

NEW BOOKS REVIEWED.

BY ADOLPH MEYER, CHARLES JOHNSTON AND JULIUS CHAMBERS.

"A MIND THAT FOUND ITSELF."*

THE human mind is the triumph of biological evolution; but, like all the boons that come to us, our mental development will at times miscarry—fortunately often merely as a warning against greater mischief, but often enough so as to bring us the saddest experience that can befall a family—to have a member alienated from the common ground of mental life for months, for years and perhaps for life. Untold unhappiness has been produced by minor forms as well as by the graver ones of the disorder. Here, for once, a mental illness has ended in a boon—it has matured, if not created, a man for a cause.

Mr. Beers, a graduate of Yale University, had the misfortune to develop a type of mental disorder such as is shown by about fifteen per cent. of those who are admitted to our State hospitals. After over two years of depression, governed by a not unusual tangle of misinterpretations of his situation, he emerged into an "elation" in which an eminently sane instinct got the upper hand—a desire to right injustice and to stand up for the Golden Rule. The provisions created for the care of such victims of fate and of ignorance—the hospitals small and large, private and public—are perhaps much better than the public and even the medical profession are apt to admit. But, alas! there are many defects in them, and the experience of Mr. Beers was more strenuous than that of the average patient, yet, as I have said, it may prove to have been for the good of many.

From a private institution which practically is the personal property of its medical head, he was taken to an endowed private

* "A Mind That Found Itself: an Autobiography." By Clifford Whittingham Beers. New York and London: Longmans, Green & Co.

institution, and from there to a State hospital. He describes his experiences in a spirit of straightforward autobiography, and the result is a book which, if anything can, will rouse a sentiment among all, that there is much to be done for the amelioration of existing conditions by those who are willing to lend their intelligence, good sense and civic instincts to a great cause.

This book of Mr. Beers is unique. There is a considerable literature regarding "abuses" and some revengeful propaganda, written by ex-patients, ex-attendants and, occasionally, by writers of merit who saw a chance of stirring the public. But I know of none animated by a fairer spirit in the treatment of the undoubted hardships to which the author was subjected. He does not make them stand out as the one outrage or trouble in the world; he looks fairly at the situation; he takes advice as to his interpretations and recommendations. If he expresses himself more drastically than an outsider or a physician would, we can easily excuse him, for he himself had to endure the things of which he tells. He has one aim: through a knowledge of what he has experienced himself, and seen and heard, he hopes to get concerted action to improve a system too readily considered good enough as it is.

The first three parts of the book contain a vivid account of the life and experiences of the author and of the origin of his book. In the fourth part, he presents the remedies at hand today. And in an appendix he reproduces some articles by well-known authorities which are well fitted to suggest the direction in which modern practical psychiatry moves.

A reader conversant with the situation can readily see how a whole combination of circumstances conspired to create the conditions under which Mr. Beers suffered. Some of the difficulties are among those which tax us even in normal life: insufficient judgment in dealing with our fellow men. Wherever the more complex difficulty of dealing with groups of patients is handled in a summary fashion "by wards," where the individual is submerged in a compact of compromises, nothing but the utmost care will prevent real hardships. The pattern of a ward is apt to be shaped according to the demands of the patients who cause the most serious trouble—that is, the more or less chronic cases. If a ward is in such a condition as the "Bull-Pen" described in the book, the official visits are short and the chances of an

inquiry into individual needs by the physician small and almost hopeless. These wards have existed so long that, like restraint, they are considered inevitable by those who have grown up with them. Yet we know that the great majority of the disorders seen in violent wards are artifacts, and that "violent wards" are to quite an extent the result of a crude drifting along effete lines. Unimaginative officials, uninformed of what is going on in the world, and penurious legislative censors of expenses and a misinformed public govern too many hospitals, and will continue to do so unless help is offered.

Mr. Beers looks for conscientious investigations. I doubt whether legislative investigations as urged by him can achieve the desired result. A body of experts representing the hospitals, the profession outside, economists and sociologists and men of public affairs as free as possible from fear of new responsibilities and of compromises, and appointed from time to time in every State for a comprehensive review and report of the whole status of the prevention and management of mental disorders, would serve the purpose better. But Mr. Beers also sees farther. He realizes the necessity of an organization of the public for the purpose of taking up a campaign which will bring to those who need it the warnings and suggestions which can only be obtained from a study of the actual wrecks. These are the balancing factors without which his plea would easily share the fate of the numerous outcries of the past.

There is, of course, always a danger that a book containing reports of such a serious character might inflame the imagination of a suspicious public, and foster indiscriminate distrust of the hospitals as they exist; and that, on the other hand, the hospitals which are so often harassed unreasonably by scandalmongers, from mean motives, might put on an air of perfection. Both these risks are, I trust, avoided by the frankness with which Mr. Beers describes himself as well as the conditions.

Moreover, the book comes at a more opportune time than its futile predecessors. There is a growing demand for more knowledge of mental disorders and mental difficulties among physicians, as well as a growing feeling of responsibility about mental hygiene among people generally. The book indicates some direct and concrete lines along which there must be better information, and Mr. Beers is not only willing, but anxious, to put the whole

task under the control of an organization which shall represent the entire movement of mental hygiene, and give the special needs a balance and proportion which they have never attained in the past.

Mr. Beers was, I think, wise to give his book as it stands without making it an exhaustive treatise on how other people should do their work. Professor William James, in the letters reproduced in the introduction, justly praises it as "fit to remain in literature as a classic account 'from within' of an insane person's psychology"; "in style, in temper, in good taste, it is irreproachable." Nobody can escape the most valuable effect of the book—that of its drawing the reader to a striking and fascinating personality, direct and sensible, and promising to become an excellent champion for a great cause. It will take many helpers and much unselfish effort to launch the attempt to solve the broad problem. May the book of Mr. Beers spread the conviction that much is to be done, but that for the most pressing difficulties help is at hand as soon as the scattered efforts shall be sufficiently co-ordinated.

Many recommendations in the book, such as those concerning commitments, correspondence, and the desirability of a National Society could hardly be brought more directly before practical readers than in connection with this most fascinatingly written human document.

ADOLPH MEYER.

THE POEMS OF W. B. YEATS.*

NEARLY every page in these two beautiful volumes brings back some early memory of my friend. When he writes:

"Yellow the leaves of the rowan above us,
And yellow the wet wild-strawberry leaves,"

I think of a long avenue leading up to the Dublin hills, whither we used to wander on school holidays, and where we once watched a red squirrel among the redder rowan berries. And when the Peasant in the Countess Cathleen tells how

"people throng to sell,
Noisy as seagulls tearing a dead fish,"

or the demon Merchant says:

* "The Poetical Works of W. B. Yeats." Vol. I, Lyrical Poems. Vol. II, Plays. New York: The Macmillan Company. London: Macmillan & Co.