

LUNACY LAWS.—So far as yet appears, the inquiry by the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Lunacy Laws is mainly directed to the consideration of the question, whether the existing guarantees for the protection of the liberty of the subject, and of the estate of lunatics, are adequate for the purpose. Two proposals have been made by witnesses with the view of increasing these guarantees. The first is, to require that the medical certificates necessary for placing a patient in an asylum shall be granted exclusively by specialists who have made insanity their particular study; and the second, that all Chancery lunatics requiring asylum treatment shall be placed in special asylums to be built for their accommodation.

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### OBITUARY.

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PETER BROTHERSTON, F.R.C.S. EDIN. 1858, SURGEON, Alloa.

THE readers of this Journal, and especially the older ones, must have noticed with regret the death of Mr Brotherston of Alloa. It is not too much to say, that among the provincial surgeons of Great Britain he stood in the highest rank; whether we test his excellence by his knowledge of the profession he loved so well, or his skill in the practical application of that knowledge, when his judgment led him to the conclusion that manual interference was necessary. No wonder, then, that, after a painstaking, hardworking busy service of thirty-five years in Alloa and the surrounding country, his sudden death should have caused a universal feeling of deep regret among those who knew and esteemed him. In Alloa we have been told the scene at the funeral was most impressive, all from the highest to the humblest of the district doing honour to his obsequies—and no wonder, for he was a man that would as soon have given the benefit of his valuable services to the poorest in the land as to the most affluent. A difficult case, requiring special surgical knowledge, was the main object of his ambition, and the annals of the Cottage Hospital which he was chiefly instrumental in founding, and which he worked gratuitously, can show the amount of unremunerated labour he performed from the pure love of his profession.

He was born in 1820, and was the son of the much-esteemed minister of the Established Church in Alloa. When about sixteen years of age he was apprenticed to Dr M'Gowan of Alloa, who was in the way of seeing a good deal of surgical practice among the collieries, and it has been suggested that while with him he acquired the great love of surgery afterwards manifested. It possibly may be so, but at the same time it must be borne in mind that he studied in Edinburgh, and that his intense admiration for the late Professor Syme was one of the most marked features in his sub-

sequent career. It is well known that the Professor entertained a high opinion of his surgical abilities, and in later years, one of the most welcome and honoured visitors at his Infirmary Clinique was Peter Brotherston.

There is no doubt that, while acquiring fame as a surgeon was from the first the highest object of his ambition, his active mind had room for other pursuits; and the archives of the Archæological Society of Alloa, started in 1863, and of which he was chosen vice-president in the first year of its existence, can show how useful he could make himself in that department of science. We shall print below his contributions to that Institution. His illustrations in natural history were chiefly procured by the deadly accuracy of his gun. Mr Brotherston was not only a good shot but a good angler; and his friends can look back with a melancholy pleasure to the happy ploys they had in his company, where the natural beauty of the scenery and the capture of the finny tribe were much enhanced, as regards enjoyment, by the vivacity and quaintness of his remarks. Though he completed his course of study for his degree at the Edinburgh University, he did not go in for it, but took instead the diploma of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and in 1858 became a Fellow of the sister college in Edinburgh. He was not a voluminous writer, but his contributions, chiefly to this Journal, were practical in an eminent degree. In 1856 he was one of the first to revive in Scotland the operation of excision of the knee-joint, which had fallen into disuse, but which was about that time strongly urged on the profession by Mr Jones of Jersey. His two cases were successful, and he brought one of them down to the Medico-Chirurgical Society of Edinburgh for exhibition. Besides performing, and performing well, a large number of the major operations in surgery, his skill as an accoucheur was generally acknowledged, and in the surgical department of that special branch of medicine his hands were always ready to do what his knowledge and great experience dictated. Two papers illustrate this: (1) "Case of post-mortem Cæsarean section, child saved" (*Edinburgh Medical Journal*, 1868); (2) "Case of Cephalotripsy after turning" (*Ibid.* 1874).

In what we have hitherto said we have abstained from intruding on the privacy of his domestic life, but we may be permitted to remark, that from what we have observed, his amiable and affectionate disposition endeared him to all who were bound to him by family ties. There was a natural simplicity about him, which contrasted forcibly with the shrewdness he so often displayed. Though not quite an Edwards, perhaps, in the firm fixity of pursuit, it is notorious that from early boyhood he showed a warm predilection for the charms of natural history, and acquired in early life a very respectable museum by his own labours and prowess. In later years his extensive practice in a more useful profession interfered greatly with his earlier tastes; but even with impaired health he

had yet found time to commence putting together for the benefit of the Archæological Society a paper entitled—"Natural history researches at San Remo."

The mention of this place naturally brings us to the beginning of the end.

About four years ago he began to be subject to occasional attacks of asthma, which incapacitated him for the time from work, and which evidently acted on his nervous system, for his friends noticed him to be frequently oppressed in spirits, and affected occasionally indeed even to tears. After a severe illness of this nature,—asthma and great depression—Dr Warburton Begbie recommended a complete relaxation from work and a winter spent at San Remo. He went there on the 20th January, and returned on the 24th May 1875 much improved in health, and hopeful of a complete change for the better; but after a time the old symptoms began to show themselves, and it was evident to all around him that he had serious apprehensions about himself. His last appearance among his Edinburgh friends was at the Harveian Festival of the 12th of April, where the depression in spirits of one who used to be among the most hilarious was very generally remarked. We firmly believe that a presentiment of his approaching end was at that time preying on his mind. Eight days afterwards, on the morning of the 20th April, he was found dead in his bed, his head resting in a placid manner on his hand. Subsequent examination, we are told, showed extensive fatty degeneration of the heart.

We must sum up this imperfect sketch by saying that his native town, Alloa, has lost one of its most useful and valued citizens; his family, a kind and loving husband and father; his friends, a true and most obliging associate; and medical science, one of its most ardent votaries.

The following is a list of Papers read by the late Mr Brotherston to the Alloa Society of Natural Science and Archæology:—Seven papers on "The Birds of Clackmannanshire," in 1863, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1869, 1870, and 1873. "The Rarer Fishes found in the Forth," in 1864. "Notes on recently captured Whales in the Forth, near Alloa," in 1865. "Our Holiday in Harris," in 1870.

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## CORRESPONDENCE.

*To the Editor of the Edinburgh Medical Journal.*

UNITED COLLEGE, ST ANDREWS, May 1877.

SIR,—In the May issue of your Journal appears a review of my "Ancient Life-History of the Earth," which contains certain misleading or absolutely incorrect statements, and upon which, therefore, I feel entitled to make one or two brief remarks:—

In the first place, as regards the *illustrations* of the work, your