TREATMENT OF A MAN OF
EDUCATION AND DELICATE FRAME
AT THE
ROYAL HOSPITAL OF BETHLEM.
STATEMENTS OF MR. SERGEANT ADAMS.

At a special committee of the governors, held at Bethlem Hospital, on Friday, the 13th November, 1840,

The President (Sir P. Laurie) stated, that he had directed the general committee to be specially summoned to consider the circumstances relative to the alleged treatment of a patient sent to this hospital, by order of the Secretary of State for the Home Department, on the 15th of September last.

The following report from the physicians and apothecary of the hospital was presented:—

“To the Chairman of the Bethlem Subcommittee.

“Sir:—In obedience to the instructions of the sub-committee of the 30th ult., we hasten to lay before you our report respecting ‘the confinement and restraint to which A. B. has been subjected since he has been in the hospital.’

“He has been subject, in fact, to no restraint whatever, with the exception of a strait-waistcoat for five or ten minutes daily, at such times as his food has been administered to him by the resident medical officer, and this is in conformity with the best principles, being intended simply for his own protection, lest in so delicate an operation any injury should arise from his own resistance. He has very pertinaciously refused his food, which is no uncommon symptom among lunatics, and the necessary interference of feeding is simply to preserve the patient’s life, and the slight restraint at the moment is merely to render the process of feeding secure.

“With reference to the second head of confinement, during a period of ten days of his residence it has been found necessary occasionally, in consequence of his great violence and noisy clamour, and unmeaning shouts of ‘murder,’ to place him in his bedroom, and sometimes the key has been turned upon him there for half an hour at a time, and occasionally, perhaps, for an hour. With this exception, he has never been confined at all, but has had the same range which his fellow-patients enjoy, and this has not taken place during the last three weeks, in any instance. He is a very dangerous and malevolent patient, and great watchfulness is necessary to prevent mischief. He was never placed under any sort of chastisement or restraint for attempting to strike the steward; and it is universally adopted as a principle in the hospital, that

patients, being irresponsible, are never to be treated as culprits.—Your obedient servants,

(Signed) EDWARD THOMAS MONRO, M.D.
ALEXANDER MORISON, M.D.
JOHN THOMAS.”

“Nov. 4, 1840.”

Mr. Sergeant Adams having addressed the committee, and the keepers having been examined, it was

Resolved unanimously,—That this committee, having investigated the circumstances relative to the treatment of the patient in question, considers that the statement made by the chairman of the visiting justices of the Hanwell Lunatic Asylum, and confirmed by Mr. Sergeant Adams at the last Middlesex quarter-sessions, on Thursday, the 29th of October, has arisen from misconception, and that there is no foundation whatever for such statement.

Resolved unanimously,—That this committee fully approves of the report of the medical officers as to the treatment of the patient in question, and that a copy thereof, and of the resolution passed this day, be sent to the Secretary of State, and inserted in the usual morning and evening papers.

By order, JOHN POYNTER, Clerk.

Bridewell Hospital, Nov. 16, 1840.

To the Editor of the “Morning Chronicle.”

Sir:—It is with deep regret that I read in your paper of this morning an advertisement from the governors of Bethlem Hospital, containing a report made to the Secretary of State respecting the treatment of a patient, and the resolutions of a committee of governors upon the same subject. If the matter had dropped with the meeting, I should have remained silent; but now that the resolutions are before the public, it is necessary, in vindication of myself, that I should also lay before them my share in the transaction, and leave them to judge of the propriety of those resolutions, and of the depth and sufficiency of the previous inquiry.

No application was made to me until the report of the medical officers had been made; but subsequently, at the suggestion of one of the governors, a special meeting of the committee was summoned with my consent, and at which by their request I attended.

The report having been read, the president proposed that I should make my statement; that the statements of the keepers (reduced to writing the preceding day) should then be read, and the keepers then called in, in order, as the worthy president observed, “to give me the privilege of cross-examining them, in which I might exercise my talents to the utmost.” I declined to enter into a contest with the keepers, or take any part in the proceedings, beyond making my statement, and asking a few questions of the steward. I then read my notes, taken at the time of my visit, as follows:—

"MEMORANDUM.

"I went this morning to church at the asylum, wishing to speak to some of the committee respecting an orphan there. I took the opportunity of visiting Bethlem, to inquire how A. B. (a patient who had been sent there under my certificate) was going on. I was shown into a basement corridor, and the person who conducted me said to the keeper, 'This gentleman wishes to see A. B.' He said, 'I will bring him out to you, Sir.' I replied, 'No, I thank you, I will go into him.' He then unlocked an iron gate, and admitted me into the ward, and unlocked a cell-door and opened it. The cell was perfectly dark, and I believe without window or the means of admitting light. A. B. sprang from his bed in a remote corner, and, holding his hands in a supplicating posture, said, 'Good God, Sir, why am I here?—what is it for?' I asked the keeper why he was in that place? He said, 'He is here for striking Mr. Nicholls.' I said, 'How long has he been here?' He said, 'A short time, a day or two, or a few days,' I do not remember which. I said, 'A. B., how long have you been here?' He said, 'A month.' The keeper said, 'He does not mean a month in the cell, but a month in the hospital.' I said, 'A. B., how long have you been in this cell?' He said, 'A fortnight—a fortnight.' The keeper said, 'A week, or may be ten days.' Afterwards I returned by the same ward, and saw his cell-door open. I said, 'How is this? why is this door open now, when it was locked before?' The keeper said, 'It was not locked; it was only close shut to.' I said, 'Do not say so; I saw you unlock it.' The keeper said, 'You did not see me unlock it.' I said, 'I saw one of you.' I said to A. B., 'Is the door of your cell kept locked or not?' He said, 'It is locked—it is locked.' I said, 'Keeper, How is this?' He said, 'It is only locked when he is noisy; when he is quiet it is only close shut to.' I made no reply, but walked away. As well as I could judge from the darkness of the cell, the blankets were clean, and he was plentifully supplied with them.

"University Club, October 11, 1840,
Half-past two o'clock."

I then added, that I had not received any information respecting A. B. prior to my visit, and that there was no embarrassment in the keeper's manner. He said, "For striking Mr. Nicholls," in a straightforward way, as if there was nothing for him to conceal or to be ashamed of. The deposition of the keeper who had the care of A. B., and who opened the door to me, was then read. It was at variance with mine, and contradicted me materially; but as the committee refused to allow me a copy, I cannot state its contents. He then gave his oral testimony as follows:—That the cell-door was

not locked at the time of my visit, but that A. B. had gone into it voluntarily, about half an hour before, to lie down; and the shutters had been put up at A. B.'s own request, to exclude the light. *That he was obliged to put the key into the door to open it, although it was not locked, for there was no handle, nor anything to open the door with; and though the person in the cell could push the door open from within, no person on the outside could open the door except by putting in the key.*

His statement was not continuous, as I have given it, but in answer to questions put by the committee; and the effect of his statement was to satisfy every person present (except myself, who had seen the act) that the keeper was speaking truth, and that I was mistaken. Strange to say, neither the president, nor the treasurer, nor the physicians, nor the apothecary, nor the steward, nor any one of the sixteen committee-men present knew, or at the instant remembered, that there was something on the outside of every cell-door, by which, without using the key, the keepers can and actually do open the cells when they are not locked. My apology for my own want of knowledge is, that I had been in the wards but twice, and on both occasions my attention was directed to other things. So much for the insertion of the key. Now for the putting up the shutters. When the keeper said that the shutters were put up at A. B.'s request, "to exclude the light," Dr. Munro added, "and to prevent the neighbourhood from being disturbed, and to keep out the weather." I said, "Dr. Munro, will you allow me to make a note of what you have just said?" He was silent; but the feeling of the committee, I thought, was (it was most decidedly 'my own feeling'), that the expression about the weather was not intended, and that it would be unfair and unkind to fix him to it; but the doctor was right, as I shall presently show. The keeper having thus accounted satisfactorily to the committee for the state in which I found the patient, a second keeper was called, who said that he had seen A. B. about the gallery some time during the morning of my visit, and the committee having no further evidence to offer in contradiction or explanation of my statement, a dialogue of the following kind took place between Mr. Nicholls and myself:—"Do not the keepers make a nightly return in writing of all patients in restraint?—Yes. Was A. B. on any one occasion included in these returns?—No. On what day was A. B. sent to that cell?—September 28th. Was not that the day when he struck you?—It was. Is not the weekly return-book of restraints made up from the daily returns?—It is. How then is it that, as A. B.'s name is not found in any of the daily returns, the following entries are to be found in the weekly

returns?—‘October 2d. A. B., since the 28th instant, occasionally confined to his cell—violent.’ ‘October 11th. A. B. same as last return.—By Mr. Thomas the apothecary: I made those entries from what I saw and heard; I had no written documents or returns from which to make them. Can I get any further information on this subject from any of the hospital records?—You cannot. Why was A. B. removed from one cell to the other? By Mr. Nicholls: Because he was violent.’

It was upon this evidence, and the report of the medical officers, that the resolutions of the committee were founded.

One of the committee asked if I objected to give my own opinion. I said, after this report, I cannot suppose that the confinement to the cell was without intermission for the whole period, which was my first impression, but I am by no means satisfied that he has not been locked up more frequently and for longer periods than the keeper admits, or the medical officers are aware of, or remember; but from the admission of this case in the nightly returns of restraints, this cannot now be ascertained; all dwells on memory and assertion. I retired, at my own suggestion, from the room, during the discussion on the resolutions, not being a member of the committee.

Now for the sequel: I observed afterwards, in passing through the wards, a large bolt case on the outside of the door of every cell. The next day I went with the steward to the cell in question. The shutter was down and the door open; I closed it, but it immediately opened again. I asked the cause. “The wind, Sir,” said the keeper, “is so strong we cannot keep the door shut when the shutter is down.” I then observed that the cell was unglazed, and saw the correctness of Dr. Munro’s remark. A patient in such a cell in the month of November needed the shutter to be up “to keep out the weather.” The shutter was then put up, and I left the cell, carefully shutting the door after me, and shortly afterwards desired the keeper (who had made the statement to the committee) to take the shutter down again. To do this it was necessary to open the cell door. He came with his keys in his hand, but ignorant of my object, and off his guard, he applied his finger and thumb to the bolt-case, and opened the door. At the same moment I said to the steward, “Do you see.” He said, “Yes, but the keeper wishes to speak; what were you going to say?” “Why, Sir, that I may sometimes use the key inadvertently.” Contrast this answer with his statement in italics made by the same keeper to the committee, and no further proof of the amount of reliance to be placed on his testimony, whether when examined by the medical officers, or before the committee, is necessary. To confirm this fact, I afterwards shut a door in

another ward, and asked another keeper to open it, who applied his finger and thumb precisely as the former keeper had done. After these proofs no one can doubt that my eyes and ears were not deceived, and that A. B. was locked in his cell, and in total darkness at the time I visited him.

And now a few words as to the change of cell which, in my judgment, turns out to be the most serious part of the case. The answer of Mr. Nicholls appeared at the time to me a singular one; viz., that a patient should be removed from one room to another “because he was violent.” To shut him up in his bed-room when violent occasionally, and to turn the key upon him, would be proper, and is precisely the practice adopted elsewhere; but why change the room? And it is very remarkable that the report is wholly silent upon this most important fact. The words of the report are: “It has been found necessary *occasionally* to place him in his bed-room, and sometimes the key has been turned upon him there for half an hour at a time, and *occasionally*, perhaps, for an hour;” but no hint is given that it was necessary to change his cell, or place him in utter darkness. The committee, however, seemed to consider the answer satisfactory, and made no inquiries of any of the officers respecting it. Before quitting the hospital, I inspected the two cells. The one (though perfectly secure) is a light, airy cell, with a boarded floor, and south aspect, and situated on the first floor; the other is a cold gloomy cell, with a stone floor, and drain in the centre, with a north aspect, and upon the basement. One of those in which the worst and most dirty patients are confined, and the only one in the hospital which is unglazed, and from which light can be totally excluded; it is numbered 12, on the basement story; the other cell is the third from the end, on the south side of the first floor gallery.

Now, when I reflect that A. B. is a man of education, acutely sensible of his situation, rational upon many subjects, delicate in frame and infirm in health, *but very troublesome*, I must say it seems to me that there was more of *temper* than of good sense or right feeling in the removal of such a patient because he was violent, into the worst cell of the worst ward, and amongst the worst patients in the hospital; and that it is not surprising that the keeper should imagine the removal was for striking the steward, which act, or attempted act, was nearly contemporaneous with it. I must also say, that his detention there for so long a period at this season of the year does, in my judgment, wear the appearance of *punishment*, rather than medical treatment. Even assuming, which is not the case, as the position of the two cells will show, that “his unmeaning cries of murder” could have disturbed the neighbourhood in one cell rather than in the

other, why could he not *occasionally* have had the key turned upon him in the basement cell "for half an hour, or perhaps an hour," without being compelled to occupy it day and night? and the more rare the times of the restraint, and the shorter their periods, the less the pretence for the removal. It is also, I think, more than probable that, under all the circumstances, the word *occasional* will be felt to be a most unsatisfactory term for expressing the days and times during which he has been confined, especially when no daily returns have been made of those days and times, and no censure passed upon the keepers who omitted to make them. I think, also, it is probable that the public will agree with me, that the committee came to a hasty resolution in declaring the charge *to be without any foundation whatever*; and I cannot resist the belief that when they "fully approved of the treatment of the patient," the change of the cells did not present itself to their consideration.

It is with great satisfaction I am able to add, that upon a second visit to the hospital, I found A. B. in a light cheerful room, to which I was informed he was removed on the day following my former visit, and that it has not been found necessary since that period (as appears by the report of the medical officers), to place him in any restraint whatever. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN ADAMS.

5, Stanhope-place, Hyde-park,
Nov. 17, 1840.

Upon the perusal of these documents, it is by no means clear to us that Sergeant Adams may not have been hasty in his admission, that the patient was not locked-up for the whole time he was in the cell. Why were not the daily returns made by the keepers of the times of his confinement? Why did not the apothecary, who must have known something of the matter, by naming A. B. in his weekly returns, direct the keepers to make the returns? Why did the physicians sign the return-books so improperly made out? And why is not all this stated in the report of the medical officers to the governors? What a system of management! And again, Why was A. B. put into such an improper cell? Answer that, Messrs. Physicians; and moreover answer this, Messrs. Physicians, Why was he taken out again after Sergeant Adams's visit? It is a most unfortunate coincidence that he is walked *into* the cell just after he strikes the steward, and walked *out* again just after a stranger

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finds him in it, a period of twelve days having elapsed. It is still more extraordinary, that he never required "the key to be turned upon him," before he was put into that cell; and, as the physicians declare, has never required it since. Nor is this all, the last entry of restraint in the weekly books, it seems, was Oct. 9; Why was no entry made on Oct. 16? For that A. B. was locked in his cell at the time of Sergeant Adams's visit, no man living can doubt. Did the apothecary know of this locking-up, or did he not? If he did, Why did he not "return" it? If he did not,—no matter, it is not worth pursuing:—*occasionally* locked-up for half an hour, or perhaps an hour—what a "return," and what a system!

[The conduct of Mr. Sergeant ADAMS and Mr. TULK in exposing the DUNGEONS OF BETHLEM to public view, entitles those gentlemen to the admiration and esteem of every friend of humanity. They ask for, and need, no other reward.]

APPEAL AGAINST THE CRUELITIES
OF
LUNATIC ASYLUMS.
BY A VICTIM.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR:—The inclosed document has been placed in my hands which I beg to transfer to you, as more fit to judge than myself whether it is sufficiently important to be placed before the public.

When any one is branded with the suspicion of insanity, most persons look very cautiously at any statement he or she may make; but it appears to me to be very unjust to swoop away every complaint of harsh treatment they may make when in a state of sanity. Miss Newell's case, if true, warrants the severe reflections she has made use of; and if you think the reprobation of such a mode of treatment may tend to lessen the sufferings of such as may now be afflicted by the same severities, you will please to insert it in your very useful Journal. I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

W. J. WHITE.

14, Brownlow-street, Holborn,
Nov. 17, 1840.