

The History of Mental Nursing.

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(Concluded from page 107).

The English Act of 1845 inspired the Scottish Statute of 1857, and interestingly enough it was in Scotland that the next real advance in the care and treatment of the insane developed. From 1857 insane persons were employed, more reasonably classified according to the extent of their disability, and given special places in asylums. At the same time the enclosed airing courts, which were used at that time for the exercise of the patients, were practically abolished. Instead, the inmates were sent to work on neighbouring farms. Some who were quiet but incurable, were boarded out in cottages in the county under regular inspection and supervision, while fully equipped sick wards where special treatment could be given were provided for acute cases.

The Scottish authorities embraced a method and treatment similar to that at Gheel in Belgium, and the practical application of the system was most successful. Provision for the insane was far more complete than in England.

As recently as 1887 the English conception of a model asylum was a vast building block, the centre consisting of residences for the staff, kitchen, church and offices, from which stretched straggling corridors and dingy corners, and from which radiated long galleries, in which small rooms or padded cells were arranged upon one or the other side, or both, of a balcony or corridor. At its extreme end were dayrooms, in which the agitated, confused or non-industrial inmates spent the day, while those patients who could be shown or taught some occupation were withdrawn from the wards to work either in workshops, laundry or sewing rooms, etc. These were clustered round the centre building or in the grounds attached, the whole being surrounded by high walls.

The unsatisfactory and unimaginative architecture may have been due to the fact that the builder never sought to co-operate with those who could have given him advice, namely the practical nurses or the hospital administrators on the nursing side.

The staff of these Victorian asylums was composed of a Medical Officer, Matron and Attendants to whom were entrusted the management, discipline and occupation in accordance with the regulations issued by the physician. As many as 100 to 1,400 patients were housed in such establishments.

A gradual change for the better took place in the housing of the insane and its administration during the next few years. The principles underlying the construction of mental hospitals became much more domestic and followed hospital procedure instead of prisons and criminal penitentiaries.

Nurses were still not trained or even given lectures, but as the study of mental disease advanced it became necessary to have attendants who could understand intelligently the treatment prescribed for the patients. It was not until 1843, however, that physicians' pupils were admitted inside a mental hospital.

Despite the fact that hospital treatment and accommodation for the mentally afflicted had improved, it would appear that the number of insane increased. This fact might have been due to the operation of the lunacy laws which brought in more patients; or it may have been due to the abundance of good institutions, where all the insane poor could be gratuitously treated. From 1859 to 1901, the number of insane known to exist in England rose from 36,762 to 83,722, and in Scotland from 6,413 to 13,688. The increase doubtless was also explained by the improvement in public opinion towards the asylums where it was now believed there was no neglect or ill-treatment of the patients: consequently the public allowed their people to enter more willingly than hitherto.

So the national outlook on mental disease gradually changed, and we come to the beginning of the scientific era when by careful study of the brain and its disorders, we began to understand the real nature of the disease and apply remedies with scientific certainty and exactitude.

Many great men had by now contributed their knowledge to the science of mental disorders. Locke, Hume and Bain and many other eminent men were among them, including Sir Charles Bell, noted for his discoveries of the existence of sensory and motor nerves in the brain. In 1807 he made this discovery, which he established in 1811 by the publication of the "Anatomy and the Brain." His investigations were completed between 1821-29 and included researches on the cranial nerves. These discoveries in physiology have been described as the greatest since Harvey demonstrated the circulation of the blood.

Pinel, who died in 1826 at the age of 81, classified mental disorders into four groups:—

1. Mania or general delirium.
2. Dementia, the abolition of thought.
3. Idiocy, the obliteration of the intellect and the affections.
4. Melancholia, or exclusive delirium.

He taught that advance in knowledge depended more on observation and experiment than intuitive deduction from the writings of the ancients, and his reformation of the treatment for the insane was successfully established and in a few years prevailed over the whole of Europe.

The development of the humanitarian treatment and the greater care of the insane now closes this epoch, and the unspeakable horrors of the lunatic asylums of the early nineteenth century with all their fiendish ingenuity come to an end. But it must be remembered that at that time humanitarianism was not a feature of public life. Children at school were flogged, as were soldiers and sailors for very trivial offences, and for breach of discipline were given anything up to 1,000 lashes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. Some of them died from the punishment. Debtors who were sent to prison were often forgotten and consequently starved.

As such cruel treatment was meted out to sane people and for such small and trivial offences, it is little wonder that the insane were treated on a correspondingly worse scale.

National Council of Women.

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE National Council of Women of Great Britain was held from November 4th to 8th, in the Winter Garden Floral Hall, Eastbourne, and this large gathering was fortunate in the mild weather then prevailing, when the charm of this fine town could be greatly enjoyed. Nevertheless, His Worship the Mayor of Eastbourne, Alderman E. C. Martin, J.P., in giving a civic welcome to the Congress, at the opening of the First Session, expressed his great regret, that so late in the season, the society could not see the wonderful display of flowers for which Eastbourne is famed. Wednesday, the 5th, with the President, Mrs. M. Lefroy, J.P., in the chair, brought a day of interesting Resolutions concerning: "The Rent Restriction Act," "Banning of Harmful Comics," "Marriage Guidance Council and Divorce," and "Child Neglect."

The last-mentioned Resolution states: "In view of the increasing number of cases reported of child neglect, and considering that the solution is not to be found in prosecution alone, the National Council of Women recommends:—

"(1) That the education of children should concern itself more with responsibility, e.g., teaching of homecraft for girls (and boys), should include more home management, and there should be more encouragement to continue this after school-leaving age; and

"Clause (3) recommends that recognition should be given by the Home Office of suitable residential accommodation

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