

The following are the extracts :—

EXTRACTS FROM 31ST REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS IN  
LUNACY.

**BEDS, HERTS AND HUNTS.**—"The proportion of deaths due to pulmonary consumption and other causes of lung disease is large, and has probably been influenced by the over-crowding which has taken place in this Asylum during the last two years. Although there has been only one fatal instance of erysipelas, the disorder has frequently made its appearance among the patients. The imperfect ventilation of some of the sewers and drains leading to the cesspools has been considered to be one of the causes, and the defect, which is a grave one, has been to some extent remedied. Further improvements in this direction are, however, needed, and will, we hope, be carried out speedily."

**BUCKS.**—"There have been a few isolated cases of erysipelas, but no disorder of an epidemic or contagious kind has prevailed."

"Throughout clean and well warmed and ventilated," but "the infirmaries in both divisions are deficient in day-room space, and an addition in that respect is very desirable. This asylum is also at present without the very necessary convenience of a separate building for the isolation of cases of contagious or epidemic disorder."

"Asylum all but full, only six male and four female beds vacant."

**CAMBRIDGESHIRE.**—"The fatal case of erysipelas occurred two days ago. Though no patient is at present suffering from this disease, its recent reappearance on the female side, in the present crowded state of the house, and with the defective sanitary arrangements as regards the position and insufficient number of the water closets, is a source of much anxiety."

"The wards were clean, but the atmosphere in the Female Ward, No. 2, occupied by the least favourable class, was necessarily, owing to over-crowding, somewhat tainted."

**CORNWALL.**—"One of the latter [a woman] was recovering from erysipelas. .... During the spring erysipelas was epidemic in the Asylum, and upwards of 40 patients were afflicted, and though some cases were of a severe character, no death occurred. Dr. Adams cannot account for the origin of this disorder, but over-crowding had probably something to do with it. We are glad to hear that it is proposed to erect a small detached hospital for contagious or infectious diseases, and we hope it will be proceeded with at the earliest period."

**DEBBY.**—"There has been no epidemic, but one patient was attacked by erysipelas in the head and face. .... The water-closets are structurally bad, but they were fairly well ventilated. We are informed that since the Commissioners' visit, in 1875, the drains communicating with the water-closets have received much attention, and are now ventilated freely by ascending pipes, and also trapped in all necessary directions."

**DEVON.**—"It will be observed that one man and two women died of erysipelas. This disorder made its appearance in the Asylum on the 27th of April in the present year, since which date there have been 15 cases, and all but one of them occurred in the female division, only one ward on that side of the house having escaped."

"Dr. Saunders is of opinion, and we concur with him, that the extent to which this disorder has appeared on the female side of the house is probably due to overcrowding in that division, and also to the defective position and arrangements of the water-closets. These latter defects were specially pointed out by two members of our Board, in their entry in this book of September, 1874, with reference at that time to the prevalence of diarrhoea, and we desire again to bring this important matter under the consideration of the Committee of Visitors."

**HEREFORD (COUNTY AND CITY).**—"Of the deaths, four were attributed to general paralysis, three to other diseases of the brain, and one to melancholia and diarrhoea. Neither erysipelas nor enteric fever has again attacked any one."

"There are no vacant beds for females."

LANCASHIRE (RAINHILL).—"There were a few cases of erysipelas in the early part of the year, but no fatal result."

"The earth-closets in each division were not, when we inspected them, altogether in an unobjectionable state. At present these closets partake much of the nature of privies, and we think that they are decidedly open to some improvement if the system of earth-closets is to be adhered to."

MIDDLESEX (COLNEY HATCH).—"With regard to the health of the patients, we find that there have been a few cases of erysipelas in both divisions, but otherwise there has been no disorder of an unusual character."

"Two women died from erysipelas."

"Both divisions of this Asylum are now practically full, and in the female side we think that the floor-space of some of the dormitories is scarcely sufficient for the number of beds occupying it."

"Nothing has yet been done to remedy the insufficiency in number and the defective arrangements of the water-closets, and we desire to bring this matter before the special attention of the Visitors."

MIDDLESEX (HANWELL).—"Typhoid fever made its appearance in the Asylum in the autumn. Two laundry maids and a patient of each sex were attacked. The male patient died, but the rest recovered. The cause of this fever has not been ascertained....."

OXFORD.—"We found seven men and 17 women in bed, of whom one man and six women were affected with erysipelas, but the cases were not severe. The disease has, however, been prevalent for some time past, although not fatal in any instance. The cause has not been satisfactorily ascertained."

"We were not quite satisfied with the ventilating of the closets, sinks, bath-rooms, and lavatories, and recommend special attention to the trapping of all the sinks, &c. The attendants are in the habit of removing the plugs from the waste-pipes in the baths, a practice which should be discontinued. In No. 3 Bath-room, on the men's side, the odour was very offensive."

SURREY (WANDSWORTH).—"One woman died of erysipelas: no remarks as to sewers, ventilation, &c."

SUSSEX.—"Four deaths from erysipelas and six from diarrhoea."

WARWICK.—"There has been no epidemic, but erysipelas was in the winter somewhat prevalent in the neighbourhood, and a few were attacked in the Asylum."

WILTS.—"The overcrowding in both divisions necessitates a certain number of beds being placed in the corridors," &c.

"We understood last year that the improvement of the drainage was under the consideration of the Committee, but nothing has been done in the matter, except that the water-closets are now flushed on a different principle. We are strongly of opinion that the whole system needs investigation, for not only in the laundry, but in many other parts, we found disagreeable smells existing, to some extent caused by a very general escape of gas, but also apparently arising from defective drainage."

".....Erysipelas was epidemic at the latter end of 1875 and the early part of this year, and was fatal in seven instances. It seems to have been of a severe character, and is attributed by Dr. Burman to overcrowding."

"Diarrhoea was also prevalent at various periods, but only fatal in two cases. This points to the necessity of taking immediate steps to place the Asylum in the best sanitary condition, and of revising the present dietary."

WORCESTER.—"The death from typhoid fever was in January last, at which time five other patients were attacked by it. The supposed cause was the bursting of a drain which had been imperfectly laid under the ward where most of the cases occurred. There has been no fresh case since this was remedied."

YORKSHIRE (NORTH RIDING).—"With the exception of some cases of diarrhoea, which were not considered to be of an epidemic character, the general health has been good without any serious interruption."

Three deaths due to diarrhoea. No notice of this taken.

YORKSHIRE (WADSLEY).—"Amongst the females several were suffering from diarrhoea, which has for some time shown itself in both divisions; but it has not been confined to any particular ward, and the immediate cause of the disorder has not hitherto been discovered."

"78 deaths, 69 p.m.'s."

BRISTOL.—"One death, however, resulted from erysipelas; several patients have been attacked by the same disease; and one of the women, whom we found in bed, as well as a nurse, is at present suffering from it. It seems to have been confined to the Female Wards, No. 15 and 16, and Mr. Thompson does not attribute it to any special cause."

"We regret to state that the head female attendant, whose serious illness from typhoid fever was mentioned in the last Report, died shortly after; since that time no fresh case has occurred. The outbreaks of this disease, which have taken place at particular seasons during the last three or four years, were, there is every reason to suppose, caused by the use of water from two sources, to which recourse was necessarily had when the other supplies failed in dry weather."

"By an analysis of the water supply, made in December last, it was shown that the water from these two sources was polluted, and quite unfit for drinking purposes."

HULL.—"For some months diarrhoea has been endemic, 40 cases having occurred in the female division, and four in the male. The excess of cases amongst the women is attributed by Dr. Wallis to overcrowding; and to pollution of the atmosphere in Female Ward 2 and its corridors, from the adjoining privies."

"Although the drainage of the new building appears to be satisfactory, that connected with the old part of the Asylum is said to be unknown, and it seems that no one can say what becomes of the sewage thus received."

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE.—"The deaths, with two exceptions, have been from causes ordinarily prevailing in Asylums. The exceptions referred to were both cases of erysipelas, terminating fatally, in patients affected respectively with general paralysis and senile decay."

"It appears that erysipelas made its appearance in the month of October last, since which time there have been 12 cases among the men and four among the women. The origin of the disorder has not been traced to any special sanitary defect, but, as the result of our enquiries to-day, we recommend that early attention be paid to the better ventilation of the soil-pipes of the water-closets, and also to the ventilation of the drains externally to the building. We learn that the question of altogether excluding the waste steam from the drains is already under the consideration of the Committee."

It will be seen that in 21 asylums erysipelas, typhoid or diarrhoea has prevailed more or less. Of course Dr. Phillimore may have special information on the causation of these diseases, but the majority of medical men, in fact all but himself, so far as I know, agree that they are due to overcrowding, sewage gases, deficient or impure water supply, and like causes. Now what do the above extracts state as to the sanitary condition of the asylums in question? They prove that in 10 county asylums (*viz.*, Bedford, Cambridge, Derby, Devon, Rainhill, Colney Hatch, Oxford, Warwick, Wilts and Worcester), and three borough asylums (*viz.*, Bristol, Hull and Newcastle), the sanitary arrangements were evidently and unquestionably bad. We have still to account for the presence of these evil diseases in eight county asylums (*viz.*, Bucks, Cornwall, Hereford, Hanwell, Wandsworth, Sussex, North Riding, and the South Yorkshire).

BUCKS.—The day-room space in the infirmaries is deficient. Beyond this I cannot obtain any information in recent Blue Books, and Dr. Humphrey makes no mention of the subject in his Annual Report.

CORNWALL.—Dr. Adams cannot account for the occurrence of erysipelas, but suggests overcrowding. This may be the explanation, but I cannot find any

statement to the effect that all the drains, &c., have been examined and found in perfect order.

**HEREFORD.**—Although this asylum was free, when visited by the Commissioners in 1876, typhoid had re-appeared when they visited it on 18th April, 1877. They say: "Besides the case of enteric fever, another occurred in the male wards, from which the patient recovered. Dr. Chapman is of opinion that leakage from the soil pipes of the water closets in the infirmary and in No. 1 Ward was the probable cause of the disorder, and steps will at once be taken to remedy this defect, by carrying the soil pipes into the drains outside the building. The occurrence of an outbreak of erysipelas two years since, arising probably from the same cause—imperfect sanitary arrangements—points to the great importance of at once carrying out the alteration in all the wards in both divisions, and at the same time securing the effective ventilation of all the drains by carrying larger pipes than those now fixed above the roof of the building."

**HANWELL.**—No explanation can be obtained of the occurrence of typhoid fever. The drains are stated to be all right. But I would take the liberty of doubting this, as in the report for last year the Medical Superintendent reports: "There has been no disease of either an infectious or contagious character amongst the patients, but three of the female servants, two laundry maids and a nurse, had to be removed to the detached Cottage Hospital—the laundry maids on account of typhoid fever, and the nurse on account of scarlet fever. As these diseases attacked those who were in the habit of going outside the building, the probability is that the complaints were contracted elsewhere."

The manner in which typhoid is almost limited to laundry maids is very suggestive of some local means of contamination by sewer gas.

**SURREY (WANDSWORTH).**—Extract from Report to Quarter Sessions, dated March, 1877: "Two cases of typhoid fever occurred in the asylum, the origin of which was subsequently traced to the defective state of the drains, permitting an escape of sewer gas into the wards. Further investigation showed the various traps and escape-pipes from water closets and cisterns throughout the building to be faulty in construction and in bad condition."

**SUSSEX.**—In 1875, two patients died of diarrhoea, and two of erysipelas. In 1876, two died of erysipelas. In the Commissioners' Report, dated 25th November, 1876, six deaths are attributed to diarrhoea, and four to erysipelas, and although they state that "the present sanitary condition of the asylum is quite satisfactory," they make no comment whatever on these deaths, a rather unusual omission. In the report for 1875, the Visitors report that "owing to the presence of iron in the water derived from the asylum well, the mains throughout the building were found to be choked with the red oxide."

As this condition of the pipes and the unusual prevalence of diarrhoea and erysipelas coincide in date, it is possible that these diseases were really due to sewer gas escaping into the building from defective water supply. So far as I can find, the Medical Superintendent does not attempt to explain the origin of the cases now under notice.

**YORKSHIRE (NORTH RIDING).**—I cannot find in the more recent Blue Books any information as to the drainage of this asylum. Neither can I lay my hands upon any of the annual reports; so I have no information as to the causation of diarrhoea here.

**YORKSHIRE (WADSLEY).**—Diarrhoea has been endemic for a number of years. Extract from Visitors' Report for 1877.—"The tendency to diarrhoea among the patients has been less than in former years."

Extract from Commissioners' Report, dated 4th February, 1878.—"We learn from Dr. Mitchell that since the Commissioners' visit in 1877 there have been several appearances of diarrhoea in the female Infirmary, which he attributes to the admission of vitiated air from an adjoining water closet. The ex-

ternal ventilation of all the water closet drains has now been completed, and there is at present no case of diarrhoea."

These extracts clearly show that in the county asylums of Hereford, Wadsworth, South Riding and Wadsley, slow poisoning by sewage gas was going on. We have, therefore, now to deal with only four asylums, viz.:—Bucks, Cornwall, Hanwell and Sussex. In these instances it is impossible to arrive at any definite conclusion for want of sufficient data. Before it could be stated that typhoid, &c., appeared in these asylums from causes other than sewer-contamination, it would be necessary to have clear and conclusive proof that the latter was impossible.

Now to sum up the whole matter. In every asylum about which we possess definite information, in which erysipelas, diarrhoea, or typhoid fever has occurred, we have a distinct history of poisoning by sewer gas. The extracts from official reports prove that there is no foundation in fact for Dr. Phillimore's statement, "that erysipelas has been a fatal and troublesome epidemic in some well-constructed modern asylums." Surely Dr. Phillimore is not ignorant of the very faulty arrangements in some modern asylums for the prevention of poisonous gases finding their way from the drains into the buildings. In some cases things were in such a bad state that it was necessary to remove all the original appliances, and in others their improvement is now being effected. That these statements are true can be shown from official reports, and are besides notorious.

I am quite at a loss to discover any rational motive that Dr. Phillimore could have in publishing the paragraph to which I have drawn attention. Because he does not choose to make post-mortem examinations, why should he try to prevent others from making them? If he could prove his proposition, no more would be made in asylums, unless the medical officers had a desire to answer a charge of manslaughter or murder.

This is the only communication with which I shall trouble you on this subject.

I am, &c.,  
T. McDOWALL.

[Copy of letter in "British Medical Journal," 22nd December, 1877.]

#### POST-MORTEM EXAMINATIONS IN LUNATIC ASYLUMS.

SIR,—The right to perform post-mortem examinations is occupying the attention of the public, the Poor Law staff, and the superintendents of lunatic asylums. I was engaged upon the uncongenial task of making enquiries as to what is the practice in kindred institutions when the public judgment so strongly expressed by Lord Salisbury opportunely came to strengthen the position, justifying my scruples, and further to demonstrate the sensitiveness of the nation upon the subject.

The daily press and the medical are all agreed that unauthorised and indiscriminate necropsies, whether in public or private practice, are not desirable, and that it is entirely at variance with the law to act in the absence of explicit and formal instructions. The editor of the "Journal of Mental Science," in a late number (94), says that "the subject of compulsory post-mortem examinations is a very difficult one, not to say dangerous." He probably referred only to the rights of the deceased or of the relatives; but there is also a professional aspect to the question. I object, as a medical man, to being compelled to pursue one branch of scientific knowledge whilst engaged in another more suited to my taste and inclination. I prefer enquiring into the causes that produce insanity, and promoting the cure—to recording the mischief that has resulted from it. When the question was raised by the Commissioners in Lunacy in 1870, I determined to act with caution, not to assume an aggressive attitude, but confine myself strictly to the duties assigned to me by the law. Mr. Wickham, of the Newcastle Asylum, has clearly shown that, since the publica-