

Allen (N)

Treatment of the insane

LIBRARY  
SURGEON GENERAL'S OFFICE  
JUL 21 1899  
630,

## TREATMENT OF THE INSANE.

BY DR. NATHAN ALLEN.

For several years there has been held connected with the annual meetings of the American Social Science Association a conference of the boards of State charities. Many of the subjects that come under the scope of both ~~the~~ bodies occupy common ground, and may with great propriety be presented and discussed at the same time. The Massachusetts board of charities was the first organization of this kind, since which time (1862) eight or ten similar State boards have been organized. In discharging the duties of public charity required by the law, the members of these boards find many topics for consideration in each of the States very similar, and which are surrounded with the same difficulties in the way of improvement and reform. One of the most important of these subjects is that of insanity. At the conference of the representatives of these boards last year at Detroit, Dr. Nathan Allen, delegate from the Massachusetts board, was appointed chairman of a committee on insanity. At the meeting this year of the conference of these boards at Saratoga, September 6, Dr. Allen made a report on the "Treatment of the Insane," presenting particularly those topics connected with insanity and lunatic hospitals which are found practically to concern these boards most in the discharge of official duties. The first topic discussed in this report was that of the

### INCREASE OF INSANITY.

Though the increase is largely made up from the chronic insane, still there is an increase of insanity over that of population in a greater ratio, but to just what extent it is difficult to decide. The questions *where* and *how* to support the insane, whether in alm-houses, asylums or hospitals, were discussed at much length. It is found that large numbers, about one-half of the insane, are not, or cannot be, cured, and this remainder, the harmless and incurable, must be permanently provided for somewhere. What shall be done with them is a question not easy to determine. This report discussed at much length the question of classification of the insane,—the criminal and the epileptic, the inebriate and the chronic,—that institutions adapted to these several classes should be provided, etc.: that the interests of each class in this way would be best promoted. The comparative merits, in cures and results, between small and large institutions were particularly noticed, and preference given to the former. The following topics, of a more general and practical nature, we here present as follows:—

### EMPLOYMENT OF THE INSANE.

As the laws of physiology have become of late years better understood, together with the causes of disease, physical exercise has assumed as a *remedial agency* more and more importance. Especially is this the case in all kinds of chronic disease. Insanity is a disease of the brain and nervous system, and in its acute stages requires, like other diseases, medication and the appliances of a hospital; but when it has passed into a chronic state there should be added to, or combined with this treatment, a strict observance of the principles of hygiene and sanitary laws. The symptoms of insanity in its acute stages are generally distinctly marked, so that medical treatment can be brought to bear directly upon it; but when it has settled into a chronic state the indications of disease become more obscure and complicated, so that the exact pathological condition of the system cannot be so easily understood. Here comes in the law of exercises.

Amusements and recreations of various kinds are provided for diverting the mind. These are good in their place; we would have more of them rather than less. Airing courts are good in their way; so is the exercise of walking and riding. All these have a most beneficial influence upon both the body and the mind. But *in o. k.*—*active employment* of some kind,—is more important than all other things to the chronic insane. It develops muscle and gives strength; improves the appetite and digestion; increases all the vital forces of the system; occupies and diverts the mind; has a strong tendency to give self-control and bring into exercise all the mental faculties in harmony with the laws of the body. It has also a decided tendency to prevent not only slight attacks of mental derangement, but also involuntary outbreaks of insanity. It would often obviate the necessity of resorting to physical restraint and seclusion.

This employment should be suited to the need and tastes of the insane. Farm work and gardening afford the greatest variety and most wholesome kinds of occupation. They call into exercise all parts of the body—surround one with pure air and plenty of sunlight, and, at the same time, occupy pleasantly the higher and better faculties of the mind. Among a large body of men, many may prefer trades or some kinds of mechanical business,—perhaps have had experience in these or can readily learn some one of them. While a plenty of good land connected with a large institution may furnish a great variety of work, other kinds of occupation and business can easily be introduced if desired.

In the treatment of the insane formerly very little account was made of work or exercise, and even at the present day it is considered by many persons of small consequence. Once it was thought that diseases could be cured by medicine alone, but the better we understand the laws of the human system and the causes of disease the less dependence is placed upon medication, but the greater the necessity is found for a strict observance of the laws of nature. Most emphatically is this true in diseases of long standing involving the nervous system and mental soundness. Accordingly, we find in all asylums for the insane that where wholesome exercise of body and mind has been most systematically and extensively introduced, in those institutions there has been found the most successful treatment of the insane—the best health, the least mortality and the most recoveries. Of course the measure of success varies, and is exhibited in a variety of ways.

There are several institutions in Scotland and England where employment has been made—particularly within a few years—a *primary object*, and this has been attended with the most beneficial results. It is believed we have some such institutions in this country, among the foremost of which may be mentioned the Northampton lunatic hospital, in Massachusetts, and the Willard asylum, New York. If wholesome exercise of body and mind—as a law of nature, as a remedial agency—is an indispensable condition upon which depend general health and soundness of mind, it should certainly be resorted to, under the most favorable circumstances and to the fullest extent. By the use of such means success, and not failure, must inevitably follow. Not only experience and observation confirm this position, but such a course of treatment harmonizes with the established laws of physiology both in a normal and a morbid condition. Many illustrations could be given where health of body and sanity of mind have thus been restored after much medication and long hospital treatment.

Most intimately connected with this subject of employment is another that vitally affects the interests of the insane, that of

### PERSONAL FREEDOM.

Ever since Dr. Conolly broke open the prison doors and knocked off the chains from the bodies of the insane, the question of freedom, restraint, seclusion, etc., has been the occasion of controversy. Since that period the whole history of the treatment of the insane shows that it has been one of steady improvement,—more liberty and freedom,—less confinement and restraint. All must admit that cases of insanity occasionally occur of such violence and danger to human life, that restraint of some kind is indispensable; but, just how far, or to what extent, this shall be carried there are differences of opinion. But because force or seclusion may occasionally be necessary, it does not follow that all insane persons must be confined by locks, bolts and bars. Great improvement has recently been made in this respect in several asylums in Great Britain. The buildings have been changed or constructed with reference particularly to making these experiments of greater freedom. The leading features of this reform are thus characterized: First, unlocked doors; second, great amount of personal freedom; third, the large numbers on parole; and fourth, the special attention given to the occupation of patients. No locks or keys are used except to small wards or parts of the hospital, where but few patients are confined. The insane are so taught, trained and treated that they are not disposed to make trouble nor escape. Their apartments are constructed and arranged as though designed for private boarders or families.

The asylum or hospital is regarded by the insane as a *home*, not a prison or penitentiary. Acting on the motto, "The more you trust, the more you may," appeals to the self-respect and the self-government, even, of the insane, which is found to exert a wonderful influence over them. Under such treatment it is surprising how rapidly they improve, and how few attempt or want to leave the institution. The effects of such management are found to be—*first*, greater contentment and general happiness of the patients; *second*, better conduct in every one—less excitement; *third*, the preservation of the individuality of each patient; *fourth*, less degeneration, and *fifth*, greater vigilance and care on the part of attendants. Special pains are taken that every insane person shall have something to do,—some work to occupy his time and attention. Under such treatment it is seldom found necessary to resort to restraint or seclusion of any kind, though increased care, watchfulness and fidelity may become requisite.

The description here given is no fancy sketch, but a simple statement of facts, the results of experiments begun, carried on and approved by the highest authorities in such matters. And why should not such treatment of the insane be successful and be approved? Does it not harmonize with the laws which govern both the body and the mind?

On no one point are we so sensitive as on that of *personal freedom* or liberty. This idea of having our liberty, our freedom forcibly taken from us, of being confined by bolts and bars, shocks our sensibilities. This is perfectly natural. It accords with our best instincts of self-respect and self-government. In case of the insane surrendering up their personal rights, their liberties, may not the change, in many instances, aggravate or increase their derangement, and serve as a powerful hindrance to the restoration of health and sanity? If certain muscles, limbs or organs of the body have become weak and reduced in vitality, it is *exercise*—free and voluntary—continued and persevered in for a long time, that gives strength and vigor. The individual must do this for himself, and, if need be, he must be encouraged and urged to do it. These means and appliances must be used to give strength and cure disease which nature and the laws of pathology have adapted to the purpose.

So of the laws of the mind. The love of liberty, of freedom, of voluntary exercise, is here the first law. Our best instincts,—the governing faculties of the mind,—self-will, self-respect, self-government, all tend in this direction, and their free, voluntary exercise should be encouraged. All moral, social and civil provisions and agencies must have a powerful influence to improve, both physically and mentally, the chronic insane. And just as long as they are treated as criminals, as prisoners, as dangerous persons who must be confined, placed under guardianship and constantly watched, just so long will their physical energies suffer and be crippled, and their spirits languish and be depressed.

There are, of course, many individuals among the insane who have become so demented, so lost to all self-respect and sense of their rights, as to be incapable of appreciating such treatment, or being influenced by it. At the same time there are large numbers among the chronic insane, if they could have the same kind treatment and useful employment, the same confidence and freedom, as are accorded to sane people, what a surprising change it would soon make in their conduct and character! It would not only improve their health and spirits, make them more contented and happy,

but would doubtless restore some of them to sanity, usefulness and self-support. Such a boon, we believe, will yet come to many of the insane. The discoveries and applications of modern science everywhere favor health and human improvement, and the best instincts of humanity, guided by the higher mental faculties, are pretty sure to move in an onward and upward direction. Wherever the rights, the liberties and the interests of any class of persons are invaded or are suffering, whether inside or outside of an institution, such a state of things cannot always continue. Reform some time must and will come. Another point, in giving the rights and the personal freedom of the insane (if not at times the sane) should receive far greater attention than it has received. We refer to the

### COMMITMENT OF THE INSANE.

The laws in the various States differ materially as to the process of committing insane persons to a lunatic hospital. As the medical testimony affords the principal evidence, it is highly important that this should be correct and properly presented. Sometimes the courts take an active and leading part, but more generally their course is formal and approbative, and no. unfrequently judges decide without seeing the person or knowing anything of the merits of the case except from the medical testimony and the representations of interested parties. In some States the certificate of one physician only is necessary, but more generally the law requires the sworn testimony of two "reputable physicians." Neither the courts nor the laws make much discrimination in the qualifications or character of the physicians, further than that they shall be "reputable," or of "respectable standing in the community." It is, of course, an easy thing to find such physicians everywhere. The trouble arises, not so much from bribery or any self-interest as from the fact that the certificates are too hastily signed and a mere formal opinion sworn to without such careful examination and such reasons given as the merits of the case demand. No judge decides an important case or pronounces a sentence upon an individual without giving his reasons.

For a physician to declare publicly that a person is insane, and to make oath to a statement which consigns the individual to a lunatic hospital, is to assume a vast responsibility. It deprives the person at once of his rights and privileges; it cuts him off from all business relations and from the legal disposition of his property; it discharges him virtually from the duties he owes to society and to his family; it renders him no longer responsible for his acts and subjects his person to the control of others. But this is not all; there is the *moral* effect, the stigma, the sense of degradation and humiliation of being forcibly removed from a position of freedom and independence, to one of confinement and unpleasant associations—this sudden change has not unfrequently such a crushing effect upon the individual that he sometimes never recovers fully from the shock.

In the preparation and completion of a document that makes such changes in the rights, situation and prospects of a person, the greatest pains possible should be taken, and no examination can be too careful or thorough lest some wrong or injury be done. The law stipulates that the vagrant and the criminal cannot be punished without a trial by a judge or jury; he is commonly provided with counsel; the evidence and the facts must be clearly set forth, and spread out before the public. Should the law provide greater safeguards and stronger defences for the vicious and the criminal than for the innocent and unprotected insane? It is true in most, if not in all the States, the law does provide for trial and appeal to the courts in behalf of the insane, but how seldom is this protection resorted to by them or their friends! In most cases this part of the law is a mere form,—in fact a dead letter to the insane.

In the medical certificate declaring a person insane, the law should require that the *reasons* be stated. In some States the statutes direct the wording of the certificate,—that the person is "dangerous to the community," or is "furiously mad"; but in many of the States it allows the certificate to say that the person is a "fit subject" for a lunatic hospital, and this opinion must be formed from personal examination and inquiry. It will be seen at once how easy it is to sign such a certificate upon very slight examination.

Suppose, now, the law required that the reasons, the facts, the evidence, should be clearly and distinctly stated upon which this opinion is based, and it were understood that the document was to be subjected to rigid criticism,—and, if found incorrect or imperfect, to be returned for revision,—would not such a procedure compel a more thorough examination? Would it not lead to a better knowledge of the symptoms of insanity as well as a higher appreciation of the nature and the results of this legal process? Once in the practice of medicine mere opinions, without explanations or reasons, might have answered, but something more is demanded at the present day, especially where the rights, the interests and the character of the patient are so deeply involved. The grounds or reasons for the "opinion" should also be stated, not only for the information and protection of the patient, but for the satisfaction of the friends and the public. Besides, such a statement may be turned to most valuable account by the physician in the hospital who is afterwards to treat this same patient.

Two other important advantages would also be secured by such a course. It would tend to a better understanding of the symptoms and causes of insanity on the part of all physicians called upon to fill out such certificates. Another advantage which is of no small account: Some persons now consigned to a lunatic hospital would never be sent there under such a law. In Great Britain, where far more attention has been given to the treatment of the insane than in this country, especially in all legal proceedings, the medical certificate, signed by two physicians, requires that the *reasons* be definitely stated, not what the witness *thinks, believes or hears*, but the *specific facts* which he, as a medical man, has observed before or at the time of signing the certificate. The law goes further,—it has a *second* provision,—the physician must state in the certificate what facts or evidence indicating insanity in the patient he has derived from others, giving names and describing definitely the nature and character of those facts.

Every blank certificate has a wide, open space for each of the heads or provisions to be filled out. And if by design or negligence the facts are not properly stated, the physician becomes liable for damages to the insane person thus committed. After long experience and much legislation in Great Britain, these careful and wise provisions in the medical certificate for the commitment of the insane have been found not only expedient, but to work well for all parties concerned. Now why should not some similar course be pursued in the United States? New York is the only State where any such legislation has taken place. There, the law requires that not mere opinion be stated in the certificate, but the *reasons*—the grounds upon which an opinion is based—must be clearly and definitely set forth. This law has been in operation only two years, encountered at first some opposition, but the longer it is tried and the better it is understood, the more favorably it is received by all parties. The State of New York is indebted for this law to a "commission of lunacy," which leads us, in concluding this paper, to offer a few remarks on that subject under the head of

### MANAGEMENT OF LUNATIC HOSPITALS.

Most of the asylums and hospitals for the insane are managed by a superintendent and board of trustees, who have the sole charge. In some States there may be a committee of inspection or board of State charities, whose duties are chiefly, if not wholly, that of visitation and counsel. While the executive in each State, or some private corporation, has the appointment of the superintendent, and the legislature the enactment of laws for their government, seldom, if ever, does either the executive or the legislature interfere directly with the management of these institutions. Thus the whole responsibility and power of government are placed in the hands of the superintendent and trustees, who are virtually one body. Now, no thoughtful person can often visit these hospitals and make much observation without seeing the importance of having more careful and discriminating supervision over them, and a more thorough investigation into the whole subject of insanity than exists at present. There are three great interests or parties that require such supervision:—

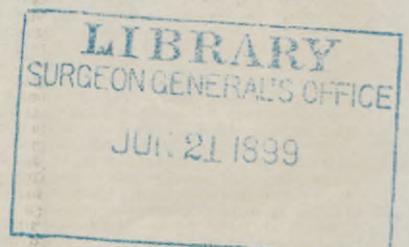
First,—The institutions themselves. Evils and abuses will spring up in these establishments; and the most effectual way to correct or prevent them is by suitable authorities outside, charged in part with such duties. Correction and reform will seldom come from local officers. Besides, until some such provision is made, prejudices and distrust will exist, more or less, in reference to these institutions, causing injury not only to the office and their management, but indirectly far greater injury to the public.

Again,—There is always room for improvement in every such institution, and this is less likely to come from persons constantly occupying the same points of view, and following the same routine of duties, day after day, than from others looking from different and distant points of view, who can compare the merits of one institution with another, and make careful observations over a large field. Hence the necessity in such management of more diversified experience, more general knowledge and larger observation than local officers usually have whose labors and interests are almost wholly identified with one establishment.

The *second* party interested is the insane, their friends and the public at large. These justly demand that they should in some way be represented in such inspection and management.

The law takes away the rights of the insane in respect to their liberty and property; it unsettles them in all business relations and in the duties they owe to their families; it cuts them off in a great measure from communication with their friends, and exposes them to personal abuse from attendants. Where such personal and fundamental rights are either taken away or abridged, should not legislation make some better provision for protection, defence and appeal in behalf of the insane than now exists? Not only the insane and their friends are concerned in this question, but every member of society, every man and woman should feel an interest in it. For who is not liable to be insane or have a friend thus afflicted? No intelligent or thoughtful community will always rest easy under such a state of things, or be satisfied with present legislation on this subject. There must be some change or improvement here in legislation. Reform is only the work of time.

The *third* party interested is *humanity* itself, aspiring to a higher state of civilization. Every generation owes something to its successors. We have here a great evil—insanity constantly increasing—occasioning immense expense and an untold amount of suffering. This evil is the result of violated law, physical and mental,—it is abnormal, no part of a healthy civilization. To check the evil its *causes* must be better understood,—the public must be instructed and enlightened on the subject. It is the duty of the State to do something in this direction. It is not wise to build great institutions and make large appropriations for carrying them on, without trying to do something to remove the *causes* which necessitate such measures when, it is evident, the evils involved are to some extent under human control. There should be in every State a *permanent* commission, consisting of one or more persons, whose duty it should be to investigate this whole subject of insanity in all its bearings, relations and causes, and make from time to time reports to the public. But no such investigations and reports will ever be made without some express legislation in relation to it. If a hundredth or a thousandth part of the means now expended upon this unfortunate class should be expended for the objects here set forth, it would be difficult to estimate either on the score of humanity or that of economy the amount of good that would in time be thus accomplished.



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LIBRARY