

Online archive 23

Asylum dance

Following the annual general meeting of the Association in Edinburgh in 18... those attending were invited to a dinner at the Morningside Asylum which was followed by a dance. This asylum had separate sections for private and pauper patients. An account from the Medical Times was given in the Journal.

‘The following day, Dr Skae entertained the Association at an elegant collation at the Asylum. Several of the Directors of the Asylum were present, to add their welcome to that of Dr Skae.

In the evening a grand ball took place at the Asylum. The ball-room was decorated with great taste, and the inmates of the Asylum took part in the festival, and danced, with the most wonderful sane propriety, decorum and grace, reels and quadrilles – polkas, waltzes, and mazurkas being properly forbidden within the walls of the Asylum. A highland piper in full costume played in magnificent style, and the general dance music of the band of the Asylum would have done credit to Almack’s. Several learned, discreet, sober, and demure members of the Association did not consider it beneath their dignity and position to join in the various dances with the patients. Mary, Queen of Scots, graciously condescended to accept our worthy publisher as her partner in the quadrille. Three or four of the Professors of the University were present, and appeared greatly to enjoy the festivities. Every person at the ball was much struck with the quiet decorum of the patients. There was not, during the whole of the evening, the slightest approach to anything like singularity of conduct or eccentricity on the part of any one patient present; a stranger, had he not been informed of the fact, would never have conceived that he saw before him nearly 300 insane patients enjoying the entertainment so kindly and judiciously provided for them by their excellent and benevolent Physician, Dr Skae.

During the interval between the dances, some members of the Association amused the patients and general company by reciting various pieces and by singing comic songs. Drs Davy and Boisragon are entitled to special notice. Dr Boisragon afforded the company much amusement by singing in character a song descriptive of the wild and plaintive grief of a fair inhabitant of Portsmouth, at the heartless and cruel conduct of the “press gang”, who had forced her lover into her Majesty’s naval service. The despair of poor “Mary” at having her sweetheart thus dragged from her embraces, was depicted by the learned psychological physician with wonderful skill. A loud burst of applause followed Dr Boisragon’s retirement from the ball-room, but a general shout of “encore” from the patients and their guests induced the worthy psychologist to repeat the song.’

The dance would have occurred in the private section of the hospital which was considerably better furnished than that available for non-paying patients.

References

Online archive 20, *Patients' views*

Online archive 9, *Thomas Smith Clouston*

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