DR. MERCIER'S DEFINITION OF INSANITY—A CORRECTION.

To the Editors of THE JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE.

GENTLEMEN,—I find that in my "Definitions of Insanity" in the last number of this Journal I have not given Dr. Mercier's definition precisely as he states it. Dr. Mercier's words are: "From whatever point of view it is regarded, insanity is then found to be a failure in the process of adjustment of the organism to its environment," whereas the definition I ascribed to him was that insanity is "a failure of the organism to adjust itself to its environment" ("Journal," Jan., 1882, p. 526). I need hardly say that the first form of words is, equally with the second, open to the objections I have pointed out. I may add, moreover, that it gives prominence to an element that renders the definition self-destructive. In the paragraph preceding the one I have quoted from, Dr. Mercier says: "To say that the organism is adjusted to the environment is to say that it is in definite relation with the environment, and for a relation between two terms to be definite it is necessary that the terms themselves between which the relation subsists should also be definite" (p. 525). Now, as "environment" is not a definite term, there can not (from Dr. Mercier's premises) be any definite relation between the organism and it, and therefore the organism cannot be adjusted to the environment. Dr. Mercier's only escape from this position would be to say that "environment" is a definite term. He has, however, himself cut off his retreat. He says: "Now, the definition of insanity is a failure in the *process* of adjustment, and the onus of failure lies in the process itself only when the terms are capable of adjustment. If the condition of the organism on the one hand, or the condition of the environment on the other, is such that they are either of them incapable of being definitely represented in consciousness, then the failure is in the representation of the terms in consciousness, and not in the process of adjustment of the one to the other" (*l. c.*). Dr. Mercier then gives examples where special portions of the environment were not definite. The addition of the remoter and more general portions would hardly increase the definiteness. We thus see that Dr. Mercier cannot consistently admit either that the organism is ever adjusted to the environment, or that the failure in adjustment is ever in the process.

Yours truly,

Sussex House, Hammersmith,
March, 1.

WILLIAM R. HUGGARD.

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(To be continued.)

Appointments.

DESHON, F. P., M.R.C.S., appointed Medical Superintendent of the Metropolitan Lunatic Asylum, Kew, Victoria.

GODSON, EDWIN, M.R.C.S., appointed Medical Superintendent of the Hospital for the Insane, Paramatta, New South Wales.

LEE, G. T., M.R.C.S., L.S.A.Lond., appointed Assistant Surgeon at Fisherton House Asylum, Salisbury.

MICKLE, ARTHUR FFLINTOFF, M.B., appointed Medical Superintendent of Haydock Lodge Asylum, *vice* James Shaw, M.D., resigned.

RICHARDSON, WILLIAM, M.B., C.M.Edin. (Senior Assistant at the Crichton Royal Institution, Dumfries), appointed Medical Superintendent of the Isle of Man General Lunatic Asylum, Douglas.

SANKEY, H. R. O., M.B.Lond., appointed Medical Superintendent of the Warwick County Lunatic Asylum, Hatton, *vice* Dr. Parsey, deceased.

SCOTT, JOHN WALTER, M.R.C.S. and L.S.A., appointed to be Assistant Medical Officer at the Hants County Asylum, Fareham.

SINCLAIR, ERIC, M.B., C.M.Glasg., appointed Medical Superintendent of the Hospital for the Insane, Gladesville, New South Wales.

NEW YORK MEDICO-LEGAL ASSOCIATION.

Among the Honorary Members recently elected are the names of Professor Ball and M. Motet, Paris; Dr. Ireland, Prestonpans, near Edinburgh; and Dr. Hack Tuke, London.

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