

REFORM IN THE TREATMENT OF THE INSANE.*

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Mr. President and Gentlemen:

Had I not been requested to refer on this occasion to an important event in the history of the insane, which has recently been celebrated in England, I should not have ventured to do so, from the fear that some might think that it had already received sufficient attention, and that its importance was over-estimated.

But in truth granting that the present standard of the management and treatment of persons of unsound mind is on the whole highly satisfactory in the United States and in Europe, it ought certainly not to be regarded as either useless or dull to cast a glance at the beginning of the movement which has ultimately developed, step by step, if not by leaps and bounds, into the present humane and, with some exceptions, efficient condition of management of the class now referred to, at least as regards public asylums. I do not include almshouses.

The event of which I speak as so important was celebrated in the city of York last year, because it was the Centenary of the projection of the Retreat in that place by William Tuke, who besought members of the philanthropic Society of Friends to support the undertaking and ultimately succeeded in his endeavor.† Everyone knows and, therefore, it would be wearisome to reiterate, the neglected state of the insane and, worse than that, the actual cruelty to which they were formerly subjected. It was the clear conception and the painful sense of the barbarous methods by which they were coerced, the conviction that this was inhuman and therefore wrong, that led to a definite attempt to make a radical reform, in the face of prejudice, ignorance and opposition of the most determined character and to the foundation of an institution which for the first time bore the name of "The Retreat."

*Read at the International Congress of Charities, Correction and Philanthropy. (Section IV, on the Commitment, Detention, Care and Treatment of the Insane) Chicago, Ill., June 12-18, 1893.

†The steps by which this movement was carried out successfully are given in the writer's "Reform in the Treatment of the Insane," 1892. J. & A. Churchill, London.

Indomitable pluck, the stern sense of duty, a dogged perseverance in the right course could alone conquer the manifold abuses by which the old system was hedged about, and, much more than that, succeed in holding up an example of a reasonable and benevolent mode of treatment. It is extremely easy now to look back on that experiment and see that it was calculated to succeed; it was so simple; it went so directly to the bottom of the evil; but before the experiment was tried and when it was being tried, it must have caused some misgivings and fear lest it would after all end in failure. Had not judgment as well as humanity, had not common sense as well as pity, had not profound depth of feeling as well as mere sympathy actuated this great revolution, there might have been nothing more than a transitory emotion, a spasmodic movement, which would never have exercised the wide far-reaching and beneficent influence which, as a matter of fact, it did exercise and exercises still. The extremely practical character of this reform is proved by the critical observation of the effects of what was then the routine medical treatment of the insane, the discovery that it was altogether injurious, and that a directly opposite treatment was surprisingly beneficial. It has been often said that while the moral treatment pursued at the Retreat was admirable, the medical treatment was neglected if not despised. I wish to emphasize the fact that this is altogether a mistake. The moral tone was no doubt in happy contrast to that elsewhere adopted, but the refusal to follow blindly the monstrous treatment then fashionable among medical men, coupled with the adoption of a more rational method, was a remarkable feature of the experiment. Speaking generally, it was the substitution of tonic and stimulating remedies for depressants (including periodical bleeding) which marked the new system of treatment at the York Retreat. Another advance made at that time was the knocking off of the fetters by which the insane were bound (a bold measure independently adopted by Pinel in Paris) and the endeavor to restrain dangerous actions by gentle methods of repression. The doctrine of non-restraint was not, it is quite true, adopted. It may, however, be granted that the avoidance of manacles at the Retreat in any form or shape and the strenuous endeavor to calm the violent patient by kindly words and sympathetic action, quickly led to a very slight resort to restraint of the limbs, and ultimately to the entire abolition of straight-waistcoats and the like. If it is an

honor to have gone to the extreme of abjuring all mechanical restraints whatever, that honor must be awarded to Charlesworth, Hill and Conolly, and not to the York Retreat.

That the Retreat was fortunate enough to effect an extraordinary change of opinion and practice throughout England, and more widely, is attested by innumerable competent authorities. Among these are American specialists who have loudly proclaimed the value of the example set by the Retreat a century ago. It has happened to many reformers that their work has been slighted or even questioned, but there has always been the most generous appreciation of the work done at the Retreat. There is, therefore, happily, no claim on its behalf to defend, and no occasion for disputation. All that is necessary is to bring out in strong relief the enormous contrast between the old and cruel and unscientific method of treatment and that which was inaugurated at the Retreat a century ago with a success only equaled by its simplicity.

And all this was done when the city in which the story is revived to-day had no existence, and the site on which it stands was a primeval forest. It may be said that there is no lesson to learn from the deed which was so courageously done in the year 1792, but from this I must be allowed to entirely dissent, for it would not only be ungracious and unthankful to forget an historical fact of this kind so pregnant with great results and benevolent ends, but if no lesson were taught, men would lose by so much the incentive to good works arising from the knowledge that success attended efforts made with great singleness of purpose, with no eye to fame or human praise, and without any pecuniary benefit, but the very reverse—expenditure of money, loss of time, much anxiety and even contumely and abuse. Similar battles have to be fought at the present day in the contest with ignorance, indifference, sordid interests and even inhumanity, and in this conflict, the modest yet determined, and as it proved, victorious struggle of the last century cannot but nerve the combatants in the Holy War of humanitarianism and scientific progress in whatever country it may be fought.