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THE SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT

No. 371,

For the Week ending February 10, 1883.

Price 10 cents. For sale by all newsdealers.

THE CARE OF THE INSANE.

The annual meeting of the National Association for the Protection of the Insane and the Prevention of Insanity was held in Philadelphia Jan. 25, Dr. Joseph Parish of Burlington, New Jersey, in the chair. The address of welcome was read by Prof. Samuel D. Gross, of the local committee. It was followed by the reading of essays by Prof. Traill Green, M.D., of Easton, Pa, on the functions of a medical staff of an insane asylum; by Prof. J. S. Jewell, M.D., of Chicago, on preventable causes of insanity; by Dr. Joseph Parrish, on how to protect the insane; and an address on the duty of medical colleges and the general practitioner toward the mental and nervous diseases, by Dr. Charles K. Mills of Philadelphia.

In the evening Rev. R. Heber Newton of New York spoke of the obligations of the sane toward the insane, and the need of new safeguards to the sane as well as to the insane. Dr. H. Marion Sims, of New York, read a paper on the prevention of insanity in certain cases of nervous and hysterical women, in which he insisted on the necessity of more critically distinguishing cases of insanity from those of the delirium of acute disease.

As an example of failure in this respect he cited the case of Horace Greeley, who was sent to an insane asylum, where he speedily died, because of delirium due to acute meningitis or cerebro-spinal meningitis. There was just as much reason, he said, for sending a case of typhoid fever, with delirium, to an insane asylum. A paper on the legal rights of the insane and their enforcement was read by Clark Bell, Esq., President of the New York Medico-Legal Society; and one on the prevention of insanity by the rational treatment of inebriety, by Dr. T. D. Crothers, of Connecticut. Important and timely papers were also presented from half a dozen foreign alienists.

Dr. J. Milner Fothergill, of London, discussed the influence of perverted assimilation in producing insanity; Drs. A. Baer, and Norman Kerr, of the same city, considered the connection between inebriety and insanity; Dr. Jas. Lalor, of Dublin, discussed the value of systematic education as a means of curing insanity; Dr. Charles Mercier, of London, contributed a paper on some of the conditions of life which influence the production of insanity; and Dr. Wm. Julius Mickle, of London, a note on the prevention of some cases of cerebral and mental disease, produced by cranial injury.

PROGRESS IN MEDICAL ETHICS.

The discussion of the revised code of medical ethics at the special meeting of the New York County Medical Society the other evening, and the strong vote in favor of allowing consultation with any legally qualified practitioner, are hopeful indications of decreasing dogmatism on the part of that school of physicians whose opposition to exclusive medical dogmas has hitherto been so rigorously dogmatic.

The special feature of the new code, which was adopted by the State Medical Society last year, and which has aroused so much opposition throughout the country, lies in the following rule:

"Members of the Medical Society of the State of New York, and of the medical societies in affiliation therewith, may meet in consultation legally qualified practitioners of medicine; emergencies may occur in which all restrictions should, in the judgment of the practitioner, yield to the demands of humanity."

The opponents of this rule protest that it substantially puts the "regular" physician—that sole embodiment of medical science and sincerity—upon a level with homœopaths and quacks and all who have been led astray by false dogmas and given over to abhorrent practices. "Why," exclaimed one indignant conservative, "have they (the State Medical Society) passed this law, which is obnoxious to the entire profession? It is an outrage. Are we going to allow everybody to come into our profession and recognize them as practitioners? That is what this rule practically amounts to."

The issue of the meeting happily showed that a portion, a very capable and successful portion, of the entire profession do not so regard it. The law of the land determines who shall or shall not practice medicine; and the question of consultation between those on the same legal footing may safely be left to the intelligence and honesty of the independent practitioner. As Dr. Fordyce Barker put it, the physician who requires to be directed how to behave is not fit to be a practitioner. "Exclusive dogmas," he said "are not confined to the homœopathic school. They are found among many who belong to the old school, and many of these 'exclusive dogmas' are far more dangerous than those of the honest homœopathists. We are meeting with exclusive dogmas in the profession constantly, and these dogmas are generally a 'rejection of the accumulated experience of physicians,' to quote the old code."

Defending the amended code, Dr. C. R. Agnew said: "My position is simply this: I believe in meeting error with the truth, and not with persecution. From some of the things which have been said here to-night, one might suppose that we were living in the first half of the seventeenth century. Error never has been and never can be destroyed by persecution. I advocate the new code because it is in keeping with the refined ethics of the time in which we live. Nothing could be safer than the new rule governing consultations. When the old code came into existence there were, perhaps, a score of homœopaths in this country; now there are fully 6,000. What has persecution done to defeat error here? You cannot re-enact the old proscriptive, trades union code, if you want to. It is a dead letter like the Fugitive Slave Law, and this society should recognize the fact."

The society did recognize the fact by a vote of 135 to 43 in favor of the new code.

Naturally, in the ranks of the opponents of the advance were numbered not a few of our oldest and most honored physicians. They are not likely to outgrow their early prejudices. On the other hand, the leaven of liberty appears to work most strongly among our leading specialists. It is a credit to the regular physicians of New York State that they have taken the lead in this proper and inevitable reform; and those physicians of this city who did so much to determine the action of the State Society are to be congratulated upon their success in bringing their local society up to the same level.

A SNAKE TRAP WANTED.

The destruction of human life in India by venomous snakes is appalling, and the number of cattle killed by them is a serious drain upon the resources of the people. In Bengal alone about 10,000 persons are fatally bitten every year, and nearly as many more lives are lost by the same pests throughout British India. These are deaths officially registered. Sir Joseph Fayrer, the most competent living authority, believes that the reported deaths do not nearly include the whole number.

The cattle reported killed by snakes number between two and three thousand a year; also, in all probability, an under statement. Of late years considerable rewards have been offered for the killing of venomous snakes, and thousands have been destroyed, to the material lessening of the death rate of people and cattle; still the country is overrun with the pests, and is likely to be until better means have been devised for taking and destroying them.

In 1880 the deaths reported as from snake bite were 19,060; and 212,776 snakes were killed at a cost of over $4,500, in rewards. The next year (1881) there were fatally bitten 18,610 people; and 254,968 snakes were destroyed at a cost of nearly $5,000.

The snakes which do the mischief are, according to Fayrer, the cobra, the Bungarus cœruleus or krait, the echis, and the daboia or Russell's viper, all of which are most conspicuous snakes, and easily identified. There are others, such as Bungarus fasciatus, Ophiophagus elaps, which are dangerous, but comparatively rare, and seldom bite men, while the hydrophidæ, being confined to the sea or estuaries, are, though very poisonous, not so dangerous to man, and the trimeresuri, which are both uncommon and at the same time are not so deadly as to endanger life.

It is proposed that a corps of snake hunters shall be organized in every district, whose duty would be, under proper supervision, to seek out and destroy these pests. In several provinces gangs of paid snake hunters are already at work, with very encouraging results.

It appears that only kanjars or men of similar caste can engage in this work, the taking of life of any sort being a violation of the religious laws of most Hindoos. It is doubtful whether the snake killers will ever pursue their task, however well paid, with a degree of care and thoroughness likely to destroy their occupation. If the snakes are to be exterminated, it will have to be by other means.

Would it not be possible to devise traps in which snakes could be taken alive (by members of castes who could not kill them) to be turned over to proper authorities for destruction? Or traps might be made into which snakes could be enticed to their own destruction, traps which once set would go on performing their beneficent work endlessly, without the intervention of a caste ridden people, and without putting upon any one but the trap setter responsibility for taking life.

The scope for invention in this direction is very wide; and in view of the circumstance that the patent laws of India are quite favorable to inventors, and the fact already noted that the general government and several local governments have seriously undertaken the work of ridding the country of deadly snakes, and are spending large sums for the purpose, it is clear that a simple, cheap, and efficient snake trap would find a ready market there. If a trap could be produced that people of all castes could be induced to use, its success would be enormous. There are 200,000,000 people in British India alone that need such protection.

Giving Notice of the Patent.

Judge Wallace, in the recent case of the New York Pharmical Association *vs.* Tilden, decides that patentees are required to give "sufficient notice to the public" that the article is patented, "together with the day and year the patent was granted," by stamping or labeling the article. Where this has not been done, it is a fair interpretation to hold that when any equivalent notice has been given, the defendant has been "duly notified" within the meaning of section 4,900 Revised Statutes.

As the sufficient notice prescribed includes a specification of when the patent was granted, it is reasonable to conclude that any notice, verbal or written, that includes this information will suffice.

As to proving the signature to an assignment, the court held that assignments of patents duly acknowledged before a notary are sufficiently proved, and it is not incumbent upon the complainant to prove the signatures of the assignors.