to other asylum superintendents. The Metropolitan Asylums Board is fortunately unique in its composition, and it is to be hoped in its principles; but it nevertheless behoves all exposed to such a danger, however improbable, to exert themselves in a way that may be deterrent to the perpetration of similar injustice by other bodies.

A board has been said to have no body to be kicked, or soul to be damned. The first part of this proposition is true, sometimes even regrettably true, but the second part is not so accurate. It is, indeed, very much the exception to find a board or committee utterly lost to the recognition of truth and justice. The board in question, however, appears to have no other moral sense than to dread the demon of the daily press, whom it worships by these propitiatory sacrifices of individual victims; and this victim is by no means the first it has immolated.

This profession and the medical press have a clear duty before them, to omit no effort that shall tend to convert this board to the recognition of a higher tribunal than that of the daily penny-a-liner, and to endeavour to gain some redress for the sufferer, who is both a member of our Speciality and of our Association.

Criminal Law Reform.

Various problems in criminal law reform seem likely to receive in the present session a legislative solution. At last the evidence of prisoners may be made legally admissible. The merits and the demerits of this change have been threshed out with unprecedented completeness, so far as the annals of modern legal controversy are concerned. The balance is, we think, on the side of the Bill. But very great precautions will have to be taken by the judges against improper forensic comments on the fact that a prisoner stands on his legal rights, and declines to go into the witness-box. In time such a refusal will no more prejudice a defendant than a reservation of his defence in magisterial proceedings does now. But at first the new procedure will want careful watching. A Court of Appeal Bill has less—but still some—chance of passing. The present arbitrary manner in which the question whether a point of law arising in a criminal trial is to reach the Court for Crown Cases Reserved is decided is utterly indefensible. Perhaps if such a tribunal is established we shall at length get the rules in Macnaughton's case revised.

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We have always wondered why it has never occurred to some ingenious barrister, in defending a prisoner, to contend and tell the jury that the rules have no legal validity, and to challenge the judge to direct them in accordance with the charge in Hadfield's case. It would be difficult for any judge to refuse to reserve a point of law of such vital importance.

Inebriates Bill.

We cordially hope that the report that the forthcoming Government Bill to amend the Inebriates Acts will deal only with police court cases, may prove to be inaccurate. Such a Bill would be scarcely worth accepting, even as an instalment; for having once touched the question again, in however perfunctory or unsatisfactory a manner, the legislature would certainly leave it alone for another decade. The minimum that can be regarded as acceptable is the enactment of a measure (1) providing for compulsory sequestering, (2) raising the maximum period of compulsory detention from one to two years, and (3) simplifying the procedure relative to admission and recapture. We trust that magisterial bodies throughout the country will follow the excellent example of the Manchester Justices in pressing the Home Office for a really serious measure of reform. The evidence furnished by the recent report of the Lunacy Commissioners that the insane population of the country is increasing, constitutes a good reason for the exhibition of some insistence in the matter; and much as a readjustment of the powers of the Lunacy Commissioners and the various local authorities in regard to pauper lunatics is needed, we shall be quite content to wait another session for it, if only an adequate Inebriates Bill is passed.

Medical Confidentiality.

The public discussion of the legal aspects of the question of medical confidentiality, to which a recent *cause célèbre* has again given considerable prominence, has, in our judgment, proceeded too largely on the assumption that the sole point at issue is whether confidence is a necessary implication in the contract between doctor and patient. The basis of the doctrine of confidence must, in truth, be sought far less in any contractual relationship than in the policy of the law. The law recognises that there are certain relations in which it is of high social importance that the utmost mutual confi-

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