trouble to their poor relatives. The petition should certainly be simplified. Few, according to our experience, are ever correctly filled up, and the subsequent amendments give no end of trouble.

One of the first cases admitted under the new Act into an asylum with which we are acquainted, had been under certificates when the old Act was in force. Her sister, a schoolmistress, on the completion of the various certificates, made this remark:—"If the new Lunacy Laws had been framed to drive sane people out of their wits I could have understood them." Others who have had similar experiences will undoubtedly agree with her.

Dry and Wet Packs.

Having a decided opinion in favour of the judicious employment of hydropathic measures in the treatment of the insane, including the careful use of the dry and wet pack, we are afraid that the recent death of a patient who was placed for a considerable time in the former, while labouring under maniacal violence, will exercise a very injurious effect in inducing the medical superintendents of asylums to forego its employment in the treatment of patients under their charge, from fear of possible results and consequent blame. True, this would be illogical, but unfortunately this is no reason whatever against such a course being pursued, as in most other human affairs. At any rate, the logic, such as it is, in which the interests of the patient may be sacrificed to the legal danger facing the physician, is natural, for he argues that if an accident should occur to a patient treated by the dry or wet pack he will be blamed. Some time ago we took pains to inquire of asylum superintendents what their practice had been in this respect. The slight degree in which the pack in any form was found to be in use was strikingly elicited, the reasons alleged for this being various. It was obvious, in some instances, that the attention had never been directed to hydro-therapeutics in any shape; nothing beyond the ordinary bath had been employed, and that for the purpose of cleanliness, and not in the slightest degree for treatment. The prolonged bath had never been in use. Packing patients had been regarded as altogether out of the question.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.41.172.95 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Other superintendents were well aware of the utility of the pack, and individually desired to make use of it, but the knowledge that it is regarded as one form of mechanical restraint, and, further, the fact that one or two patients had died under this treatment, whether *post hoc* or *propter hoc*, paralyzed their wishes and judgment, and this, it may be added, at a time when prescribing remedies hypodermically of a much more risky character.

Following in the footsteps of Dr. Lockhart Robertson, Dr. Duckworth Williams has used the wet sheet largely, and testifies that "those who have used it most are unanimous in their opinion that it is a valuable addition to their means of treating certain forms of insanity."* Patients suffering from acute sthenic mania and recurrent mania are, as Dr. Williams considers, the most likely to derive benefit from this treatment. This treatment may be continued for eight to twelve hours at a stretch. Some liquid nourishment, and certainly stimulants occasionally, have been beneficial if symptoms of exhaustion appear. In recurrent mania, marked by violence rather than the physical symptoms just mentioned, most good is done by using the pack daily for four hours, twice in the morning and twice in the evening for a week. Dr. Williams regards the dry pack as much more limited in its usefulness. With the exception of the sheet not being wet, the manner of its use and the caution necessary are practically the same. It is important to note that although the shock is not so great, there is more danger of exhaustion, the pulse becoming slower and the temperature reduced, while the perspiration is very great indeed. Dr. Percy Smith, however, thinks the dry pack safer than the wet pack. He has found that the dry pack is not so successful as the wet in soothing the system, and, indeed, occasionally has had quite the opposite effect.

We have adduced the practice of high authority on the employment of the dry and wet pack in insanity, not as one to be necessarily followed in detail, but as of interest and importance in reference to that which was adopted at the Holloway Sanatorium, in which the patient died, and was the means of attracting much public attention. From the evidence given by the assistant medical officer we find that Thomas Weir, aged 25, the patient in question, was on August 9th, 1894, much excited, and made a violent attack on two of the patients. Two days later he was still violent,

* *Vide* "Dictionary of Psychological Medicine," Art. Baths.

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.41.172.95 Published online by Cambridge University Press

made desperate attempts to escape, and refused his food. On that day he was dry packed. On the 13th, believing his food to be poisoned, he refused it again. On September 3rd he attacked three of the attendants. Dry pack from 5.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. Two days afterwards he was very violent, and had the dry pack for five hours. On September 10th he attempted to escape. On September 20th it is reported that "owing to his incessantly repeated attacks it has been found necessary to keep him more or less continuously under restraint by means of the dry pack." Again "this evening (26th) he managed, during the short absence of the attendants, to free himself from the pack, and to escape through the window on to the roof." It appears that on this occasion the attendant had just left him for a moment or two. He was recovered about midnight, having sustained a few bruises. He was kept more or less from this period in the dry pack till his death. He was, therefore, on the 27th eighteen hours in the dry pack. On the 29th he was reported as trying to bite his attendants on their approaching him. On the 30th "furiously excited and noisy all night. About 4 a.m. the same morning he died."

From this record it is not easy to discover very clearly the exact duration of time during which the patient was confined in the pack, but the allegation was made, and was not contradicted by the medical staff, that he was practically so treated for the last three or four days of his life; say, about ninety-six hours, not allowing for those times when he was removed in order to be washed and to attend to his necessary wants. However liberal a deduction may be made for these purposes, the duration would clearly exceed by many hours the period or periods already mentioned. We do not state this by way of blame, but simply in order to put on record the fact.

With regard to the patient's escape from the pack, it was concluded that the straps had not been properly applied. The inference would certainly be that they were not too tight. Afterwards they were applied more tightly.

The summing up of the Coroner does not appear to have been characterized by any prejudiced feeling, and the opinion was clearly expressed that the medical staff would regret the unfortunate result as much as anyone else.

The verdict of the jury was as follows:—"We are of opinion that Weir died from exhaustion, following mania. Rider: The jury are of opinion that not sufficient medical

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.41.172.95 Published online by Cambridge University Press

supervision was exercised, and that the mechanical restraint was excessive and too long continued."

We do not propose to enter into the question whether the treatment adopted was continued for too long a time or not; whether the amount of nourishment administered was sufficient; whether stimulants ought to have been freely supplied; or, lastly, whether the medical supervision was as great as so serious a case required. Doubtless the Lunacy Commissioners will report on the unhappy event, with all the evidence at their command to assist them in arriving at a correct conclusion. Any criticism on our part at the present time would be premature. Our sole object is to record the treatment adopted, earnestly hoping that the judicious use of the dry or wet pack will not be thereby jeopardized.

Pensions.

We regret to note that the Derby County Council, at their meeting of 3rd October, have thrown out the scheme for pensions submitted by the Asylum Committee. It had been carefully prepared on similar lines to that which has been lately accepted by the Norfolk County Council. Unfortunately the Finance Committee had arrived at the conclusion that they could not recommend the scheme, holding that every case must be determined at the time when the official applying for a pension became eligible. After hearing opinion of counsel, and debating the question from the point of view of the Finance Committee and of the Asylum Committee, it was moved that the scheme be received as containing reasonable suggestions for the guidance of the Asylum Committee. An amendment to the effect that no scheme could be legally formulated by the Asylum Committee with regard to pensions, but that each case should be dealt with on its own merits, was the finding of the Council by 24 to 14 votes. The arguments advanced were, briefly, that the Committee could not bind their successors with reference to pensions; that the Lunacy Act was permissive and not compulsory in this respect; that the different classes of officials would be dealt with on different grounds, and each on his own merits. It was also thought that every recommendation for payments must come through the Finance Committee, who act for the Council as advisers on financial questions.

It is to be regretted that there is such diversity of pro-

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.41.172.95 Published online by Cambridge University Press