

source for which it ought to be called upon to contribute, as a man contributes by an annual subscription to the establishment expenses of a club, although he may not use it.

It will be desirable to enact an uniform system of accounts for the use of county asylums, and to provide for the appropriation of the sums charged in excess of the maintenance rate for borough and out county patients, in which, as you are aware, the greatest diversity of practice now exists.

I fear that you will think that your invitation to me to address you on the subject of the Reform of the Lunacy Laws has brought upon you an epistle of unconscionable length: but the active interest in the welfare of the insane which I have known you take, during the fifteen years that I have had the honour and the pleasure of acting under you as Chairman of the Visitors of this Asylum, assures me that you will give not only my views and recommendations, but the whole of this important subject your earnest consideration. Whatever that may lead to, I sincerely trust that you will use your influence to persuade government to put aside the idea of imperfect temporizing legislation for the insane, and to face the real difficulties of the question with a comprehensive measure.

I remain, my dear sir,

Yours very faithfully,

J. C. BUCKNILL.

To Samuel Trehawke Kekewich, Esq., M.P.,

Chairman of the Visitors of the Devon County Asylum; Member of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Lunacy Laws.

James Atkinson's Prison Letters.

James Atkinson, who was tried for the murder of Mary Anne Scaif, at the last Winter Assize, at York, while in prison awaiting trial wrote the following letters, which have been omitted in all former reports. It will be remembered that the defence was imbecility, and that the prisoner was acquitted on the ground of insanity.

The letters will speak for themselves, whether the capacity of the accused was or was not on a level with that of a child of five or six years of age. The manner in which the Counsel for the prisoner attempted to get

over these letters was by supposing that they were dictated by the Wesleyan Minister: but this the Minister has denied. He says he never dictated a word, nor did he know that the letters were written; indeed, the two first were written before he ever saw the prisoner. It may be taken as a fact that they are the spontaneous effusion of the man himself. They make manifest the degree of mental capacity of the accused and the motive for the murder. They have been verified by Mr. Price, the Counsel for the Crown, and appear to justify the extract copied in the *Times*, December 28th, 1858, from the *Leeds Mercury*:

"THE MURDERER ATKINSON.—After his acquittal, on the ground of insanity, on Saturday last, the prisoner coolly walked from the bar into the dock, where he was engaged for nearly two hours intently reading a book. Since his trial, he has put off the supposed *imbecility* which he displayed before the medical witnesses, and conducted himself with as much rationality, intelligence, and acuteness, as any prisoner in custody."

[No. 1.]

September 3, 1858.

Dear Friends—I take the opportunity once more to write to you hoping you well You will be very much troubled about the awful crime I have committed as I ham as much as you I wrote to Mr Gill about it I thought he would be in trouble about it as I think him clear of it be what she said about her mother as I thought she wanted some one else As I should not think of her having any one else we had been so much connected together I thought it was a very queer idea of you wanting to part us She was very queer with me at Bewley Galay after Mr Gill shook hands with her I told her she must want to be with him She said she would if I did not mind more so After he came again as we was standing together he said azent you going in to the kissing ring and she said you are liken to go on something of that sort and he went away then and she was very queer after that but we got all right in the night I think Mr Gill is clear after all that if your mother had not been so queer with her *that Sunday* night it happened this would not have been the case as I think we was all right at tea time before your sister and mother came in and after that she slited me all the night till it happened as I think you have no one to blame but yourselves I have been the worst of all to do as I have don I can forgive you all and I hope you will forgive me as the Lord says we must for-

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give one another, he says tho' their sins be as scarlet he will make them as snow though crimson he can make as wool that [some portion illegible here] if they would only repent to him as that dear one had little time if he thought she was worthy of it he would do it it is all I wish for in this world as we all are borne to die and don't know how soon that will be as I little thought that we was born for this we little know what we are born for this as had to be our case I never thought but we should have been married before now it had not to be I hope the Lord Jesus Christ will make us happier than should have been here as we shall all rise together As I hope this will be a warning for you all at Darley and her parents and mine too I hope you will bear one another no malice through this as they could not help it I received a letter from Mr Gill and he was glad to hear from me such one as I sent him and the Lord Jesus Christ says we are all to forgive one another as I shall do all of you

I remain

Your sincere friend

JAMES ATKINSON.

Should have been your brother if things had not passed out as they have for time and eternity. I hope it will be for the better as I thousands, I would have given thousands of worlds to have it back.

Read Matthew, chapters 5, 6, 7. See 55th chapter Isaiah.

As it will have brought a great trouble on you, if one could always give things thought before hand, as the Lord has all ruleing he can do as he thinks.

[This letter was written to the brother of his sweetheart. —G. W.]

[No. 2.]

[*Written to the sister of his Sweetheart.*]

September, 1858.

Dear Friend—I take the opportunity to write these few lines to find you all well you will be in very much trouble about your sister and me and our souls eternal as I have as much as you to think that evil one had got so much hold of us [or as] that the more I think of it the worse it is She told me in winter she thought something would happen us queer in the end as all I wanted was for to get married We should be happy then she thought the same we should have been but she felt poorly the time I thought it would have been and after that she was as willing as me till her mother began to be so queer with her as she told me

you said something about me as well since my father and your mother fell ought more so [here it is illegible] I thought a good deal about it as I told her I thought she wanted some one else as she slighted me so much we was all right that Sunday night before you come and your mother as I had no such a thought in my head to do as I have done it was same as if it had to be nor never had when we was contented together as we always was before your mother was so with her As it is a very dreadful parting I think I had better don thousands of ways than doing as I have as I can forgive you all as the Lord says we should forgive one another as she had little time to repent in. The Lord can save to the uttermost I hope she as fallan asleep in Jesus as I have been the worst of all the Lord says he can forgive the vilest of the vile if they will repent to him with humble contrite hearts as I am praying to him for my sins for they are many I little thought this would have to be the case with us as we little know what we are born to though our sins be as scarlet he can make them white as snow as crimson as wool that is one of the worst that I have been as he knows all our sins we shall have to appear before him at the last day you as well as me I hope you will have got her likeness from my parents My wish his for us all to be in heaven

Read Luke 21st ch. Isaiah 55th ch.

J. A.

[*No. 3, written to the same.*]

York Castle, Nov. 17, 1858.

Dear Friend—I take the last opportunity to write to you hoping you well As you will be in much trouble as I am to think that I should have placed ourselves in such a awful situation as you will think that I have been a very wretched one as I have done one of the awfulest crimes that ever was committed I think The more I think about it the worse it is It is a thousand pities that I did not value our souls eternal welfare before it happened You are to blame about us not getting married as she always told me all you said about me as I had got it into my head that no one else could make me happy in this world and we both of us thought so much about one another before your mother was so much against me I think it was very wrong of her to do so as long as we had gon together It was a thousand pitys her falling poorly when she did if she had not this would not been the case with us as we was always very

happy before that and she always told me all you said about me I think if she had not this would not have made me so unsettled as I was and she begun to be much quearer with me after Gill came to your uncle's that night it was a thousand pitys but we had parted but it seems it was not to be the case as I had not the least thought about doing as I did when we parted from Furness and you not ten minutes before She was very quear with me all the way from the chapel she began worse at the bottom of the lane As I can forgive you all I hope you can forgive me Do not bear my parents no malice they could not help it I had it in my mind to *put myself away but my heart failed me* after I cut her I had it in my mind at times before but when we was content I never thought about it I have brought great trouble on all our friends I have our father's and mother's gray hairs down to the grave with sorrow I think our fathers will never look up in this world again I hope it will be such a warning to them as they have not had a late *I feel that I deserve all that I shall get in this world* I hope He has received that one soul he can save to the uttermost I am not worthy to ask him for forgiveness but I feel he can forgive me if it be his will He gave his only begotten son to save them that is lost tho' their sins be red like as crimson as wool as mine has been the vilest of the vile I hope you will all turn to him and repent of your sins you only have a little longer to be in the world you do not know how soon as we little thought this we expected being happy married by this so if you wish to see me or write either I shall be very glad as we little know what has to be in a year Farewell dear friends farewell if we shall meet no more we shall meet in heaven if the Lord's will be done I hope you have got her likeness. J. A.