The Asylums of Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania.

1. *A few Observations relative to the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum.* By the Right Rev. R. W. Willson, D.D., Catholic Bishop of Hobart Town. 1859.
2. *Letter from the Catholic Bishop of Hobart Town respecting Lunatic Asylums.* Ordered to be printed by the Legislative Assembly, New South Wales, 12th August, 1863.
3. *Letter from Dr. Campbell, Superintendent, Tarban Asylum, to the Colonial Secretary.* Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 20th August, 1863.
4. *Second Progress Report from the Select Committee on the Present State and Management of Lunatic Asylums; together with Minutes of Evidence.* Ordered by the Legislative Assembly to be printed, 20th April, 1864.
5. *Report of the Commissioners of the Hospital for the Insane, New Norfolk, for the years* 1860, 1861, 1862, *and* 1863.

In the 'Journal of Mental Science' for January, 1863, was given the story of the abominations of the Yarra Bend Asylum, near Melbourne, the exposure of which, mainly owing to the benevolent zeal and persevering energy of the Right Reverend Dr. Willson, Catholic Bishop of Hobart Town, issued, as our readers know, in the appointment of our associate Dr. Paley as medical superintendent. Since he has been in charge of the asylum, the greatest improvements have been effected; and it appears that all is now done that can be done for such a place. Unfortunately a badly-selected site, and the ill-construction of a building which is overcrowded, are difficulties in the way of a complete success; and Dr. Willson has accordingly not ceased to urge strongly on the Government the desirability of erecting on a good site an additional small asylum, which might be used as a hospital for curable cases. We hope we are not premature in saying that this is now to be done, the Government of Victoria having appropriated 320 acres of land for the use of a proposed hospital for the insane, near Melbourne. Two other similar institutions are also to be erected in the country. Very gratifying it is thus to learn that the work of reform is being attended with such complete success in Victoria.

Much remains to be done, however, in other colonies. In the

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

April number of this Journal for 1864 are quoted some severe strictures by two members of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales on the wretched condition of the two metropolitan asylums at Tarban Creek and Parramatta. One of these gentlemen—Mr. Holroyd, who in the course of his life had visited many asylums in different parts of the world—had only seen one that was so badly managed; and that was at Cairo. And others seem to be of much the same opinion. "All that we have to boast of," says the *Sydney Empire*, "is one asylum for incurables and another asylum for making incurables." Dr. R. Greenup is the medical superintendent of the asylum at Parramatta, in which the incurables are stowed away; and Dr. F. Campbell is the medical superintendent of the asylum at Tarban Creek, in which the incurables are supposed to be manufactured.

As in Victoria, so in New South Wales, Bishop Willson was the first to call attention to the defects of these asylums; and we doubt not that he will be the last to be silent until those defects have been remedied. "Where good is to be done or evil undone," says the *Melbourne Argus*, "there the Roman Catholic Bishop of Tasmania is to be found, as much by inclination as in virtue of his office." It was unavoidable that the bishop, though conducting his benevolent crusade with great moderation, should wound the self-love of a self-satisfied medical superintendent. A man who is living contentedly in a system of which he is the founder or the advocate—how vicious soever it may be—is not easily persuaded that there are other and better things in heaven and earth than what are dreamt of in his philosophy. He is apt to identify himself with a corrupt system, and an attack upon it is a mortal offence to his self-love. This it is which commonly makes it necessary to sweep away along with the bad system the men who have administered it and grown to it, if a full and lasting reform is to be accomplished. The traditions of the old and iniquitous system of dealing with the insane will not die out as long as men are alive who were engaged therein, and on some of whom the reform was unwillingly enforced; who bowed their heads before it, not in hearty acquiescence, but under the load of a disagreeable necessity. It is painful to confess that there are yet some who seem ready and eager, on the slightest gleam of encouragement or the chance of impunity, to retrograde to words that cruel barbarism which was such a grim satire on a boasting civilisation, and the tardy overthrow of which has made the lives of Pinel and Conolly a bright page in the world's history. Most necessary, therefore, is it that all those who are truly interested in the welfare of the insane should watch with severe and jealous scrutiny the management of the asylums in which they are confined; the sincere reformer cannot yet afford to be indolent or careless, nor, from any amiable kindness to individuals, to forbear the severest condemnation

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on occasion of the slightest retrogression. Heartily, therefore, do we sympathise with Bishop Willson in his zealous exertions; and even if he had painted the bad in colours a little too dark—which, we are bound to say, there is no reason to suspect—we could readily forgive so slight a fault in so great and good a cause.

The Superintendent of Tarban Creek Asylum, however, can by no means forgive the bishop for not having recognised the perfect success of his management. In reply to the strictures passed upon the asylum, he has addressed a long letter to the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales, from which we shall now extract, for the amusement and edification of our readers, this hero's estimate of himself. It would appear that the world has hitherto been most culpably ignorant of the existence of a mighty benefactor, who, long patient under cruel neglect, at last comes forward and "fearlessly vindicates his own claims to the rank of a successful reformer, second to none in Christendom, though the bishop may think otherwise." We confess with sorrow that we can find no excuse for so natural a thought in the bishop. Distant as it is our misfortune to be from the newly-risen prophet, we can put forward a sort of plea of justification for our ignorance; but how it happens that one of his own country has failed to recognise this great and successful reformer, is certainly puzzling. It is but one more instance, we fear, of that perversity of human nature, whereby it happens that a prophet ever is without honour in his own country. Dr. Campbell must console himself as lesser reformers—such, for example, as one Lord Bacon—have done, by appealing to an enlightened posterity and to future ages. It matters not much that some quacks, well skilled in thrasonical boasting, have made that appeal also, and that vainglorious madmen commonly do so; only a man who, like the Right Reverend Bishop Willson, had, from pure motives of benevolence, visited very many asylums in different parts of the world, and had been an earnest reformer before reform was so fashionable as it is now—having, so long ago as 1831, fought a hard battle for a total reform in the Nottingham Asylum—could fail to appreciate the transcendent merits of a system which had for superintendent one who was 'second to none in Christendom.' Though thus blushing unseen, however, it is gratifying to think that the fragrant sweetness of this modest flower is not entirely wasted on the desert air. "And when it is further shown," Dr. Campbell writes, "that the number of cures, calculated on the same favorable ratio, exceeds considerably any return that Drs. Conolly and Bucknill, with all their boasted advantages, could ever make out, and even superior to the highest number of cures in the crack establishments of St. Luke's and Bedlam, the equivocal postulate of the supersession of the present management, and its possible consequences, by either of the above eminent names, accompanied by all their mob-catching statements and improvements,

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is a very unfortunate one for the bishop's logic, and undoubtedly points at my inefficiency." Let not the reader, hastily thinking to find an exceeding vulgarity of tone in this characteristic outburst, decline to follow patiently a little further.

"Let it not be supposed for one moment that I would derogate from the well-earned fame of the first of these physicians, but I pretend to be neither Dr. Conolly nor Dr. Bucknill; I am simply the superintendent of a colonial lunatic asylum; and having achieved a work which Dr. Conolly, distinguished as he is, has not equalled, I wish to stand on my own merits beside him, but not below him. I am the first reformer of the abuses peculiar to mad-houses in the southern hemisphere; and my reform, though carried on through incredible difficulties and most trying circumstances, has been rendered the most complete on record. In spite of all the imperfections, the disadvantages, and impediments to improvements pointed out by the bishop as antagonistic to successful management, I have the unspeakable satisfaction of having thoroughly and demonstrably gained the advantage over the most enlightened of British superintendents, and placed the asylum over which I preside in a loftier position, in regard to government and the treatment of lunatics, than the most advanced and favoured of European asylums. I therefore deny the right of any one to hustle me from the honorable niche in which my own unaided exertions have placed me. Not even the bishop's favorite shall stand above me there, till they do what they have not yet done."

After pointing out with what advantages he supposes that Dr. Conolly was surrounded at Hanwell, where "every assistance that wealth, civilisation, and science could render was placed at his disposal; and of course he succeeded," Dr. Campbell proceeds:—"Who could fail to succeed under such favouring circumstances? The case was far otherwise with myself. To be brief, it was altogether the reverse of this pleasing and wise procedure of the Hanwell authorities. When I entered on my career of reform here, many years ago, all the encouragement and support I obtained came from my own unquenchable zeal, my energy, and my fixed resolution to begin and go on with my important enterprise, through good and bad report, until I reached the goal; and the facilities which smoothed my path, and the applauses which cheered me on my course, were bitter and satanic persecution by those whose position and influence in society, with ample means of vengeance, gave them the unholy power of persecuting with deadliest effect. Even the Government of the day rendered me no active or material assistance, but looked on with solemn indifference: or when I chanced to stand at bay against the calumnious shafts of my vindictive assailants, became suddenly endued with imperial sensitiveness, and recompensed my efforts at self-defence with pompous menaces and censure. Dis-

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

couraged from without, and obstructed from within, by an undercurrent of treacherous opposition, I had to maintain, single-handed, the contest of craft against honesty on the one side, and of cruelty against mercy on the other, with a staff of assistants only half sufficient in proportional number, and they the very garbage of humanity. Such were the propitious conditions and bountiful support by which I was enabled to accomplish my arduous and onerous undertaking. The results are—*omnibus et lippis notum et tonsoribus esse;* they are even in the hands of the venerable bishop, to whom I sent them shortly after his visit, though it would appear he ignores the facts stated and demonstrated in one of the documents."

Such outspoken candour can scarce fail to excite approval as well as surprise in rightly-constituted minds; it is not every one who would so honestly confess that he had "maintained single-handed the contest of craft against honesty on the one side, and cruelty against mercy on the other." We should attach more importance to the confession if we were convinced that the capacity of writing English was one of Dr. Campbell's accomplishments, and that he had not in this case said exactly the opposite of what he wanted to say. Windy words are ever apt to carry light heads into confusion of thought.

One more extract, and we have done with this melancholy exhibition of overweening conceit and arrogant puerility, the extravagance whereof is not less pitiable than it is ridiculous. It is not likely that any one will ever be so successful in writing Dr. Campbell down that which one Dogberry wished to be written down, as Dr. Campbell himself. Such stilled fustian as he indulges in surely marks a want of cultivation as well as want of modesty and want of sense, which it is happily not our painful lot often to meet with.

"With reference to the epileptics, I can assure the bishop that they are most particularly cared for. Their lamentable condition was a source of the deepest anxiety to me for years, until, by God's help, I happened to invent a bed so admirably adapted for that peculiar class of patients, that I have been repeatedly complimented on its supreme usefulness and fitness for the purpose. The sides are deep and well padded all round from top to bottom, and it is very ample; so that the patient in the convulsive struggles of a paroxysm is perfectly safe, both from falling out and from injuring himself against the sides."

We do not doubt for a moment that Dr. Campbell has done much good in bettering the condition of the insane of New South Wales; but we certainly think his friends must regret that he did not employ some one else to put forth his merits and claims in language which would have gained much in efficiency by wanting bombastic inflation and offensive vulgarity. By the exercise of a prudent moderation he would have gained considerably in strength; and had

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

his cures been a little less than 78 per cent. on the curable admissions—as he states them to be—one would not have been so prone to suspect that he may, if his life be spared, some day present to the world cures in the proportion of 101 per cent. on the curable admissions.

Notwithstanding Dr. Campbell's letter, or perhaps in consequence of it, a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly was appointed on the 14th July, 1863, to inquire into and report upon the condition of the two metropolitan asylums; and the evidence which was taken before the Committee and ordered to be printed on 20th April, 1864, now lies before us. It appears to justify completely the strictures of Bishop Willson. We are sorry to add that the tone and style of Dr. Campbell's evidence tend to strengthen the unfavorable opinion which his letter produces. Here are some extracts from the Minutes of Evidence:

QUESTION 163.—"With regard to amusement and cheerful recreation, I allude more to the system adopted in England of having music, dancing, and such amusements in the asylum—you have no means of carrying these out? Yes, you could carry out dancing; that is, you could carry out the principle—whether I could bring it into practice is another thing; but I do not like exhibitions; I have always set my face against exhibiting that most appalling of all calamities to which flesh is heir, to the public gaze."

Q. 164.—"Could it not be done among the patients themselves, without making an exhibition of it? It might be, but I doubt whether it is practicable without great risk. I think with the 'Man of Feeling,' that it is an inhuman practice to expose the greatest misery to which our nature is afflicted, to every idle visitant," &c.

Q. 165.—"Is it not done in England? In large establishments, where there are large rooms, and a great number of inmates; but with all their clap-trap about holding these assemblies, you will find that two thirds of those who are present are sane people. The number I could send out to dance would not be more than two dozen, or, more near the truth, one dozen of each sex (there being 411 patients). There would be considerable probability of painful displays. We must take facts, not shows, to guide us."

Q. 168.—"I am not asking you so much what could be done at Tarban Creek Asylum, but what might be done if there were a proper place? If I had the means at my disposal, I would have a place that should be a perfect paradise. I would give these poor creatures every accommodation and means of enjoyment that could be thought of." If Dr. Campbell were the superintendent of his own paradise, we think on the whole that we should prefer for residence the other place. A little further on in his evidence, he says that he would not advise a large asylum; "but if you will have a large asylum, my advice would be to turn that premature birth of vanity,

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Sydney University, into a great asylum; it would make a capital asylum."

Q. 188.—"What is your opinion of the appointment by Government of boards over particular asylums? I have never liked boards; they only cause confusion. I speak of boards of control." Perhaps Dr. Campbell's patients might have a different opinion.

Q. 217.—"Is the drainage good from Tarban Creek? The drainage is excellent, but there is one great objection, and I do not understand it—the architects even do not seem to understand it—about our waterclosets. They do not please me; there is, in certain states of the atmosphere, an offensive smell from them."

Q. 218.—"Have you an ample supply of water for them? Not enough of water to wash the grosser matters down; but even if we had, that would not remedy the evil."

Q. 219.—"Do you ever use disinfecting materials? It would take all the disinfecting materials in the colony to keep them sweet and pure, in the present condition of the cesspools." And would be a needless waste, Dr. Campbell seems to think, for he says—"but smells of this kind are not positively unwholesome, as is generally supposed." Stinks might perhaps appropriately form one of the attractions of his paradise.

To cōmment upon such kind of evidence would be a miserable and useless waste of time and labour. It is not likely that anything others may say will have any effect upon one who speaks in the style which Dr. Campbell thinks is decent and proper to use. He has, with characteristic taste, gone out of his way to tell a Committee of the Legislative Assembly that the Sydney University is a "premature birth of vanity;" and, without going out of his way, he has successfully exhibited to the world what a monstrous birth of vanity is. Were so self-sufficient a man amenable to a word in season, we should recommend to him a story and a prayer: the story is that of the aspiring frog in the fable, which came to so untimely an end; and the prayer is from the English Litany—to be delivered from "envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness," "from all pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy." We sincerely hope that the result of his evidence may be to impress upon the Legislative Assembly, and all who have the welfare of the insane at heart, as it has impressed upon us, the urgent necessity of a speedy and radical reform in the Tarban Creek Asylum.

The Parramatta Asylum, to which incurables are mostly sent, and in which there are 469 patients, appears also to be in a very defective condition; indeed, the evidence discloses a worse state of things than at Tarban Creek.

Q. 412.—"How is the asylum supplied with water? It is supplied by a culvert from the river, which comes under a pump which is used by the patients."

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Q. 413.—"Is your supply of water ample? Except when the pump breaks we have plenty."

Q. 414.—"Are your buildings sufficiently supplied with water-closets and other conveniences for the use of patients? The buildings are not supplied with water-closets; there are privies in the yards."

Q. 415.—"The old night-buckets are still used? Yes."

Q. 416.—"Do you not think that they are objectionable? With cleanliness I do not know that they are more objectionable than water-closets. It is very difficult to keep water-closets clean."

Q. 432.—"How many attendants have you at Parramatta? I have a return of them here. About one to twenty patients."

Q. 433.—"How does that proportion stand when compared with the number of attendants in lunatic asylums at home and in other parts of the world? I have no data beyond the bishop's letter, which states that the number of attendants at home is much greater."

Q. 462.—"Do the lunatics destroy the books? Very much."

Q. 463.—"Wantonly? I can hardly say wantonly; but they do destroy the books."

Q. 464.—"What are your means for religious instruction? We have no means for religious instruction."

Q. 465.—"Is there no clergyman attending? Whenever a clergyman is sent for he comes."

These extracts are from the minutes of the evidence of Dr. R. Greenup, the medical superintendent. The following are from the evidence of Mr. Michael Prior, master's attendant:

Q. 1271.—"Do you recollect a patient who was in in the month of July last, of the name of Robert Shaw? I do."

Q. 1272.—"Do you remember his being ill-used by a keeper of the name of Luke Dunn, by Gately, and 'Jemmy the washerman?'" On the evening previous I was going round to see that the patients got their provisions; he was very much excited, although generally a quiet man; I attempted to abate his excitement, and he struck me. I ordered an attendant to put him in a cell, and removed him to another ward. As he was going to bed he was very much excited, and attempted to knock out the brains of one man, and I ordered him to be handcuffed and secured to his bed. In doing this I was obliged to use coercive means, but I used no more force than was necessary, as I am always opposed to the exercise of brute force."

Mr. R. Melville, a discharged patient, gives the following evidence:

Q. 2248.—"Was there sufficient attention paid to the cleanliness

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the patients in general? They were compelled to bathe once a week; I should suppose that was sufficient."

Q. 2250.—"And there was an ample supply of water for these purposes generally in the institution? There was an abundance, but sometimes it was disagreeable to wash after a great number had washed in the same water."

Q. 2251.—"Were they made to wash in the same water? Yes, there were five large vats, in which from 150 to 200 would have to wash."

Q. 2252.—"That was about thirty or forty to each vat? Yes."

Q. 2255.—"The water naturally would become filthy before forty or fifty men had finished their washing operations in it? Sometimes it would, for some of these patients were very dirty."

It further appears that, for the drying of themselves, all these patients had but one piece of linen about twelve feet long.

Two of the attendants gave evidence that patients who displeased Prior, the head attendant, were sometimes 'dipped' with their clothes on, being held under water till they were nearly suffocated.

Mr. Prior was recalled, and further examined.

Q. 2909.—"Do you recollect a man of the name of Robert Floyd? Robert Loyd, I do."

Q. 2910.—"It has been stated that he has been bathed in one of the dirty vats with his clothes on, as a punishment, and another patient cried 'Murder! in a Christian country to treat any person in such a way'? Not to my knowledge with his clothes on."

Q. 2911.—"Has it ever been the practice to dip patients in water, and hold them under until they have been nearly suffocated? Never."

Q. 2912.—"You never recollect a case of that description? I have dipped this Loyd, but not to the extent described. It used to be a system when I first went there—that was six years ago—and the practice has been discontinued."

Q. 2925.—"When men were dipped with their clothes on, was it as a punishment, or was it the then usual mode of ablution? I never knew them to be dipped with their clothes on, but with their clothes off. It was, of course, as a punishment."

Q. 2926.—"The charge against you is, that you dipped Loyd? Not with his clothes on."

Q. 2927.—The charge is that you dipped him with his clothes on. I never did; it was the mode when I went there, but it was discontinued afterwards."

Thus much we quote from the evidence taken by the select committee, and worse remains behind, if the statements of some attendants and a discharged patient, who were examined, are to be trusted. No one, we think, can fairly weigh the evidence without being convinced that there is great cause for dissatisfaction with the condition

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of both these asylums, and that it was full time that some one should stir up the stagnant iniquity and arouse public attention to the great offence existing. It is plain that one of the first and most obvious things to do is to appoint an efficient board of control to see to the proper management of the asylum, in place of the irregular and inefficient supervision which, not without amazement, we find now to exist as little more than a mere formal matter. It is certainly to be hoped that the investigation which Dr. Willson has been the means of promoting, and which has disclosed a worse state of things than probably he was prepared for, will be followed by the adoption of speedy and effectual means for rendering the provision for its insane worthy of the great colony of New South Wales.

The hospital for the insane at New Norfolk, in Tasmania, has the services of a kind-hearted and efficient medical superintendent, and is under the effective supervision of a board of commissioners, who meet at the hospital once a month. The reports of the commissioners exhibit, year after year, a regular progress in improvements made; and, were the construction of the hospital not somewhat defective, little would now be left to be desired.

"The commissioners, in closing their report for 1863, feel that they only discharge a debt of justice to the superintendent and medical officer, Mr. Huston, in testifying to the cordiality and zeal with which he has seconded them in every proposal for the amelioration of the hospital; and to the tact, discretion, and kindness, which have marked his intercourse with the patients of all classes, conciliating thereby their confidence and good feeling."

Those who are truly interested in the welfare of the insane, in whatever part of the world, must feel most thankful to the Right Reverend Bishop Willson for the zeal and energy with which, through good report and through evil report, he presses forward the good work of reform, and will hope that the life of this veteran reformer may long be spared, that he may continue to plead so earnestly and well the cause of those unfortunate beings who, by reason of a great affliction, cannot plead for themselves.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.10.52.591 Published online by Cambridge University Press