



## Our Foreign Letter.

### ASYLUM LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

THE events of the past few months have made us feel quite important. Previously, and in peace times, we have humbly hoped that our English friends occasionally remembered our existence, and thought kindly of us; now we regard ourselves as rather prominent features of the political and Colonial chessboard. So that it occurs to me that many readers of the RECORD will be interested to read a few jottings anent Asylum life in this quarter of the globe—from the point of view, let me hasten to remark, of the attendant, and not the patient. But really, from the point of view of the patient, if I had to be incarcerated "in durance vile," or under lock and key for the good of the community, I should have no hesitation in committing myself unreservedly to the care of either of the three large and important Asylums of this part of the world.

We have a very large community here of over 200 patients, and a corresponding staff, so that we constitute a whole society of our own. Among the attendants there is a considerable mixture of class and race; but, on the whole, we get on very comfortably, forming of course the cliques and sets that are inevitable under such conditions.

In addition to the chronic insane, we treat a large number of acute cases of mania, dementia, &c., and these are of course the cases which are of the greatest interest to the Nurse, or the psychologically inclined. Some patients are discharged "relieved," and in these instances the relatives sign an agreement holding themselves responsible for the care of such patients; so that, in case of difficulties arising, the Asylum authorities cannot be blamed, or accused of having discharged the patient in an unfit condition.

The treatment of the insane is humane and palliative. During the whole year I have not seen one case of actual restraint. A favourite and most effectual method of our Medical Superintendent here is to order "seclusion" to violent patients. This seclusion generally lasts only about four hours, and is never prescribed excepting for violence and excitement. It is perfectly wonderful to note the effect such isolation has in calming the excited and disturbed mental faculties, and the usual result is quietness for several days, and sometimes weeks after.

We receive paying patients, paupers, and natives also, so there is plenty of variety in the work, and opportunity for contrasting the effect which lunacy has on the trained and cultivated by contrast with the untrained and ignorant. Every effort is made in all cases to give as much occupation to the mind as possible, and to leave little leisure for morbid imaginings and distorted fancies. It is found that the best effects are obtained in treating the mentally deranged when the attention of the sufferers is absorbed by externals,

so that there is very little opportunity for unhealthy brooding and introspection.

The amusements are made as varied as possible, and with our beautiful recreation hall we are able to enter upon indoor entertainments on a much more extensive scale than formerly. The proscenium is still to be erected, but we hope this will be completed by our own labour within the next few months. Dances continue to be held weekly, but during the hot months of the year they are replaced by concerts and magic lantern entertainments. In our efforts to entertain our patients, instruction is combined with recreation, and with this object in view we are giving a series of demonstrations with the magic lantern, introducing such subjects as astronomy, geology, and botany, as well as photographic views of different parts of the world. Many musical and other talented folk give us entertainments of various kinds, and enable our poor patients to spend many "happy evenings," where otherwise the time would hang drearily and wearily on their hands.

We have a weekly newspaper, full of local chit-chat, Asylum news, short stories, poetry, &c. In addition, a brief *résumé* of what is going on in the world outside is given in the paper. Of course great care is exercised that no morbid or unhealthy details are given. No crimes or violences, or anything which could possibly disturb the minds of our poor patients, ever finds a place in this newspaper, which, edited, conducted, printed, and published entirely by Asylum talent, affords the utmost interest not only to the inmates and staff, but to our resident friends and neighbours, who are eager and interested subscribers.

A number of novels, light reading, and numerous illustrated papers and magazines are provided for the use of the patients, and are much appreciated by them.

Out-door sports, such as cricket, garden bowls, croquet, and lawn tennis, together with walks and picnics, all combine to reduce to a minimum the restraints and tedium of Asylum life.

The private patients are allowed drives from time to time, and a house for these is sometimes taken at the seaside, where they can go for change of air and scene. This they enjoy very much, and many derive benefit from the change, both mentally and physically.

Altogether, there are few Asylums where such efforts are made to provide amusement, instruction, and recreation for the patients. Hardly a day passes but something or other is "on," and our resources are often put to the test to introduce new and varied means of amusement, for repetition in these, as in many other things, has the effect of producing that monotony it is their object to dissipate.

After tea we generally have music in the day rooms for the patients, and three or four times a week we get up a little impromptu dance. It is found that the effect of the music and the exercise of the dancing has an admirable effect in helping our patients to sleep well and quietly.

Weather permitting, the patients are sent out walking at least once a day; and the working party are kept busy in summer on general work such as gardening, gravelling paths, &c. Cricket and tennis is also indulged in. As far as possible, we try to give our patients the impression that they and all of us are to combine to produce happiness and good-fellowship all round.

(To be continued.)

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