PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FOR THE RELIEF OF THE SICK.

[The receipt of the last annual report of the Bridgewater Infirmary has been the occasion of directing our attention to some excellent observations published by Mr. Jonathan Toogood, on the utility of public institutions for the relief of the sick. We reprint the remarks of Mr. Toogood, which have been confirmed by an experience of thirty years. The abstract of expenses, &c., for the year 1841, shows that 1,164 out-patients, and 152 in-patients, have received efficient medical relief for the moderate sum of 469*l*.]

Numerous and excellent are the hospitals in this kingdom—and no country can boast of so many—still their number has been found insufficient to afford relief to the many objects which constantly present themselves: accordingly, dispensaries have been established in London, and other large places, as auxiliaries to those on a larger scale. Within these last few years the number of these auxiliary charities has much increased: and as they are calculated to afford a great deal of benefit at a moderate expense; and as they do not by any means interfere with, or supersede the necessity of, larger and more extensive institutions; it will be the object of this paper to illustrate the advantage of local establishments for the relief of the indigent sick.

Every medical practitioner must have found that cases frequently present themselves, amongst the lower classes and labouring poor, which do not admit of adequate relief at their own homes; and that consequently many valuable lives are lost, which might probably have been saved, if the sufferers could have obtained that advice and assistance which their cases demanded.

This applies more particularly to those who, though not actually paupers, are yet frequently objects of greater charity. The scanty pittance which this class of persons can afford to appropriate to advice and medicine, will not go far towards the removal of a painful disease or the alleviation of a serious accident.

It often happens that persons of this description, who, by their mutual industry and frugality, have been enabled to furnish their houses, and to provide themselves with decent necessities, are suddenly reduced to poverty by the affliction of sickness. Their trifling savings are soon expended in procuring common necessities, and nothing is left to supply medical assistance. The next step which these poor creatures generally take is, to dispose of their remaining property to obtain the necessary means for their support; and, after a long and painful struggle, they are reluctantly compelled to apply for parochial relief. The minds of many of this class revolt at first at the idea of resorting to such aid; they feel themselves degraded by it; and that spirit of independence which it is their pride to possess, and which it is so necessary to preserve, is for ever destroyed.

In times like the present, when distress has been so generally felt, many tradesmen and mechanics have been reduced from a state of compa-

rative independence and comfort to indigence; they have become proper objects for institutions of this kind, and have suffered no degradation in their minds, or in the estimation of their neighbours. Servants, too, are at all times proper objects, and ought to be relieved by such public charities. A fit of sickness is a great misfortune to any one, but to none more particularly than to servants, who in a short time are often compelled to part with all the earnings of their labour, if their cases are properly attended to; or, if their means do not enable them to procure such assistance as is requisite, are incapacitated from supporting themselves.

Although the humanity of our profession is, I trust, as extensive as its usefulness, it must be acknowledged that the system of farming parishes by the year (a system which cannot be reprobated too much) often prevents the poor inhabitants from receiving that attention which is so important to their recovery: for it often happens that the overseers* of parishes will contract for the medical and surgical care of the poor with the practitioner who will undertake it at the cheapest rate, without paying due regard to the humanity and skill of the contracting party; and much and deeply is it to be regretted, that in our enlightened profession men are to be found, willing to do that which their own consciences disapprove. It is a well-known fact, the salaries afforded by some parishes are so trifling, that the first slight illness which occurs in a poor family absorbs the sum allotted for the whole year; and, consequently, it is quite impossible that any medical man, however great his humanity and desire to fulfil that which is required of him, can devote such attention to those cases as he would to others under different circumstances. It is to be hoped that this uncharitable system will soon be abolished. Would it not be more for the interest of parishes to support institutions of this kind? And would not their burdens be lessened by doing so? The advantages to medical practitioners, and more especially to pupils, are too obvious to be insisted on.

In whatever point of view, then, this subject is considered, I think it will be found that local institutions for the relief of the sick are worthy our best attention and support; and that in no way can so much charity be exerted at so trifling an individual sacrifice. These considerations induced me to invite my medical brethren in this place to attempt an establishment. By the liberality of the inhabitants of this town and neighbourhood, a highly useful institution has been formed; and, in a period of nine years, a great deal of good has accrued from it.

As it was necessary that the greatest economy should be practised, it was determined to follow the plan of the Wiveliscombe Public Dispensary as nearly as possible; and, to expend no money in building, a house was rented and fitted up for the accommodation of eight in-patients, and for rendering assistance to out-patients. The donations enabled the managers to accomplish this; and the annual subscriptions were equal to every expense except the board of the out-patients: and here, again, the plan pursued at Wiveliscombe was resorted to, by making the in-patients allow 5*s*. a week towards their maintenance. A committee,

* Subsequent experience has proved that Poor-law guardians are little better than "overseers."—Eds.

treasurer, and secretary are appointed; and a respectable woman resides in the house, in the capacity of matron and housekeeper, with a nurse under her. As this house was found inconvenient in many respects, an appeal was made to the liberality of the subscribers, three years since, with such success as to enable the committee to purchase a most desirable house for the purpose, excellently situated, and capable of affording every comfort to the patients. The benefits of the charity, consequently, have been greatly extended. The cases which have fallen under the care of the physicians have, of course, been by far the most numerous; and a great portion of them have been very serious, and demanded great skill and attention. Although those belonging to the surgical department have been fewer, they have not been less important; and amongst the variety of cases which have presented themselves for operations, the following have been successfully performed:—cutting for the stone, fractures of the skull, amputation of the shoulder-joint, popliteal aneurism, amputation of the thigh, leg, and arms; &c. &c.

This description of charity claims superiority over all others, particularly from its easy attainment and trifling comparative expense. County hospitals require great subscriptions for their formation, and considerable funds for their support; but local institutions of this kind are established without much difficulty; and a small annual subscription will afford very extensive relief. In every town and neighbourhood people are to be found who would willingly make donations for so charitable a purpose, and as readily subscribe a guinea annually for its support; especially when it is found that the sum is so well applied, and that they materially lend their aid in alleviating the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. I hope and believe that medical men are everywhere to be found, willing and ready to afford their gratuitous assistance. I beg it to be distinctly understood, that it is not my wish to detract from the merit and usefulness of county hospitals. I am ready to admit the benefits conferred by them, to the fullest extent; but as the means of raising and conducting larger establishments are difficult to be obtained, whilst the necessary funds for carrying on such institutions as the one proposed are within the reach of most towns, and even of large villages; and as cases daily occur which require such prompt and immediate assistance as can only be afforded on the spot, I think they may be more generally adopted.

“JONATHAN TOOGOOD.”

Abstract of admissions, expenditure, &c., for 1841.

The number of out-patients treated was 1,164; of these, 953 were cured; 15 relieved; 9 died; 4 discharged at request; 27 made in-patients; 1 discharged for irregularity; 69 re-admitted; 66 remaining on books.

One hundred and fifty-two in-patients were treated; of these 118 were cured; 16 relieved; 4 made out-patients; 2 re-admitted; 2 forfeited; 1 dead; 9 remaining in house.

The receipts during 1841 were 476*l.*; thus made up. Subscriptions, 311*l.*; donations, 39*l.*; collections at churches, 41*l.*; patients' board, 58*l.*; interest, 25*l.* The expenses were 469*l.*, viz. house expenses and wages, 260*l.*; medicine and dis-

pensing, 121*l.*; rent, &c. 25*l.*; repairs, &c. 15*l.*; furniture and instruments, 6*l.*; stationery and printing, 21*l.*; sundries, &c. 17*l.*

SEPULTURE IN THE CITY OF LONDON.

THE following remarks on this subject were delivered at a recent meeting of the Common Council of the City of London.

“Mr. Anderton said it was high time that burials should be prohibited within the city. The scenes, in fact, which daily took place in the churchyards within the city were revolting in the extreme. Under the churches in the very heart of the city bodies were buried, not in leaden, but in wooden coffins; and not forty-eight hours ago, in a churchyard near his residence, he had seen broken pieces of coffins and the ashes of the dead removed by grave-diggers, to make room for new coffins; so that, notwithstanding all that had at different times been urged against the practice of crowding the city churchyards, there were many who, with their eyes and understandings open, persevered in that which all other civilized places condemned and abhorred. The adherence to the old system was strangely enough proved by the fact, that in some churchyards furnaces were prepared for burning the old coffins and the bones they contained.—(Expressions of surprise and disgust.) He was happy to find that the Bishop of London had directed his attention to the subject, and he felt convinced, from the general feeling expressed, that all that was necessary to accomplish the great object of burying the dead at a distance from the populous city of London, was the presentation of a petition to parliament.—(Cheers.) He felt assured, also, that the members of that court would deserve and receive the grateful acknowledgments of their fellow citizens for recommending immediate measures for the abolition of the existing practice.”

“Sir Peter Laurie said it was quite evident that with respect to the sepulture of the dead, no place in the world could be in a worse condition than the city of London. He supposed that every one had read Mr. Walker's pamphlet on the subject, and he felt much gratification at the appearance of so many beautiful cemeteries round the metropolis, and at the great public feeling on the subject of close interments which was daily exhibiting itself.”

“Mr. R. Taylor much approved of the report. In the parish in which he resided, the gravedigger had lately been killed by the fall of a pile of coffins. He also found by the parish books, that the graves were ordered to be dug to a very enormous depth, in order, of course, that the greater number of bodies might be deposited in them. Of the depth to which the unfortunate man who was killed had dug, some opinion might be formed, when it was said that sixteen coffins had tumbled upon him. In fact, the top of a grave was as far from the bottom as a two pair of stairs window was from the ground. In no great city in the world was such a thing allowed as sepulture within its precincts, and he trusted that London would not much longer form the revolting exception.”—*Times newspaper.*