The actual fact is that the Commissioners had visited and decided on and signed the discharge of Miss Lanchester before they were approached by Mr. Burns.

The vaunts of the Socialist Press on the influence it exerted are, therefore, without any foundation, and we can only express our regret that they found even momentary credence.

Objections to the Boarding-out System.

The boarding-out of insane persons has so long been an approved and integral part of the Scottish system of Lunacy Administration, it has been the subject of so many reports and critical examinations, that we have no intention of entering upon a disquisition as to the obvious dangers, disadvantages, and discomforts it may entail. Every good Scot accepts it as, on the whole, an eminently satisfactory solution of difficulties with which a nation is brought face to face in dealing with the mass of chronic lunacy, which as yet shows no decrease. It is a necessary part of the education of those who undertake active responsibility in this department of social work to visit, or, at least, to study the Gheel system, which is the prototype of all similar projects. In Scotland it is generally believed that the plan, so ably recommended by Sir Arthur Mitchell in his work on the *Insane in Private Dwellings* (1864), and since then so strenuously upheld year by year in the Reports of the Lunacy Board, has proved a real benefit to the insane and to the public. It is no part of that ideal to congregate the insane in particular localities, but rather to dilute the lunacy in so far as possible, just as we dilute excitement in asylum practice. Circumstances, however, have caused some neglect of this guiding principle, which it is easy to account for, and already a remedy has been applied. The decay of handloom weaving, for instance, rendered it acceptable to the numerous cottagers in Fife to supplement their diminishing incomes by receiving such cases, and, naturally, the success of neighbours in earning a welcome addition to scanty means is contagious. The Parish Council of Collessie (a rural district near Ladybank) lately met to consider this question, and their finding was that "certified lunatics in the usual way be permitted in the parish as at present." One of the ten members present entered his dissent. There seems to have

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.42.177.352 Published online by Cambridge University Press

been at that meeting a general consensus of opinion that the boarded-out patients were comfortable, contented, and kindly cared for. Besides, the Inspector of Poor reported that the yearly payments made on their behalf amount to £700 or £800 a year.

The General Board of Lunacy have also considered complaints made by Mr. and Mrs. Auld, with sixteen others, to the effect that they "suffer an intolerable grievance owing to the presence of these lunatics in Collessie, feeling that neither life nor property is safe, and that freedom is most seriously and oppressively curtailed." We will not pause to reflect upon this portentous utterance, before which the parish pump must visibly pale, but only note that there is no sympathy expressed by Mr. and Mrs. Auld touching their unfortunate neighbours who are so unwelcome, no suggestion for their betterment, no desire for their freedom. "Anywhere, anywhere, out of—Collessie!" And, naturally, Mr. Labouchere is on the side of the Aulds! Not thus has improvement in the treatment of the insane been attained, not thus will it be carried to perfection. Blow hot, blow cold! Hurry every lunatic into the nearest asylum, and then—hasten to deliver him from the madhouse keeper. The Lunacy Board, however, recognising, as it has always done, that there is adequate reason to prevent the concentration of these cases, has issued a circular letter to the effect that certain parishes must not further increase the numbers of boarded-out lunatics—with such reservations as might have been expected.

No doubt the recent murder committed by William Craig gave point to the feeling which instigated the petition above mentioned. He had been boarded out for some considerable time after having passed through the Barony Parish Asylum at Lenzie, where he had been found harmless and suitable for extended liberty. Unfortunately, some little time before the fatal assault, Craig had been removed to the house of an inexperienced guardian, who apparently had not dealt with him with that amount of tact and discretion to which he had been accustomed. In a moment of anger he assaulted the wife of his guardian and her infant child, having stabbed the latter with a knife. The wounds proved fatal, and Craig was apprehended and brought before the Sheriff, who "committed him to the prison of Perth to be detained during her Majesty's pleasure." No doubt such an occurrence is of

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.42.177.352 Published online by Cambridge University Press

serious moment to the lunacy authorities and to the public generally. But does it endanger the stability of the system under which Craig was cared for? During 38 years of lunacy administration in Scotland this is actually the first accident of the kind. On an average no less than 2,000 insane persons have been boarded-out yearly—that is to say as many as are contained in one of our largest asylums.

It will not be contended that one murderous assault in 38 years in such an institution, even if it only contain chronic patients, is by any means an impossibility or even likely to cause astonishment. It would appear that even the Chairman of the Portsmouth Borough Asylum is not exempt from unreasoning attack. The newspapers made this known lately under the startling head-line—*Savage Attack by a Female Lunatic.* To be sure there would have been no paragraph if it had been the ordinary occurrence of a nurse having had her face scratched. But of Portsmouth more anon!

It cannot be urged that this fatality is to constitute a sufficient reason for the reversal, or even the modification, of a policy which has contributed so efficiently to the happiness and comfort of so great a number, and which has saved the country so much money. At the same time, it certainly impresses upon over-zealous advocates of the system a caution which cannot be lightly neglected, and emphasises dangers which those charged with the selection of patients and guardians must ever be alive to.

One word as to the treatment of Craig subsequent to his appearance before the Sheriff, who, according to newspaper reports, remitted him to the Perth Prison as above indicated. It seems, however, that he was detained in Perth, but that he was replaced in the Barony Parochial Asylum, from whence he had previously been boarded-out. This is not by any means the first case of the kind, and such procedure must be watched with a jealous eye. We fully admit that crimes of violence may occur in ordinary cases of lunacy, for whom the best place is the ordinary asylum of the district; but, of late, there seems to be a tendency to limit the use of the Lunatic Department of the Perth Prison, which will, if unchecked, raise old controversies in a very acute form.

It is well known that the Perth Prison now contains but a moiety of its former population, that extravagant expenditure on Barlinnie and other prisons has proceeded apace, leaving much of the vast and expensive buildings at

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.42.177.352 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Perth empty. If anything is to come of recent recommendations as to habitual offenders, Perth Prison might well be turned into a reformatory for such individuals; but in any case an attempt to depopulate the wards of the Lunatic Department and to transfer the inmates to ordinary asylums must be the signal for prompt and energetic action.*

* Since this was written another petition has been presented to the General Board of Lunacy by the proprietors and householders of the parish of Collessie. One hundred and four signatures were adhibited, but it is said that many more might have been obtained. In any case there is ample evidence of the real feeling of the neighbourhood on the statement of this overwhelming majority. The petition is in the following terms:—

To the General Board of Lunacy, Edinburgh.

Gentlemen,—Being aware that an agitation against the system of boarding-out harmless pauper lunatics in the county is being carried on by certain parties in the parish of Collessie, and that a petition has been forwarded to the General Board of Lunacy for their removal and for the abolition or curtailment of the system, we, the undersigned, proprietors and householders in the parish of Collessie, beg to subscribe to the following petition in favour of the said system, and in particular respectfully to crave that the present system be continued, and that the lunatics be allowed to remain as at present in this parish on the following grounds, and for the following among other minor reasons, viz. :—

(1) That the lunatics, in the opinion of your undersigned petitioners, are harmless and inoffensive, and are not a source of danger to life or annoyance to the great majority of residents in the neighbourhood; the fatality at the hands of one of them which took place recently in the village of Giffordtown being regarded by us as a most exceptional occurrence, and most unlikely to recur, the lunatics being under constant medical and parochial supervision.

(2) That the system is not carried on as a trade by the guardians of lunatics in this parish, the fact being that the guardians have other, though in some cases scanty, means of livelihood, and board out lunatics only to eke out to a small extent such other means.

With regard to the advantages of the system we are of opinion—

(1) That the removal of all such patients back to the asylums would enormously increase the poor rates of the county, in respect of required extra accommodation and attendance at the asylums.

(2) That the system is a means of helping many to eke out their livelihood, which in some cases would be otherwise small, and in this way also it helps to keep poor rates at a low figure.

(3) That it is at present a source of revenue to the parish of Collessie to the extent of not less than £650 per annum, the great proportion of which is spent in the parish, to the advantage of the shopkeepers, merchants, tradesmen, etc.

(4) That the system is of immense advantage to the mental health of the patients themselves, giving them as it does an idea more of home and home comforts than they could possibly get by being constantly confined in an asylum, and thereby tending in some cases to their ultimate recovery. For these and other minor reasons we respectfully subscribe to this petition.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.42.177.352 Published online by Cambridge University Press