

Letter [soliciting pecuniary aid] : Retreat for the Insane ; Hartford, July 20th, 1860 / [signed] J. S. Butler.

Contributors

Institute of Living.
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Retreat for the Insane.

Hartford, July 20th, 1860.

MY DEAR SIR:—

Permit me to address you for the purpose of soliciting pecuniary aid for the Institution over which I have the honor to preside.

Let me call your attention briefly to some considerations which have urged me to a step clearly no part of my official duty to the 220 patients under my charge, and the additional care and labor of which might easily and perhaps reasonably have been avoided by me.

But eloquent and touching appeals have been made to me daily for years by these patients, which I can no longer resist, and to which I felt compelled to make an effort to respond. Not a visit do I make to our Wards that I do not pass by some sorrowful face which I could not make bright and happy; some torpid mind which I could not cheer and animate, did I possess some needed additional appliances of treatment. These are clearly demanded by the necessities of the Insane; they are possessed by some other Institutions more liberally endowed than our own, and no Institution can be considered complete without them. In some of my Annual Reports I have gone more at large into this subject, and to them I would refer for details.

What we need and what I ask for, are additional means of providing amusement, recreation and employment for all our patients, but especially for that large class who are within the range of recovery or improvement.

The greatest evil of all Lunatic Asylums is the monotony of the patients' life; their greatest necessity is the relief of this monotony.

The means of relief which I am now anxious to obtain, and which will afford us greater aid than any other, and for which I ask your assistance, are—

1st. A CONSERVATORY FOR FLOWERS, &c.

It is proposed to build this from 75 to 100 feet in length, with a double spanned roof of glass.

This will afford a pleasant daily promenade for our patients, especially during those stormy and inclement days which form so large a portion of our New England year, and when out-of-door exercises for invalids is impossible. The care and culture of the plants will afford daily occupation of the most useful and grateful kind for our female patients. The Conservatory will also enable us to decorate our rooms, especially those of the sick and desponding, with flowers.

2d. A BOWLING ALLEY, WITH ROOM FOR A BAGATELLE BOARD, AND FOR CALISTHENIC EXERCISES, &c., FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF OUR LADIES.

These popular and useful recreations will be of incalculable benefit. Both the Conservatory and the Bowling Alley, while affording needful and healthy exercise, of which very many will gladly avail themselves, will serve most effectually to relieve the monotony of their Halls, by giving our ladies a pleasant resort during the many stormy days, especially of the winter season.

3d. A SMALL, NEAT, AND TASTEFUL BUILDING FOR A MUSEUM OR READING ROOM, FOR OUR GENTLEMEN.

This may be made a place of deposit for objects of curiosity, and specimens in the different departments of Natural History, such as minerals, birds, shells, &c. Decorated with maps and pictures, and supplied with periodicals, it will form a most pleasant and important place of resort, especially for our convalescent gentlemen. The want of such a room in the Institution, has, of late years, been greatly felt. After convalescence has commenced, the forced association, even to a limited extent, with the recent and excited, or with the chronic and frequently more or less unpleasant Patients, is not only annoying and painful, but absolutely injurious to the educated and refined; and yet, beyond the time devoted to out-of-door exercise, (often impossible in stormy weather,) I have no means of giving them that entire relief which they require. A room of the character I have described, like the Conservatory, located upon the Lawn, distinct from the Institution, would afford a most grateful and beneficial resort for this class.

Occasional visits to a well stored Museum of objects of curiosity, Natural History, &c., would be a source of great enjoyment to all our patients.

4th. THE LAYING OUT AND DECORATION OF OUR GROUNDS.

It is proposed to drain and grade the ground, add to our present plantations of trees and flowering shrubs, and to open a carriage road at a more suitable distance from the building than the present one, to which the public at certain times and under suitable restrictions may have access.

We have been presented, by Mr. Olmsted and Mr. Vaux, (the Superintendent and the Architect of the New York Central Park,) with an exceedingly artistic and beautiful plan for this purpose, which most happily develops all the natural beauties of our Lawn. It has been adopted by the Board of Directors—and if we are enabled to carry it out, will prove an ornament of great practical utility. These gentlemen assure me that few lawns possess greater capacity for producing beautiful effects, if properly managed.

Mr. Waring, (Superintendent of Drainage of the Central Park,) has also given us a plan for thorough drainage.

The generous interest which these gentlemen from abroad have taken in this enterprise, is very gratifying.

5th. A MELODEON FOR OUR CHAPEL. A PIANO FOR OUR NEW AND HANDSOME AMUSEMENT HALL; AND LIBRARIES FOR SUNDAY READING.

These, with additions to our Magic Lantern Apparatus, and to our limited stock of small Musical Instruments, are our more necessary and pressing wants.

A careful estimate of expense, gives for the—

Conservatory,	\$2,000
Bowling Alley, &c.,	1,400
Museum, &c.,	2,000
Grounds,	5,000
Musical Instruments, Apparatus, Books, &c.,	1,600
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	\$12,000

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In the thirty-fifth Report, I made a brief Exposé of the financial condition and resources of the Institution. I there stated, what was known to all familiar with its history, that it was founded mainly by private benevolence; that it has since received but comparatively little aid from either public or private sources; that the donations of the State have been small, few and far between, and generally for a consideration; and that the Institution has principally accomplished its results and attained its present position by the blessing of Heaven upon that spirit of Christian philanthropy and financial sagacity which have guided its concerns.

The architectural and other improvements which have been made during the past few years, and which remain to be made, (such as the introduction of Gas, Steam, &c.,) have absorbed and will continue to absorb for several years to come, every dollar of our available income.

I am compelled, therefore, to look to private beneficence as the only source from which it is possible to obtain this aid. I ask it earnestly, as giving the Institution the greater power of promoting the recovery of the curable; of alleviating the weariness of hope deferred—that heart-sickness which comes from impatient waiting for the slow-moving hours of long protracted convalescence; in truth, of exchanging darkness for light, sorrow for joy, sickness for health, gloom and despair for peace and hope, for many who have been, and the many who yet will be brought to our doors bound in the bondage of this terrible disease. Is it strange, therefore, living as I do amidst so much misery which can so easily be remedied, or alleviated, that I should plead earnestly for the means to do it, in the strong conviction that if this effort fails *now*, no similar one will be made for years?

Within the past few years most liberal donations have been made to many other of our Institutions for these and similar objects. It is not certainly becoming that the Retreat should be suffered to fall behind hand in points of such importance. It ought rather to lead.

The many and great improvements which have been made in this Institution during the past few years, are evidences of a recognition of the fact that the day has gone by, when the ordinary necessities and comforts of life were deemed a sufficient provision for the Insane. The Christian sentiment of the day now demands, that in the arrangement of Lunatic Hospitals, everything repulsive shall, as far as possible, be laid aside; that they be made cheerful and pleasant residences for the diseased body and the disordered mind; that their wards should invite and not repel; be sought as a refuge and not entered as a last resort; that the real affliction of this grave disease shall not be aggravated, both to patient and friends, by the necessity of resorting for treatment to an abode in any manner cheerless or repulsive, but that they should be soothed and consoled by their ability to seek relief amid pleasant associations, and in a cheerful and home-like dwelling. Thus treating it, as it is, a simply physical disease, we should deprive Insanity of half its horrors.

There is another consideration which it is fair to present, and which interests us all. Insanity is no respecter of persons. There is no home so wisely guided, none so safely guarded, that this disease may not enter. In all, therefore, that we may do towards increasing the efficiency and comfort of our Asylums for the Insane, we may be ministering in the future to the necessities of some one of our beloved ones or ourselves!

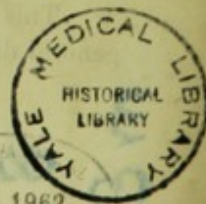
I am aware of the thousand calls which are day by day almost intruding themselves upon private charity. The one I now present to you needs no better excuse, if any, than the subject itself.

This movement is made with the sanction of the Board of Directors, and under the advice and general direction of a Committee appointed by them.

I remain, with respect, your friend, &c.,

J. S. BUTLER.

I remain, with respect, your friend,



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