account of the Origins of the University of London. By Augustus D. Waller, F.R.S., LL.D., Member of the Senate, late Dean of the Faculty of Science in the University of London. (See p. 28.)