OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

Lunacy Acts Amendment Bill.

And so once more this unlucky Bill has been arrested in its development into a fully organized Act. It is very wearisome to be obliged every year to consider proposed changes in the Lunacy Laws and to have to insist upon the necessity of not interfering with the prompt treatment and care of the insane by vexatious preliminary proceedings and complicated forms. Above all is it a thankless office to attempt to convince the highest legal functionary of the land that a medical man may be better qualified than a lawyer to diagnose the nature of the mental disorder under which a person labours. So long as a Lord Chancellor having charge of a Lunacy Bill deliberately asserts from the Woolsack that the lawyer is as competent as the physician to determine whether a man has or has not disease of the brain, so long will any legislation which he initiates or supports be liable to proceed on fundamentally false lines, and so long will it be simply impossible to urge with any prospect of success the profound objection entertained by the Parliamentary Committee of the Medico-Psychological Association to allowing magistrates the opportunity of revising and reversing the certified opinion of a medical man, or entrusting them with the function of a personal examination of the alleged lunatic with a view to determine his mental condition.

It would, however, be unfair not to acknowledge the courtesy with which the Solicitor-General listened to the representations made by a deputation which waited upon him for the purpose of stating the objections entertained by the Medico-Psychological Association to a number of clauses in the Bill. Sir Edward Clarke wished the interview to be of a somewhat private character. He entered into the suggestions made in the most friendly spirit, and frankly admitted the force of some of the objections which were pressed upon his attention. There can be no doubt important amendments would have been introduced by the Government in the House of Commons, and that if Mr. Clarke has charge of a similar Bill next Session, important modifications will be introduced, although the fundamental principle—the personal intervention of the magistrate—will no doubt be regarded as essential to the Bill.

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