

To the Legislature : in the matter of the insane in the prisons and poorhouses of Pennsylvania : letters of Dr. J.A. Reed, Dr. D.D. Richardson, Dr. George Cook.

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TO THE LEGISLATURE.

IN THE MATTER OF THE

INSANE

IN THE

PRISONS AND POORHOUSES

OF

PENNSYLVANIA.

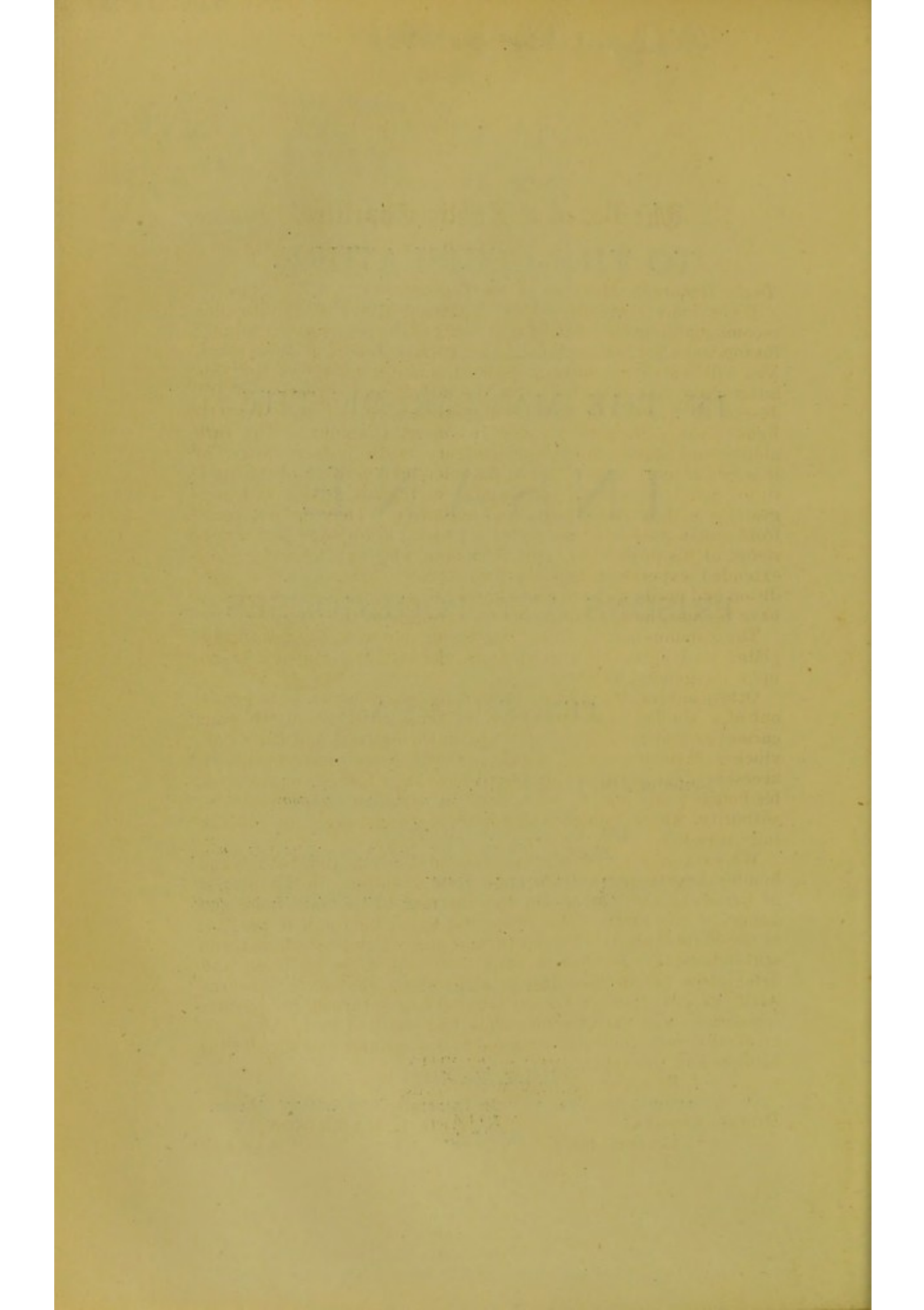
Letter of DR. J. A. REED,
Physician in Chief at Dixmont.

“ DR. D. D. RICHARDSON,
Physician in Chief at Philadelphia Hospital for the Insane.

“ DR. GEORGE COOK,
Physician in Chief at Brigham Hall Hospital for the Insane.

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1874.
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OFFICE OF
The Board of Public Charities,

HARRISBURG, *March 23, 1874.*

To the Honorable Members of the Legislature:

We submit herewith several communications sustaining our recommendations in relation to the care of the poor and "criminal" insane, so-called, submitted in the Annual Report of this Board. The bill which we have presented, making provision for this latter class, was prepared with the advice and direction of Dr. Joseph A. Reed, the Medical Superintendent of the Western Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane at Dixmont. The rare ability and almost unexampled fidelity *to his proper duties*, of this gentleman—manifested in the splendid condition of the institution which he superintends—must clothe his advice and suggestions with large influence and authority. They do not come from a man possessed merely of a general knowledge and experience of his profession; but from one who has had the most extended experience *with the very classes of Insane*, whose condition and needs we have made known to you; and whose wrongs have become, now, a public outcry throughout the State.

The communication from Dr. Reed, herewith presented, explains at length the provisions of the bill, and his own views upon the general subject.

Other letters are added, presenting views which have grown out of a similar experience, and to those, also, we invite your earnest attention. They will explain themselves, and their convincing statements and arguments will serve to strengthen, if necessary, the position this Board has taken before your honorable bodies; and which, we believe, is sustained by a weight of authority, whose influence has not been and cannot be successfully invaded.

We earnestly renew our recommendations in this behalf, and humbly beg to press them upon your attention—in the interest of humanity and justice—in the interest of the fair fame and honor of our State. We pray that the system now in practice at the State Hospitals for the Insane, and which has inflicted, and still inflicts, the grossest wrongs upon the most suffering and defenceless of all the classes with which the State concerns itself, as guardian or keeper, shall be overturned by *positive legislation*; and that she may thus be permitted to do what she originally undertook and intended to do—protect and care for the helpless and the dependent.

By order of the Board,

DILLER LUTHER,
General Agent.

Respectfully,
GEO. L. HARRISON,
President.

Communication from Dr. J. A. Reed, Medical Superintendent of Dixmont Hospital for the Insane.

January 29th, 1874.

HON. GEORGE L. HARRISON :

Dear Sir:—Inclosed I send you a sketch of an "Act," which, if passed by the Legislature, will make it possible to bring every insane person out of the Penitentiaries and Jails of the State, and fully as difficult for the Hospitals to send them back to those institutions as it has heretofore been to get them out of them. If all the hospitals, receiving aid from the State, are required to take their share of such cases, we will make no objection to the commitment of all, whom the Courts of the Western District may see proper to transfer from the prisons to Dixmont. I most decidedly prefer this course to that of making either one of the hospitals odious or distinguished, as THE ONE to which "criminals" are sent.

I need not say to you or to the members of your Board, that this hospital has at all times come up fully to its obligations to the State, and has received all patients who were committed according to Law, whether they came from penitentiary, jail or poor-house. Thus far I do not know that the Institution has suffered in reputation by the course pursued, at least the present overcrowded condition of our wards is not indicative of any loss having been sustained in that particular. *At the present time we have eight or ten patients who have been transferred from Prison or have been acquitted of high crimes on a plea of insanity, and I have no desire to have them removed, as they are among our most peaceable and least troublesome patients. Several of them are quite industrious and useful; one of them who was acquitted of homicide in Forest County, and has been, almost every day, at work on the farm since he was admitted.*

I wish, however, to have my position on this question fully and fairly understood; and I may say that if the legislature was so disposed, that I would, for several reasons, prefer that a separate building should be erected not only for the insane convicts but for that other large and dangerous class of insane persons who are impelled to crime by disease. But as I do not believe the legislature can be induced to erect a building for the "insane convicts" while their number is so limited, I am not disposed to urge any preferences in a way that might, in any degree, interfere with the welfare or the recovery of any one, who may be insane and in Prison. If an "Act," such as I have proposed, should be passed and approved, the difficulties in regard to the proper care and custody of this class of insane persons will, for the present at least, be removed, and the State will have taken another step forward in the cause of humanity. At some

future time, when the insane convicts have increased in number, and we can demonstrate that the innocent insane are being injured by the association with those from Prisons, I have not a doubt but that the Representatives of a people who have already expended millions on their insane, will promptly apply the appropriate remedy.

I can readily see that while we are discussing the subject and waiting for "the right thing" to be done, the unfortunate insane who have found their way into the Penitentiaries and Jails, are suffering from the want of proper care and treatment. This is not as it should be, and I sincerely hope that the present Legislature will adopt this or some other Law, that will afford the much needed relief. I have said that this Institution has always admitted patients who were legally committed; and I may add that so long as the hospital receives aid from the State by appropriations, I shall consider it obligatory on our part to admit all such persons, even if every "private patient" shall be excluded. The laws now in force, however, empower the institutions to refuse certain classes of insane, and authorize the hospitals to discharge incurables; but if the proposed Act should become a law, we shall be required to admit every one that may be presented with an order of Court; *and when the hospital is fully occupied by "State patients," and not before, have we, in my opinion, the right to refuse any of that class.*

I am very respectfully yours,

J. A. REED.

Letter from the Medical Superintendent of the Philadelphia Hospital
for the Insane.

INSANE DEPARTMENT OF THE PHIL'A HOSPITAL, *March 3d, 1874.*

MR. GEO. L. HARRISON,

President of the Board of Public Charities:

Dear Sir:—I have received a communication from you asking me to express my opinion frankly in relation to the care of the poor and criminal insane, and say how far I agree and how far disagree in the views which the Board of Public Charities have expressed in their recent communications to the Legislature on the subject.

You wish me also to state, what my experience has been with these classes, and upon what grounds I base the judgment, which I shall give in answer to your inquiries.

You also express your satisfaction with the condition of the Hospital, of which I am the Medical Superintendent, and the general comfort and quiet demeanor of the patients, and their freedom from mechanical restraint.

I answer you, of course, in the light of my own experience, and in doing so, I may suggest that the absence of such experience might very naturally and reasonably lead to a different opinion and view of the subject.

I have had sole charge of this institution for $7\frac{1}{4}$ years, and partial charge for nearly 3 years, in all more than 10 years. I have had, until recently, but one assistant.

The number of patients in the Institution when I took charge of it, was 565. The present number is 1,023.

The accommodations and appliances for its management are, as you well know, from frequent visits and observations, very unsuitable in most respects, and very discouraging to one who has the responsibility of its direction. Indeed, outside of the extension which your Board induced City Councils to build in 1870, there is little that can be called hospital accommodations, and these provide only for 180.

The composition of this large population is extensively varied. It is made up of pauper inmates, the institution being sustained by taxation.

There are about 273 curable and 750 incurable cases. They are of both sexes, and all ages; classified imperfectly, but as well as the present crowded condition will allow. I suppose they are just such cases as are found in all Alms Houses, excepting that, being near a large city, there are instances of the disease in a more aggravated form than may be the case in the rural counties.

Among those who come here, because of their inability to go elsewhere in consequence of poverty, there are numerous cases of a most interesting character, whose lives have been a series of trials and hardships, although their earlier prospects seemed bright and hopeful. There are wives and mothers whose mental health has given way, because of exhaustion through anxiety and over-work. Young girls whose homes have been made wretched by toil exacted without relaxation, affections trifled with and abused, and hopes blasted. In the male department there are many equally interesting cases. Many are as genteel and respectable, as well educated and well reared as those who are found in private asylums, and who would be there but for pecuniary disability.

We do the best with them that we can; but in the absence of such appointments for care and treatment as are furnished at State Hospitals, we cannot be expected to make them as comfortable, or afford the same opportunities for recovery.

I can readily understand how utterly unfit the County Alms

House is as a receptacle for the insane, without a Medical Superintendent or experienced paid nurses, or proper appliances. No surer plan could be adopted to confirm and perpetuate their insanity, and make them life charges to the County or State. I have no question as to the prior right of the *pauper insane* to State Hospital treatment. They are unquestionably the State's wards.

We have also, of both sexes, a number of what are called "criminal insane," several of whom have found places here, because they were unwelcome elsewhere—one man an attempted suicide and double murderer. They have been sent here by the courts and municipal authorities.

Few insane are not liable to commit the same acts, and many, here and elsewhere, have committed them; *and the only distinction between them is that the latter have not chanced to come under the eye of the law, and the law has not therefore been the instrument of their committal.* I have not thought that this *accident* should form a reason why they should be differently treated. Their conduct is like that of other patients afflicted with the same phase of insanity, and they give no more trouble when they come from officials, than when they are sent by their friends. This has been my own experience, and it accords with that of many other physicians similarly situated.

In conclusion permit me to reiterate, what I suggested to the medical superintendents who recently met, to consider this subject, at the Pennsylvania Hospital for the insane, in this city.

I believe that it would be best to build, for the "criminal" insane, so-called, a separate hospital, to be constructed upon the most modern plan, looking to restoration, and to security. *This hospital should be far remote from any prison.* Failing in this, I am of opinion that there is no valid reason why such cases should be sent to or remain in prisons; but rather that they should be admitted to the different hospitals of the State and properly classified.

For the insane poor, *not criminal*, accommodations should be made either by building more hospitals, *without delay*, or by extending the present hospitals to accommodate *one thousand* patients each.

I am aware that these suggestions are, in part, at variance with the views of some of my brother superintendents, but I feel confident that it is the State's only resource, if she is to provide for the most afflicted of her Wards.

Very respectfully yours.

D. D. RICHARDSON,
Superintendent Physician in Chief, Insane Department Philadelphia Hospital.

Letter from Dr. George Cook, Medical Superintendent of Brigham Hall Hospital for the Insane.

BRIGHAM HALL, CANANDAIGUA, N. Y., *March 4, 1874.*

GEO. L. HARRISON, Esq.:

Dear Sir:—I have just read the Addenda to a Plea for the Insane in the prisons and poorhouses of Pennsylvania, and cannot resist the strong desire of my heart to thank your Board for the earnest words spoken in behalf of the poor and friendless insane, who have so long suffered, and “no man has cared for them.” “Forsaken of friends, forsaken of all” was written of this class by Miss Dix in the State of New York more than a quarter of a century ago. Not wholly forsaken now, for eight hundred of them are now gathered into the Willard Asylum for the chronic insane, taken from the filth, neglect and abuse of the county houses to the wards and open fields of an asylum. *Year after year pleas for more hospitals have been founded upon the wretched condition of the insane in county houses; appropriations have been made and hospitals built ostensibly for them, and, when finished, these forsaken and friendless insane have found the doors closed against them, and been told in almost scornful words that the hospital was not built for them.* What a startling fact is this in our so-called charity! It is a shame upon our christianity! Upon our humanity even. Again I thank you for your good and brave words. It is good to see an honest spirit at work in our charities. May He who, unlike some of our asylum superintendents, esteemed Himself not too good to heal those whom we now call paupers—guide and strengthen you in your humane work. I presume copies of your Plea have been sent to the members of *our* Board of State Charities? If not, I hope they may be sent.

Yours very truly,

GEORGE COOK.

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