OCCASIONAL NOTES OF THE QUARTER.

Collective Investigation.

If any sign were required to give assurance of the vitality of the Medico-Psychological Association, it is not far to seek in the hearty reception accorded to recent proposals to form Committees for the purposes of collective investigation. When Dr. Mercier put his paper on the agenda of the last Annual Meeting, it was generally felt that it would elicit promises of active support, and regrets were expressed that time did not permit of this important subject being dealt with at Dublin. There has, however, been no serious loss of time, as opportunity will, no doubt, be found to convene members specially interested in the course of the forthcoming Annual Meeting in London, when definite proposals, methods, and aims can be discussed and the plan of action agreed on.

The Committee appointed at Glasgow, on the initiative of Dr. G. M. Robertson, have not yet met, and it may be that their report will not proceed on the identical lines indicated by Dr. Mercier. But it is a question whether such work should not be undertaken in sections, and the general results compiled and abstracted from the facts ascertained in various parts of the kingdom. If a general agreement as to the scope, methods, and subjects for investigation were conceded, it would seem that the actual work might be distributed by districts with advantage in respect of accuracy and celerity. The general averages for the whole population of the kingdom would, doubtless, prove of great value; but the differentiation of the statistics relative to well-defined districts would be an additional gain. In formulating opinions regarding certain broad facts of lunacy, we can at present base our conclusions upon the Reports of the Commissioners in Lunacy for the three countries; but there are many questions at issue which can find no place in formal Blue Books. Again, there are so strongly-marked differences, racial and social, between the natives of the Eastern Counties of England and those of Wales, for instance, that any collective investigation would prove incomplete in so far as it might fail to take into account the geographical distribution of the facts elicited. The comparative rarity of

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general paralysis in Ireland and of epilepsy in Scotland has been repeatedly the subject of comment. We might fairly expect more accurate and more detailed information should the Committees entertain the idea of investigating these conditions.

When it is considered how many facts lie unclassified and lost to the scientific world in the records daily and painfully compiled by asylum officials, there cannot but be regrets that years have elapsed without a serious effort to arrange and publish the mass of facts that have accumulated. The well-defined and indubitable facts relating to the daily life of the insane are buried in innumerable case-books and multitudinous reports. There is now a reasonable hope of vivifying them. We have been laden, and we have laden others with the laborious duty of recording. Let us, therefore, brighten toil and fructify it.

No doubt, from time to time the records of particular asylums have been laid under contribution, and so form the groundwork of our knowledge and our ready means of checking or verifying individual experience. But, in many cases, these observers and recorders, working separately, have laboured under obvious disadvantages in drawing conclusions from a limited area. They have not always been able to deal with figures applicable to a wide range; they have not always been able to correct their opinions by reference to the experience of others. There are obvious disadvantages in dealing statistically with small numbers, in failing to correct the personal equation, in hazarding a general statement which may prove to be strictly local in its application.

The much-abused statistical tables of the Association, prepared and authorized after long and careful consideration, have now been in general use for some twelve years and await the attention of our collective investigators. It is a rare thing to take up an asylum report altogether incomplete as to these tables. The labour and expense entailed by their annual production should assuredly be recognized by the Association responsible for their adoption, and a general *résumé* of their contents should be published. The President is not alone in casting doubts on the trustworthiness of these statistical tables. It has been hinted that unworthy expedients are sometimes in use to obtain a just balance. But the Committee will, doubtless, examine such of the tables as they may decide to deal with in minute detail, and

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only accept for their purpose what bears the stamp of accuracy and what admits of indubitable asseveration. There is no one sanguine enough to believe that the tables of causation can be more than approximately true, and the vexed question of classification of mental states will, as heretofore, afford opportunity for lively discussion. Nevertheless, there are many other points which present no such disadvantages, and a well-considered plan of action cannot fail to elicit much that will be of permanent value.

We have been careful to avoid entering upon the obvious difficulties in the way. There are always more than enough of those whose delight it is to shout that there is a lion in the path—they have no difficulty in discerning a whole menagerie. We deprecate great expectations and will be well content with the day of small things. It is very certain that friendly, energetic, and capable workers, operating in different parts of the country, animated by a common enthusiasm and proceeding on well-defined lines of action, will not fail to place on record results of the utmost value, results which will command the attention and the gratitude of the scientific world.

Fair Play.

What has become of the Report on the Inquiry at St. Ann's Heath? The weeks and months pass, and the shameful allegations Mr. Labouchere scattered broadcast are in danger of being forgotten. It was a serious and specific charge—nothing less than the "slow torturing to death of a helpless maniac." The colours were laid on with a lavish hand—"in all the blood-stained records of modern lunatic asylums there is not to be found a more sickening and horrifying story." Mr. Asquith followed up this precious rhodomontade by appointing a Commission, which proceeded on extremely doubtful authority. The Speaker of the House of Commons, assisted by Dr. Savage, made a full investigation, in the course of which every facility was granted for the elucidation of the case at issue. The responsible managers of St. Ann's Heath Asylum welcomed the inquiry, and after much labour and anxious care the facts are set forth by Mr. Gully. But the Report remains unpublished. It has not been called for by any private member. Mr. Labouchere, having obtained so much sensational "copy," having served it up with vitriolic sauce, leaves it in the limbo of cynical

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