Belgian Opinion on Belgian Asylums.

Elsewhere we quote (see Notes and News) at considerable length a report on Belgian asylums by Dr. Lentz, who occupies in Belgium a position similar to that of an English Lunacy Commissioner.

His communication is interesting for what it does *not*, as well as for what it does, contain. It shows how utterly worthless is outside inspection of monastic institutions. Inspectors who are either afraid to describe what they see, or powerless to bring about reform of what they know to be wrong, do much more harm than good. They help to hypnotise into even deeper trance a public opinion that is already somnolent. They secure the continuance and the increase of abuses. Dr. Lentz refers to the discreditable defence of antique procedures offered at the Antwerp Conference by medical superintendents sometimes living and practising an hour's distance by express train from the institutions whose management they championed. He deprecates the bluntness with which a Teutonic Knight of the Holy Ghost (in Heine's sense) attacked the methods of barbarism, but he forgets to refer to that gentleman's indignation when he found a pair of shackles in a patient's bed in an Antwerp asylum. One of the most instructive items in the report of the Conference is a defence of the present Belgian system. A physician to an asylum, discoursing on the therapeutic value and the necessity of Restraint, remarks that in his institution, containing, as we understand, about five hundred patients, there are about a hundred who are of dirty habits, and that of these it is not necessary to shackle more than five, or at most six, in bed! An Englishman feels unable to criticise a system which leads to an asylum physician making such a boast.

Doctors not Disqualified.

In another place (see Notes and News) we describe the most recent proceedings in connection with the Youghal Auxiliary Asylum that have come to our knowledge. We are not wel supplied with items of information on this subject—a fact which speaks for itself, so we have to depend on the *British*

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.51.212.148-a Published online by Cambridge University Press

Medical Journal in a not very up-to-date article. It is good of the ecclesiastics who rule the asylums in the South of Ireland to graciously admit that a man being a doctor does not disqualify him from being the manager of a lunatic asylum. Whether medical qualifications are essential or not for this office is a matter on which existing law and ecclesiastical opinion appear to differ, but that is perhaps of little consequence. The excessive frankness of the southern bishops is certainly advantageous, as it makes clear the line that will be taken all through Ireland in the early future, but tactically we doubt its wisdom. The committees are almost everywhere striving to destroy medical control and discredit medical opinion, and they are playing the game of the church so successfully (though often we believe unconsciously) that she would be wiser (we say it with all reverence) to lie by till she is presently called upon to solve the knots that local self-government is busy tying.

The Monaghan Scandal.

It is our painful duty in Notes and News to record from the files of a local newspaper, dealing with the affairs of the Monaghan Asylum, as disgraceful a story of attempted misuse of power as we have ever had to comment upon. We are familiar with the desire to get rid of medical superintendents in Irish asylums in favour of other methods of management. If nothing else were in view save the happiness of these officers themselves, we could only wish that the prophecy of their would-be supplanters would soon come true, and that there would shortly be no more doctors in Irish asylums. The records of medieval times and even of modern times in some foreign countries tell us, however, what this would mean for the patients, who, after all, though it is often forgotten, are the chief objects for which asylums are built and maintained. But it would not appear that in Monaghan the end desired at present is to get rid of the medical staff in favour of clerical managers, lay or ecclesiastic. The end is more ignoble, being a purely personal one, and the means adopted to attain it are of corresponding baseness. The unfortunate medical superin-

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.51.212.148-a Published online by Cambridge University Press