

CORRESPONDENCE.

CONCORD, MASS., December 4, 1896.

TO THE EDITOR: I do not know whether you have noticed the investigation into the affairs of the new State Asylum for the Insane of Vermont, which has resulted in the exposure of serious evils and abuses, and in the resignation of the superintendent. The Rutland *Herald*, edited by a very sensible man, not much acquainted with insanity, even in Vermont, and almost uninformed as to other States, published a good article, for Vermont, but in course of it diverged into remarks of a general nature, which a person interested in the New Hampshire Asylum asked me to answer. I did so, and the result is inclosed; possibly it may be of some service in your part of the country, where, unfortunately, politics have more to do with the care of the dependent classes than in the States named by me in the letter which brought the editor to his bearings.

Yours truly,

F. B. SANBORN.

To the Editor of the Herald, Rutland, Vt.:

In your long and truthful article of the 18th inst., giving the facts and comments naturally suggested by the late investigation into the affairs at Waterbury, there is one statement which I think you will see, upon reflection, to be quite too sweeping. You say: "An insane asylum is at best a place of horror. A State asylum is generally a den of cruelty and corruption, with politics creating and maintaining all manner of abuses." * * * *

Now, I am a stranger to you, and you must take my word for it that I have seen many insane asylums—probably seventy-five, in at least twenty of our States, and in ten of the nations of Europe—within the past thirty-three years; many of them ten, twenty, or fifty times, and at all hours of the day and night. During that period I have probably spent six whole months among the inmates of such asylums—so far as I know, without any bias for or against the management, except as the facts seen and heard gave me a bias—and I can truly say that an insane asylum, "at best," is one of the most beneficent places in the world; at mediocrity (which is the condition, of course, of more than half of them) it is a very useful charity, and for most of its inmates a comfortable home; and even in the worst, which in my experience are less than 5 per cent of the whole number, more good than harm is commonly done. An asylum is a painful place, because there we see the sad spectacle of reason dethroned; but it can not be described, in any save exceptional instances, as "a place of horror." I have seen a few in this lifetime of a generation (thirty-three years) which could be called—exceptionally, and for brief periods—"dens of cruelty and corruption." One or two such I have been able to expose and reform—notably the Tewksbury Insane Asy-

lum, in 1876. But experience has taught me that such abuses as were there brought to light, and those which, I must believe, took place at Waterbury, are more frequently the result of ignorance and laziness than of either cruelty or corruption, in the ordinary sense of those terms.

The part played by politics in asylums is faithfully portrayed by you; it is the worst foe of good management, and the safest shield of incompetence and neglect. But party politics do not usually, of late years, control the management of asylums, even in America, and still less in those countries of Europe which I have visited. Politics have now little to do in the State asylums of New England, New York, or Pennsylvania; in certain of them, as that of New Hampshire, for instance, absolutely nothing. There are imperfections and unavoidable (as well as avoidable) evils in most of our hospitals and asylums, but there is in almost all of them a noticeable improvement since I began to inspect them in October, 1863. Not a year has passed since then in which I have not inspected at least half a dozen asylums, and in some years more than thirty. It may therefore seem to you that, though I can not speak from any recent observation in Vermont, my testimony is of some value as to the general state of things, and it is directly contrary to your extreme statement cited above.

CONCORD, MASS., November 21st.

F. B. SANBORN.

We have received the following letter relating to the policy of a medical publishing house in refusing medical writers the use of their own writings. It would seem that Messrs. Wood & Co.'s action is not in accordance with the spirit of scientific medicine, which ought to be recognized even in the business management of their medical publications. It is doubtful whether it is even good business policy:

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

I would be pleased to have an expression of opinion from you, either personally or through some medical journal, as to the relations of the lay publishing firms of medical journals and the profession. The request is suggested by the fact that Messrs. William Wood & Co. of New York refuse to permit the editors of "The American Year-Book of Medicine and Surgery" to use in our abstracts of medical progress, articles and illustrations first printed in the *Medical Record* and the *American Journal of Obstetrics*.

This decision seems to me to be wrong for the following reasons:

1. *It prevents the dissemination of medical knowledge.* The Year-Book condenses, systematizes, and criticises the year's medical work in a shorter space and more permanent manner than the journals, and has thousands of readers no single journal can claim or hope to reach. Every physician writes and publishes articles in