

Asylum Notes.

THE LUNACY COMMISSION'S REPORT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK.

The first report of the new State Commission in Lunacy, which succeeded to the powers and duties of the State Board of Charities in respect to the insane, and of the former single Commissioner in Lunacy, which was recently presented to the Legislature, is a document of unusual interest and importance, since it deals with live questions of great moment to the people, and especially to the medical profession, of the State. Especially will its treatment of the subject of State care for the insane, to a discussion of which the major part of the report is devoted, attract wide attention and produce a lasting effect.

It classifies and enumerates the institutions wherein insane persons are kept; sets forth the scope of the Commission's work as prescribed in the act creating it (Chap. 283, Laws of 1889), and briefly, but with sufficient fullness, discusses these topics: Registration of the Insane, State Asylums, Revision of Statutes Relating to Insane, Official Responsibility, Private Patients, Discharge of Insane from Custody, Laws Relating to Chronic Insane, Transfer of the Insane, Removal of the Insane from their Homes to Asylums, Service of Legal Papers on the Insane, Discharge of Public Patients on Bonds, Habeas Corpus, Insane State Paupers. It then takes up the theme of State Supervision of the Insane, and recognizing its paramount place in the present bent of the public mind concerning insanity as a practical matter of State concern, it occupies some fifty pages with a full and explicit exposition of facts, views and opinions relating to the question at issue between the exclusive care by the State of all its insane on the one hand and what is called the "mixed system" of State and County care on the other. After adverting to the nature and gravity of the issue and the need of some fixed and permanent policy, the Commission gives some pages to considerations which it thinks properly precede any rational discussion of the matter. These are grouped under three main heads, viz.: 1st, the fact that insanity is a disease needing treatment; 2d, the error, almost universal half a

century ago and still common, that there is a hard and fast line of distinction between "acute" and "chronic" insanity justifying the belief that all or nearly all cases of the latter type are hopelessly incurable; and 3d, the wrong, unjust and injurious idea that those of the insane who are cared for at public expense are "paupers" in any true sense of the term, and ought not to be treated on any better footing than sane "paupers." It reviews the progress of efforts in this State to alleviate the condition of the insane, quoting from the act establishing the State Asylum at Utica in 1843, which forbade the counties (except New York, Kings and Monroe) from caring for their acute insane; and then, after showing the steps that led to its enactment, citing part of the Willard Asylum Act in 1865, which forbade the counties (with the same exceptions) from caring for their chronic insane. Their definite declaration of the State's purpose to care for all its insane has never been withdrawn, but, as a temporary expedient, forced upon the Legislature by the imperative necessities of the case. In 1871, power was given the State Board of Charities to exempt counties which in its judgment had sufficient facilities for caring for their own insane. This power has been exercised in behalf of nineteen counties, and one (Clinton) was exempted by special act. On October 1, 1889, there were 5,371 of these so-called "chronic" insane—3,138 in State asylums, 1,848 in exempt county poor-houses, and 385 in non-exempt county poor-houses. After discussing what should be regarded as essential requirements in any proper system of care for the insane, the following are presented as the leading points of advantage claimed for it by advocates of "county care:"

That the "chronic" insane being "paupers" and incurable, the lowest rate at which they can be comfortably fed, clothed, warmed, etc., is justifiable. 2. That they should be kept in the county of their residence, to have the benefit of visits from relatives and friends. 3. That they are better off in the county poor-houses, because land there is usually cheap and fertile, and they can be profitably employed in tilling it. 4. That better results may be looked for in small than in large institutions. The question whether these claims are sustained in actual results as observed by the Commission is treated exhaustively, and the verdict is emphatically in the negative. The several features of care that are nowadays regarded as essential in the proper treatment of insanity are reviewed, and in nearly every one it is declared that the county institutions fall lamentably below the reasonable standard that should be maintained. Some

striking, indeed shocking, instances are related of gross neglect and disregard of common decency and humanity: for instance, putting two filthy patients in one bed, bathing three or four patients in one water, sending out a debilitated man in chains to work in the fields, the care of insane women by male attendants, etc., and other like examples of flagrant impropriety, to speak mildly. Respecting the relative cost of the two systems, the actual difference is believed to be small; while if equipment, facilities, attendants, medical supervision, etc., were required of county poor-houses in degree equal or approaching to those supplied at State asylums, the cost in the former would materially exceed that in the latter. The Commission recommends: 1st. That all the insane except in New York and Kings Counties be transferred to State asylums as soon as practicable. 2d. That districts based on proximity and population be assigned to each asylum. 3d. That inexpensive buildings be erected, at a cost not exceeding \$550 per patient, on the asylum grounds of the present State asylums. 4th. That the State pay all expense of maintenance and removal. 5th. That the Legislature appropriate money at its present session to begin the erection of such buildings.

The increase of insanity and necessity of additional provision for idiots of the unteachable class are briefly referred to, and various recommendations are made.

The number of insane in custody on the first day of October, 1889, was as follows:

State asylums, - - - - -	5,442
Counties of New York, Kings, and Monroe, -	6,970
Exempted counties, - - - - -	1,848
Non-exempted counties, - - - - -	385
City alms-houses, - - - - -	6
Quasi-public, - - - - -	541
Private asylums, - - - - -	315
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Total (an increase of 601 for the year), -	15,507
State Asylum for Idiots, - - - - -	477
Custodial Asylum for Feeble-Minded Women, -	250
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The aggregate population of the foregoing is 15,507 insane, 477 idiots, 250 feeble-minded women.

The discussion of the question of State supervision of the insane concludes as follows:

"The conclusion of the Commission regarding the system of county care of the insane is, that however feasible in theory, in practical operation it has been found to have failed and fallen far short of the hope entertained for it when the act of 1871, sanctioning its trial, was passed. As a system it has developed inherent difficulties and defects which seem to be ineradicable, and which make its successful operation in all essential respects impossible. Such being the case, it ought to be abolished and the policy of State care for all of the insane, both chronic and acute, should be re-established at the earliest practicable date. It can not be said that the system of county care has not had a fair trial. It has been in vogue since 1871 under exceptionally advantageous circumstances. During all that time it has had the advantages of State supervision, and yet it has failed to meet every reasonable or just expectation. If the system has been a failure for nearly twenty years, is it not reasonable to conclude that it is likely to be a failure for all time to come. It is not claimed that the system of State care as now conducted is perfect, but it is steadily progressive; it is humanely and intelligently administered; it represents all that is best in the present state of medical knowledge; and whatever other criticism may be passed upon it, it certainly can not be said that the inmates of the State asylums are not comfortably housed, sufficiently clad, properly fed, provided with sufficient attendance and care, and given medical supervision and treatment of an exceptionally high order."

The report is signed by Carlos F. MacDonald, M.D., Chairman; Goodwin Brown and Henry A. Reeves, Commissioners.

A RESOLUTION RECENTLY PASSED BY THE NEW YORK STATE COMMISSIONERS OF LUNACY

"*Resolved*, That hereafter no license for the establishment and keeping of an asylum for the care, custody or treatment of the insane or persons of unsound mind, for compensation or hire, shall be granted except to a duly qualified medical practitioner of recognized professional skill and standing, who is a graduate of a legally incorporated medical college, and has had actual experience in the care and treatment of the insane."