

Lunacy versus liberty : a letter to the Lord Chancellor, on the defective state of the law, as regards insane persons, and private asylums for their reception : with remarks, original and select, including the author's own case, and others / by William Griggs.

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LUNACY *versus* LIBERTY.

A LETTER
TO THE
LORD CHANCELLOR,
ON THE
DEFECTIVE STATE OF THE LAW,
AS REGARDS
INSANE PERSONS, AND PRIVATE ASYLUMS
FOR THEIR RECEPTION:
WITH
REMARKS,
ORIGINAL AND SELECT,
INCLUDING THE AUTHOR'S OWN CASE,
AND OTHERS.

BY WILLIAM GRIGGS,

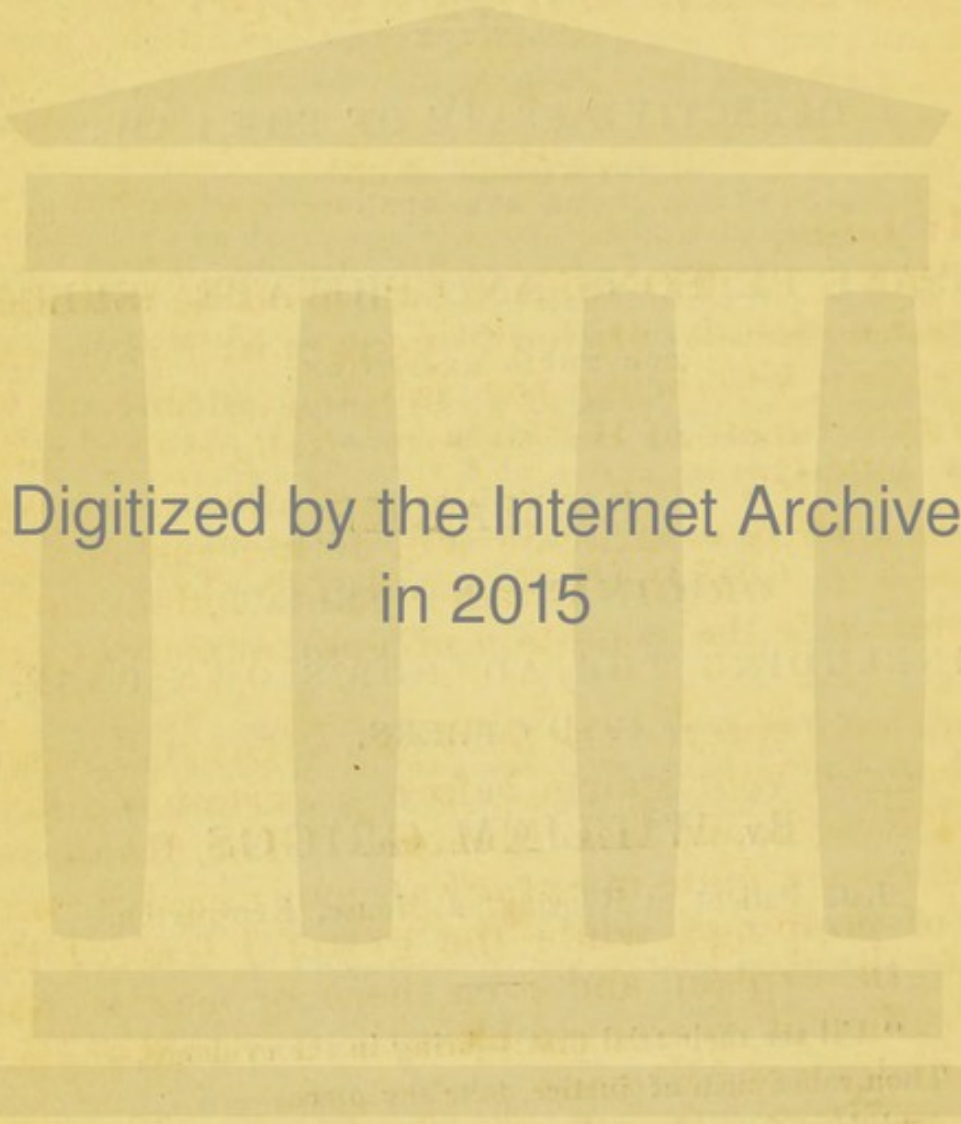
Late Patient at Kensington House, Kensington.

“ I'll see their trial first:—bring in the evidence,—
Thou robed man of justice, take thy place;—
And thou, his yoke fellow of equity,
Bench by his side:—you are of the commission,
Sit you too.”

LEAR.

LONDON:
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1832.



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A LETTER

TO THE

LORD CHANCELLOR,

&c. &c.

MY LORD,

The subject I am about to introduce to your notice, is entitled to your most serious consideration; you being the adopted parent of the most unfortunate of His Majesty's subjects—I mean those afflicted with insanity—I flatter myself, should I be in error, you will do me justice, and ascribe it to the right feeling—that of endeavouring to ameliorate the condition of your numerous progeny.

You have entered the field like a true sportsman, and bagged your game, before a certain old lady would have found her Manton. The Chancery Barristers are quite in extacy at your exquisite method of popping; while the grateful tear of the widow, the orphan, and even the poor maniac, will have sufficient reason to bless the day that placed them under your humane protection.

Our learned medical men, and more especially those who make affliction of the mind their constant study, assert most positively, that almost every person afflicted with mental derangement presents a new case, but do not tell us by what means they discover a person to be of unsound mind. If it is owing to certain little eccentricities which they have, and it appears to be the only rational criterion they have to judge by, then indeed might they send to confinement half the human race, for

heaven knows we are eccentric enough; and I firmly believe, if it was not for the sublime and beautiful system of police, watching us day and night, we should certainly make our escape, and leave certain persons to work for their own living.

The whole Society of Friends, called Quakers, are an eccentric body; and if eccentricity constitutes madness, they deserve confinement; for they have no starving poor, consequently workhouses are useless to them; they go for neither soldiers or sailors; are never tried for offences of any kind—as for hanging, they understand it not—they leave the rope for other christian sects; their affirmation has more weight in a court of justice than any other person's oath; they drink no spirits, though the spirit moves them sometimes; they look at all collectors as they would at robbers, except those who collect for charitable purposes; they have no childish titles among them, one excepted, that of friend; their motto is peace, and their creed universal benevolence, and I firmly believe them to be as happy mortals, and the most peaceable of any of His Majesty's lieges.

Is it not eccentric to drag a person to a police office, and subject him to a heavy fine or imprisonment for breaking a law he never heard of? Even the *unpaid* themselves often chuckle at the absurdity of some of the acts made by our *wise Laws*.

That military ruffian, Napoleon, condensed the laws of France into a small pocket volume, that every one of his dear subjects might carry the whole of the laws about him, and not, as is the case in some countries, be referred to the ten thousandth volume of the abridged index of the laws for a particular act.

On a late occasion, when the sanity of a lady was to be proved, an honest jury gave the lie direct, by their verdict, to the opinions of the mad doctors, and set the lady at liberty, to strut her hour and amuse herself with any eccentricity she

might think proper: in truth, the M. D.'s, (which of course means Mad Doctors) are frequently more mad than the patient they send into confinement. But in order to place the subject before you in a proper light, I will put a case for your Lordship's consideration.

A person is taken ill with fever; a medical gentleman is sent for; in a few days his disorder increasing, the patient, dissatisfied, complains to his doctor; he of course advises the calling in a physician. Now here lies the danger. We all know that fever is often attended with delirium. Suppose from interested motives a mad physician is called in, you may immediately be declared mad; your certificate signed; a keeper sent for; and if you have property, you may be taken in a short time to one of these private asylums—private indeed they are, if the parties who send you there wish it to be so. It may be thought this is overcharged, but I fear it is too often repeated.

Suppose, for instance, a person's name is Brown, and an interested person wishes him to be confined, it is only saying his name is Green; call in a medical gentleman, that lives at a distance, he signs his certificate in the name of Green, for he only knows what has been told him, and you are soon as secure as you would be in any Bastile in Europe; and to find you is thus rendered impossible.

It is sometimes very convenient to send a person to a mad house: a brother, for instance, may find it very convenient to confine his brother, provided he has that brother's property to squander away as he thinks proper. It may be a very convenient way of disposing of a wife, or she her husband. In the same way, a tradesman in an extensive way of trade, managed chiefly by his clerks, it may be convenient to send to a mad house, that these clerks may benefit by his absence—his lady too might prefer the dress circle of a theatre, or the dulcet strains of the piano, to the society of her husband:

such cases of convenience are as notorious as the sun at noon day. Are these things known, and if they are, to pass by unheeded?—if any say, Aye,

Why then reward him, heaven,
And put a scourge in every honest hand,
To lash the coward naked through the world.

The extreme facility the law affords to medical men of cutting off from society all they choose to suspect of being of unsound mind, is the most abominable tyranny I know of in the present age.

Some years since, I read of a certain Indian Monarch, who used to amuse himself by pounding his subjects to death in a huge mortar. If this fellow was not mad, his subjects ought to have risen *en masse*, and made a target of his body, as a lesson for future monsters.

Magna Charta, of which Englishmen appear so proud, makes no distinction of persons, sane or insane, but grants common protection to all; and it is an absurdity, to say the least of it, to think we are to hold our liberties under the cobweb tenure of medical men, however respectable they may be. The law is very defective, and it is impossible, as at present constituted, that ample justice can be done to these particularly unfortunate persons.

I may be told, that certain commissioners watch most carefully all private Lunatic Establishments. How often these gentlemen choose to perform their duty I have yet to learn. But this I do know, that the asylum I was in,—Kensington House, Kensington,—I saw no commissioner while I was there, which was four weeks, from October 29th, to November 25th, 1831.

Now if they can keep away four weeks, I do not see but they can keep away any time they may think proper. I understand they do attend, and very properly, at times when the keepers know not of their coming; but it appears bordering on insanity, to examine mad people; and as to asking

questions of the keepers, as they are interested, you might as well ask Rosy Gills, the Fishmonger, if his fish is fresh; and you may guess the answers both keeper and fishmonger would give, with this contrast however, that Gills wishes to get rid of his flounders, but the keeper wishes to keep his patients.

How do those commissioners arrive at the knowledge that the patients are actually insane? Do they come to a conclusion on the information they gain from the keepers? or from what other source? This is the *grand secret*. While I was in confinement, I was most desirous to see those gentlemen commissioners, but was disappointed. Had they come, I had a few questions, ready cut and dried, to put to them; but my being so decidedly insane, I suppose no notice would have been taken of them. In point of fact, they appear to be a kind of special jury.

I may be told, they are gentlemen of the highest and undoubted integrity; and that they hold their authority from you, my Lord; and I believe all this to be true; but if their altitude was that of Babel, I would not fall down and worship them.

I will put a plain question to the Commissioners. Have they seen or examined the patients for twenty weeks past, at Mr. Finch's, Kensington House, Kensington, from this date, February 14th, 1832? I am free to acknowledge, that this establishment is very far above suspicion, as will be seen by my own case, which I am about to mention.

Had I been in a petitioning humour, I might have petitioned the Legislature for enquiry; but as petitions in general begin with the degrading humiliation of a slave, and end with a most glaring falsehood, I preferred making it public, and leaving it to abler and better hands.

I have no sinister motive to gratify—no ambition to work myself into notice—but feeling most acutely for the situation of these heaven-afflicted mortals,

it is against this systematic waste of life, I have thrown down the gauntlet—this absolute tyranny, in giving power to medical men to outlaw whom they please, contrary to every principle of justice :

“ My soul’s in arms and eager for the fray.”

I had been suffering under mental delusion some months, augmented by drinking to excess; this brought on an excitement of the brain, which deprived me of almost every faculty: I had the best advice; medicine and various methods were tried, but without success: at last a medical gentleman was found of sufficient nerve to stop my further career, and had me taken to Mr. Finch’s Asylum, Kensington; and by being kept quiet, and from strong liquors, in the short space of four weeks was perfectly recovered.

I will now, for the information of the friends of those who are in this asylum, briefly state the treatment I received while under Mr. Finch’s care; and the treatment of all the patients were the same, for I had the indulgence of seeing all of them, and know it to be a fact.

In justice to Mr. Finch, I will first give my unbiassed opinion of him;—a more humane and tender man does not exist—a man possessed of the finer feelings in a high degree; and for his kindness to me, and his humanity to all persons in his asylum, I shall ever hold as one of the best of men I ever knew, and hereby give him my warmest thanks.

I was made an inmate of his house, October 29, 1831; and had I been German Cobourg, could not have been introduced with more politeness by Clarke the keeper, into the parlour of that establishment. It being evening, my COFFEE was brought in, and the door locked on me. I was sensible enough to know my situation, and, after a moment’s reflection, was determined to make the best of it.

I found myself in the company of three gentlemen I had never seen before, (insane of course): all seemed lost in a kind of melancholy, impossible for me to describe. I attempted to rouse them, but to no purpose. One was Mr. Charles Wright, Opera Colonnade, Wine Merchant, who makes a point of never speaking. He has declared he never will speak any more unless his wife Eliza comes to see him; and has been confined many months; and up to this moment has most religiously kept his word. The second, Mr. Richard Burton Williams, a Merchant's Son, of the Island of Trinidad, who I recommend to the particular notice of the Commissioners on their next visit. The third, Mr. William Hale; the last two cared little about speaking: in fact it was a sort of silent committee.

I soon after went to bed, with a full determination in the morning to attempt to get them into some sort of conversation; and I succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectation, with the exception of Wright, who made up by dumb motions; and I firmly believe, they had not seen so merry a day for months past: in the pugilistic phrase, I would not be denied.

The parlour we were confined in was about eight yards square, carpeted all over, mahogany furniture, and a good fire; no bars to the windows; not the least appearance of a place of confinement; under no personal restraint whatever, except our liberty; our bed room, above the size of the parlour, with four beds, at a proper distance from each other. My companions were secured to their beds, I was not; but as much at my liberty as I should have been in my own bed room. In the morning at eight we came down to breakfast, which consisted of a large bason of COFFEE, with three good slices of bread and butter, and more if we wished for it: breakfast over, if the weather permitted, we walked in the garden for two hours or more, or spent our time in reading in doors,

for there is an extensive library in the house, which the patients have the use of, if their cases admit of it, with newspapers and periodicals: thus the time is past till dinner hour, at one, which always consists of some substantial joint, varied every day, with soup or pudding. Our aristocratic pride would not suffer a knife in our presence: we give our royal order, to bring our meat in ready cut, with silver fork and spoon. We were not supplied with a small plate-full, but with one that will keep off *the Cholera*. Persons afflicted with this quack disorder, would soon be cured by dining with Finch's patients for a month, and compelled to eat the same allowance. I have known even the *good lady of the house* send a servant in livery into our parlour, with her compliments, and beg we would accept a little present after dinner. Pretty fair this for a mad house!

Dinner over, books again, or a walk in the garden, which I should think two hundred yards long. I was allowed a pipe, and derived a very great benefit from the use of it. At five, in to tea, which was precisely the same as breakfast; after which, no more to eat or drink: to bed at eight. Now be it remembered, medicine is not required in this disorder. A chapel is attached to the house, and a clergyman lectures every Sunday evening, if the key is to be found. The novelty of preaching a sermon to mad people not a little delighted me; and our parson cut away at *Irving* in fine style I assure you.

The general character of this disease, after long confinement, appears to be that of an oppressive kind of stupor. The spirits are more depressed in some persons than others; some will get in this state in a few months, while others will be years; but as far as I could perceive, all do arrive at that state. Age makes no difference, to illustrate which, I will give an account of some of my companions. One was a French Abbé, who, but a short period be-

fore I was at Finch's, occupied the same apartment I did; he must have been in possession of great muscular strength at the time, as I understood he took up a large chair, and struck the four legs of it through as many squares of glass in the window of the room. When I came, he was in such a debilitated state, that a child might put him down easily—he was so decrepit, that his head was sunk on his chest, and during the four weeks I was there, I never once saw his face. When his physicians came to see him, the keepers were obliged to get him into their room a full hour before they arrived, or he could not have spoken to them. I know not who kept him there; whoever they may be, they ought to blush to keep this poor fellow among madmen, when he only required a nurse. He was treated with the greatest kindness by Mr. Finch, and excited the general sympathy of all the other patients.

Another patient, of the name of Parmenter, who has been confined a long time, and considered to be in the worst state a person can be in. He has been in a mercantile house in the City, and was a clever accountant. I fear I am unequal to the task of giving even a faint description of him—he is in general secured, hands and feet, in a sitting posture; every attention is paid him that humanity could dictate. You privileged tyrants, who outrage nature by your crimes, did you but see this poor remnant of a man in one of his fits, you would be taught a lesson not easily to be forgotten! See him elevated on his throne, naked and manacled, depicting true nature in all the solemn grandeur of frantic despair, in awful majesty. I have often witnessed the tragical delineations of *rage* in a Cooke, a Kemble, and the classic Young; but the efforts of these mock heroes, present but a feeble outline of that passion, compared with this poor unfortunate original: 'tis fruitless to draw comparison—'tis *Ætna* to a woolsack. Will no one advocate the cause of the poor maniac? Yes, Parmenter, I will

make the attempt, and this shall be a standing memorial of my sincerity.

Last, but not the least, comes Mr. Charles Wright, Opera Colonnade, Wine Merchant. So, Sir Charles, you have had company lately, I understand, to dine with you, and a dessert of parchment after? What, are you an executor? What, bring deeds to a person for his signature confined as a lunatic, and to a madhouse too? This smuggling is really too bad. And did you sign their instrument? And what was your signature? Was it Charles Wright?—No.—Was it Hecate?—No. Did you sign it at all?—Yes. Now, Mr. Wright, if you are actually mad, how dare any one presume to get your signature, knowing it must be illegal; and if you are not mad, you ought to be with your family. I most humbly submit to your Lordship's better judgment that the parties ought to be Nonsuited. Bravo, Charles Wright, Opera Colonnade, Wine Merchant.

I will now leave Finch's and once more breathe the free air. I am not complaining of the treatment persons receive at these private asylums—it is their interest to use them well: it is against the tyrannical principle of depriving persons of their liberty without sufficient enquiry. I have no wish to see mad people run about without restraint, knowing well the consequence might be fatal to themselves as well as to others; but before any person is sent into confinement, enquiry ought to take place—a jury ought to be summoned, similar to our Coroner's Inquest, which might be done in twelve hours, and every person examined on oath. There may be cases, certainly, where immediate security may be requisite, until a jury have come to a decision.

There have been numerous cases, and too many I fear at the present moment, where people have been sent to private madhouses, when their reasons have been sound, and kept for years to gratify villanous interested persons.

While I was at Mr. Finch's, he one day brought

me in a volume of amusing pamphlets bound together, and among them was one describing the entrapping of a Mrs. Smith, to *Burrows'* madhouse, who was afterwards set at liberty by the interference of her friends, who brought her to the Court of King's Bench, and most clearly proved her sanity, to the entire satisfaction of the worthy judges. Why were not all the parties indicted for conspiracy?

After reading this, I began to see the horrible situation a person was in confined as a lunatic. I became alarmed, and the thoughts of it tended in a great measure to my so speedy recovery. To the friends of patients, I would say, above all things, see them frequently, and judge for yourselves—cheer them with hope, and if you find them better, take the earliest opportunity and remove them. Mark this particularly—for if a person remain long in this isolated state, be assured he will sink into a desponding low stupor or melancholy, from which he may never recover. I fear too many are lost to society by the stupid neglect of those who call themselves their friends, but who are positively their worst enemies: remember both keeper and doctor are interested in keeping people in confinement. The keeper delights in a full house, and the chariot-rolling guinea trade of the doctor must be extremely pleasant. That we mad people have lucid intervals, the following anecdote will abundantly prove.

While I was at Finch's Hotel, being in a Shandian kind of humour, thinks I to myself thinks I, this confinement of Finch's savours very much of despotism; so addressing my companions in rather an independent sort of a tone:—"Gentlemen," says I, "suppose we were to establish a little *republic* among ourselves, and be free at once." "Republic," says Williams, "we will have no rascally republic, if we have any change, it shall be a thundering good limited monarchy; Wright shall stand

a dozen of champagne, and we will elect him as our sovereign." Wright nodded assent to our proposal, provided he might be allowed to keep his own conscience; this motion required some consideration, and when put to the vote, Wright had a most triumphant majority in favour of his proviso. We immediately gave three cheers, at the noise of which, the keepers rushed into our room, suspended the Habeas Act, upset Magna Charta, burnt the Bill of Rights, and nearly choaked poor Wright with his Coronation Oath. Such regular confusion was never seen or heard of since Noah's Flood—it was something like Owen's merry plan of dancing and singing into eternity, but not so expensive. Thus was destroyed the sweetest form of government ever projected in a madhouse.

"We are not ourselves, when nature being oppressed, commands the mind to suffer with the body."

The idea people in general have of insane persons is, that they are very dangerous, and keepers say so too, as a matter of course, but a greater absurdity does not exist. I have known the worst patient at Finch's, in his worst state at the time, walk with his wife in the garden, free from any restraint whatever, and never knew him guilty of the least violence towards her, for in general they are in that torpid state that a child might lead them any where.

One of my medical gentlemen, while I was afflicted, told me that two dozen at the gang-way would do me good; if so, why did he continue to send me medicine? I suppose he had been an eye-witness to this Christian dispensation, and stood *solus*—thinking with our immortal bard,—

Damn'd be he who first cries hold, enough.

For his peculiar kindness and edification I will relate an anecdote of what occurred some time back,

in my hearing, at Epsom Races, the year Cadland beat Colonel. I was standing among a group of the good people of Surry, when one of them observed, as the horses were coming in, "see how yon jockey be flogging the Colonel." "I am glad of it," retorted another, "why should not Colonel be flogged as well as Private. Sambo might say, doctor no floggee, him no feel for others."

If I were to make choice of a doctor, I should choose a fine healthy-looking man—a skilful anatomist—one who could tell you the number of degrees of each element your amalgamated body was composed of—that if any truant atom has escaped from you, could immediately detect and replace it. Such a man would deserve the name of doctor; in place of which, we have a parcel of pale-faced apothecaries, half a dozen in a street, blinding you nightly with their cursed bulls' eyes—writing up Surgeon and *A-coach-here*—how they get their diploma needs no comment. Pretty fellows these to rob men of their liberty. Perched up in their cabs, these Brooks' looking medical nabobs drive about, seeking whom they may devour. I should like to give them my advice gratis.

Before any person is confined as mad, let them be fairly proved to be so. Have the Commissioners power or not to discharge whom they please in these private madhouses? If they have not the power, then give them that power. If they have, when and where did they exercise it? Diogenes must put two lights in his lanthorn, before he could find a keeper, (however humane he might be disposed), who would say the patient is quite well, take him home.

The brightest gem in this country is trial by jury. Let these poor unfortunates have their jury to decide their cases; then, if jurymen would but be *honest*, they will have nothing to fear. Let them have this before they are consigned to indefinite miserable solitude.

Shade of Howard, your name has been eulogised, and you have almost been canonized as a saint, for your foreign invention of solitary confinement. A more brutal or unnatural mode of punishment never entered the mind of man. What, is it not enough to manacle the body, must you also enslave the mind? And as if heaven itself revolted at this detestable idea, it decreed that your unhallowed carcase should rot on the Desert Wilds of Tartary, as food for the carnivorous condor and vulture.

Much unfounded clamour has been raised against private madhouses, but if persons can pay for superior accommodation, let them have it: but let these places be well looked after—

Let the housemaids do their duty.

Persons confined in these places must be persons of property; then why not hold commissions on them all? If expense forms part of an excuse, then that expense ought to be abridged, provided a statute of lunacy is issued, and they are proved to be of unsound mind, it does not follow that they are to be unsound *for ever*. No disorder appears to be more changeable than this actually is. I know well that those who sign certificates for confinement of persons have power to release them; but, as I have before observed, too many are placed in private asylums by persons interested in keeping them there. To abolish this diabolical villany, commissioners ought to be more frequent in their visits, for if they do not intercede in their behalf, how are they ever to obtain their liberty; no one else ever sees them: year after year may follow, and having no hope left, they naturally become careless of themselves; a desponding perpetual sullenness pervades, and death itself appears preferable to such a life: this is the principal reason that frequently goads them on to self-destruction.

Before I entered Finch's I suspected I had all

the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition to encounter, and thought of nothing but whips, racks, and chains, but was agreeably mistaken, as, with the exception of two persons, all were as free from restraint of any kind, except at night, as any person could wish to be: had I seen any thing of the kind, it would not have been hid under a bushel, for like a China man, I had two eyes, and should have made use of them.

Persons suffering under this malady, are subject to the greatest privations; and happily for the human race so few (comparatively speaking) are afflicted with it. The monarch and the humble plebeian equally partake of its direful effects.

When I first came home, I appeared to be quite a curiosity—a diamond of the first water. One of my most particular friends—a red nosed newsman—was more than ordinary curious; some one had told him I had swallowed the Select Vestry of St. Marylebone, and this uncertificated bankrupt believed it to be true. A lady, too, said to me, “So, Mr. G., I understand you have been confined.” I replied, “Yes, madam, I have been confined, the nurse has gone home, and I am much better.”

Sir Geo. Tothill was my physician, and was fearful of carrying things to the extreme of confinement in a madhouse, knowing well what might be the consequence. My case he did not think required that dangerous coercion. His advice was, that I ought to be placed under restraint and kept quiet, and from strong liquors; but who was to do it, that was the question. His humanity would not recommend a keeper from a madhouse; and who else would undertake the task. Had I been confined and neglected for twenty weeks, I make no doubt I should have sunk into that low torpid state I have left my poor companions in; and should have been hurled into irretrievable destruction. At present I have not leisure to enter further into this affair, but shall reserve it for another letter. Should

my humble efforts be the means of restoring but one member to society, I shall feel amply repaid. As far as my humble abilities will admit of, I have constructed a machine, it remains for your Lordship to give it motion.

Your Friend,

WM. GRIGGS,

10, Edgware Road.

POSTSCRIPT.

Now to those—whose duty it is to alleviate the condition of those unfortunately afflicted of our fellow creatures—whose minds are sound, and who are clothed in ermine; sleeping on beds of down, and in the full enjoyment of every luxury; who hears not the piteous heart-rending sigh, or the plaintive *O dear!* bursting from the heart of the poor maniac—his noble frame enervated—his case hopeless and forlorn—pining in wretched melancholy—in the name of God bring him to the light—do your duty by him—attempt his restoration—cheer and console him, and should one particle of reason return, attempt the recovery of another; then should all your endeavours prove abortive, you will have this consolation, that you have done your duty, and bear this in eternal remembrance—

'Tis his case to-day, it may be yours to-morrow.

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