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John Bucknill (1817–1897) (first editor of the *Journal of Mental Science*)

As the first Editor of the Association Journal from 1853 to 1862 John Bucknill ensured that the Association did not founder and was able to increase its membership. The Journal has continued to the present and is the second oldest psychiatric journal still extant. He became Lord Chancellor's Visitor, was President of the Association and was knighted.

John Bucknill was born in Leicestershire in December 1817, where his father practised as a surgeon. He was educated at the local Grammar School and at Rugby school under Dr Arnold, though he did not complete his course at that school. In 1835 he became a student at University College, London, and took the degree of Bachelor of Medicine at London University in 1840 obtaining high honours both in medicine and surgery. Subsequently he became house-surgeon, under Liston, at University College Hospital. After leaving University College Hospital he practised in Chelsea until his health broke down and he was ordered to a warmer climate (Madeira, Devonshire or Cornwall), which led to his application to the Devon County Asylum. He was appointed the first medical superintendent of the then recently built county Asylum at Exminster, Devon, in 1844, and held that position for eighteen years. He was allowed a free hand by the authorities, and was able to organise the asylum as he wished, with the result that he received the approval of both his own Committee and of the Commissioners in Lunacy. A new programme he initiated providing extra-mural residences for the treatment of some of his patients, was spoken of by the Commissioners in their thirteenth annual report. 'There were also seven other female patients, who were boarding and lodging, under the charge of the medical superintendent and the committee, in cottages beyond the precincts of the asylum.' The condition of these women was reported to be very satisfactory, and 'we should be glad if the example thus set were followed by the visitors in other counties'. In 1852, while at Exminster, he took his M.D.Lond. and

shortly afterwards became a Fellow of University College, of which body he was also a Member of Council for some years.

Suggestions for the publication of a journal to represent the Association of Asylum Medical Officers were first ‘made in Germany’ by Dr Damerow, of Halle, in 1844, and were supported by Dr Bucknill and others, but the scheme was not carried out until 1852. In that year *The Asylum Journal of Mental Science* was started, with Dr Bucknill as its first editor. The first number of the new journal was published 15 November, 1853, and for the first two years of its existence appeared every 6 weeks, after which it was made into a quarterly journal and its style and appearance improved.

Dr Bucknill edited the Journal successfully for nine years until he was appointed Lord Chancellor’s Visitor in 1862, when the duties of his new office compelled him to resign. His term of editorship was marked by steady hard work and ‘he spared neither himself nor others in providing for the regular appearance of the Journal’. His son wrote: ‘I well remember the early days of the *Journal of Mental Science*, and how I used to ride on my half-wild Exmoor pony backwards and forwards between Exminster Asylum and Pollard’s, the printer’s, in Exeter, with proofs for the press. It mattered not what was the weather or the hour; I had to do it and do it quickly.’ A pamphlet on the law and theory of insanity was written by Dr Bucknill in 1852, and was devoted as were many of his publications prior to 1855, to the legal relations of insanity.

John Bucknill was heavily involved in the enrolment of a corps of citizen soldiers, under the name of the Exeter and South Devon Volunteers, with the help of Earl Fortescue. The new corps, which was officially styled the 1st Exeter and Devonshire Rifle Volunteers, proved highly successful, and formed the nucleus of a later citizen

army. He entered heart and soul into the new movement, and devoted himself in his spare moments to the organisation, drilling, and various other duties connected with the regiment, carrying them out in such a manner as to earn the admiration and thanks of all concerned. He was the first recruit sworn in, and stuck to the ranks all through his connection with the regiment, although frequently pressed to become a commissioned officer.

In 1855 he contributed an article to the *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review*, 'The Pathology of Insanity', and in 1857 was awarded the Sugden Prize for his thesis 'Unsoundness of Mind in its relation to Criminal Actions.' These were followed, in 1858, by *A Manual of Psychological Medicine*. This book was written in collaboration with Dr D. Hack Tuke, and went through four editions. The two authors wrote separately, Dr Hack Tuke writing the first half of the volume, comprising the chapters on Lunacy Law, classification, causation, and the various forms of insanity; while Dr Bucknill contributed the chapters dealing with diagnosis, pathology, and treatment. The work was for some years the standard British book on psychological medicine. In 1859 Bucknill was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and subsequently filled the posts of Censor (1879–81) and Lumleian Lecturer (1877). In 1859 he took an excursion into general literature, and wrote the *Psychology of Shakespeare*, followed in 1860 by the *Medical Knowledge of Shakespeare*. Both books were good examples of his literary style and critical acumen. He also wrote an account of Jonathan Swift's deafness realising it was Menière's disease. 1860 saw Dr Bucknill President of the Association his work had done much to foster and develop.

Dr Bucknill, having been appointed Lord Chancellor's Visitor of Lunatics in 1862 resigned the superintendency of the Devon County Asylum and the editorship of the *Journal of Mental Science*, and devoted himself to the duties of his new office. He was eminently suited to his new post, where his commanding presence and authoritative manner never failed to impress. In 1876 Dr Bucknill resigned his office under the Lord Chancellor and commenced private consulting practice in his special department, but, nevertheless, continued to interest himself in asylum matters. In 1877 he delivered the presidential address before the Psychological Section at the annual meeting of the British Medical Association at Manchester, showing a grasp of detail in medical matters outside his own special department which called attention to the extent of his general professional knowledge.

In 1875 Dr Bucknill visited the United States, with a view to studying the question of inebriety and its treatment in that country. The record of his observations made there, and their special bearing on proposed legislation for inebriates in this country, are contained in his book, *Habitual Drunkenness and Insane Drunkards*, published in 1878. Several papers on American asylums for the insane were also the outcome of this visit. About this time, in conjunction with Sir James Crichton-Browne, Dr Ferrier, and Dr Hughlings Jackson, he edited the neurological journal *Brain*. His later writings chiefly concerned themselves with the care of the insane and their legal control, and the relation of madness to crime. He became a Fellow of the Royal Society, a Justice of the Peace for the County of Warwick, a visitor of the Warwick County Asylum, and a Governor of Bethlem Hospital.

Sir John Bucknill's views did not always commend themselves to his medical colleagues, for example his strictures on private asylums – but his opinions were always honest and outspoken, and he possessed the courage of them. He was a keen sportsman, fond of all kinds of outdoor sports – shooting in Caithness and North Wales, fishing in Canada and Norway, foxhunting in Warwickshire, and whilst a Volunteer a good rifle shot. He was knighted in 1894, the honour being conferred not only as a recognition of his services in the matter of national Defence, but also as a mark of the distinguished place he held in his own profession. He died in 1897. As to the cause of his death, Dr Barnard Scott, who made the autopsy, wrote to his son, Colonel Bucknill: 'Septic inflammation from catheterism – brain healthy as yours – all his symptoms due to septic absorption – we have not found anything wrong, except in the kidneys and bladder.'

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