

## **On insanity in Wiltshire / by John Thurnam.**

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ON

# INSANITY IN WILTSHIRE.

BY

JOHN THURNAM, M.D.

[*Being a Supplement to the 19th Report of the Medical Superintendent of the  
Wilt's County Asylum*]



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## INSANITY IN WILTSHIRE.

THE successive additions to the buildings of the Asylum at Devizes, which have from time to time been found requisite to carry out the care and treatment of the insane poor of the county of Wilts, suggest various important inquiries, in regard to the actual and relative number of insane persons in Wiltshire, as compared with other parts of England. On reference to the published "Returns of Pauper Lunatics," collected by the Commissioners in Lunacy;\* and on comparing these with the Returns of Population for 1861, it will be found that Wiltshire stands in the unenviable position of having a greater proportion of insane paupers than any other county of England and Wales. In the table appended hereto, I have abstracted the numbers for each County, arranged according to the proportion of pauper insanity existing in each.

*Ratio of Pauper Lunatics in England and Wales.*

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\* Twenty-first Report, for 1867. p. 244.

*Ratio in  
Wiltshire and  
adjoining  
Agricultural  
Counties.*

From this table we find that the ratio of pauper lunatics and idiots to the population of England and Wales in 1867, was in round numbers one to five hundred (1 to 494); whilst in Wiltshire it was as high as 1 to 327. The table further shows that several of the counties adjoining to Wiltshire are only slightly more favourably circumstanced; Gloucester (1 to 341), Oxford (1 to 349), Berks (1 to 340), and Dorset (1 to 387), all being among the eight counties in which the ratio exceeds one to four hundred. The other three referred to are Buckingham, Leicester, and Hereford; the last named being that in which the ratio is nearly as high as in Wiltshire (1 to 329). All the eight counties, it will be seen, are chiefly agricultural; none having any considerable mining, manufacturing or seafaring population.

*Ratio in  
Northern Ma-  
nufacturing  
Counties.*

If with these eight counties we compare those eight in which the ratio of pauper insanity is the lowest, namely Durham (1 to 843), Glamorgan (1 to 758), Stafford (1 to 729), Yorkshire (W.R. 1 to 709, E.R. 1 to 593, N.R. 1 to 539), Cornwall (1 to 694), Derby (1 to 628), Chester (1 to 595), and Lancaster (1 to 571), we see at once the great difference in the amount of insanity in these populations, which comprise all that is most influential in the mining, manufacturing, and trading enterprize of the kingdom.

*Race.*

It might, perhaps, be thought that this difference in the ratio of insanity is in part due to a difference of race; and perhaps the South Western and West Midland English counties (Wiltshire included), in which the ratio of insanity is the highest, are to a great extent those in which the native or Celtic element is in many places in excess of the Saxon. Again, in the counties north of the Trent, in which

TABLE SHEWING RATIO OF PAUPER INSANITY IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

COUNTY.	POPULATION, corrected to July, 1866.	PAUPER LUNATICS & IDIOTS, 1st JAN., 1867.			RATIO TO POPULATION
		In Asylums.	In Work- houses, with friends and elsewhere.	Total.	
Durham . . . . .	567,500	400	273	673	1 to 843
Glamorgan . . . . .	360,703	258	218	476	„ 758
Stafford . . . . .	816,056	712	407	1,119	„ 729
West Riding, Yorkshire	1,598,946	1,134	1,122	2,256	„ 709
Cornwall . . . . .	376,306	365	177	542	„ 694
Derby . . . . .	360,968	331	244	575	„ 628
Chester . . . . .	530,279	495	396	891	„ 595
East Riding, Yorkshire	249,849	293	128	421	„ 593
South Wales . . . . .	730,813	514	744	1,258	„ 580
Lancaster . . . . .	2,628,542	2,525	2,077	4,602	„ 571
Rutland . . . . .	21,301	28	11	39	„ 546
Cumberland . . . . .	210,167	219	168	387	„ 543
North Riding, Yorkshire	260,123	302	181	483	„ 539
Kent . . . . .	792,947	802	675	1,477	„ 537
Northumberland . . . . .	362,753	411	268	679	„ 534
Huntingdon . . . . .	64,284	78	44	122	„ 527
Westmoreland . . . . .	62,082	65	55	120	„ 517
Lincoln . . . . .	414,758	515	311	826	„ 502
Nottingham . . . . .	305,587	340	274	614	„ 498
Monmouth . . . . .	183,240	251	125	376	„ 487
Devon . . . . .	593,010	651	587	1,238	„ 479
Southampton . . . . .	520,037	622	504	1,126	„ 462
North Wales . . . . .	433,993	370	571	941	„ 461
Sussex . . . . .	377,180	531	310	841	„ 460
Bedford . . . . .	140,691	185	121	306	„ 460
Norfolk . . . . .	430,841	478	473	951	„ 453
Warwick . . . . .	605,275	909	433	1,342	„ 451
Salop . . . . .	246,768	336	223	559	„ 441
Suffolk . . . . .	336,997	394	377	771	„ 437
Somerset . . . . .	445,352	475	551	1,026	„ 434
Essex . . . . .	422,617	587	387	974	„ 434
Worcester . . . . .	322,632	516	229	745	„ 433
Surrey . . . . .	905,098	930	1,187	2,117	„ 427
Cambridge . . . . .	171,322	237	170	407	„ 421
Middlesex . . . . .	2,366,439	3,864	1,791	5,655	„ 418
Hertford . . . . .	176,270	250	186	436	„ 404
Northampton . . . . .	235,366	2	587	589	„ 400
Dorset . . . . .	191,030	310	184	494	„ 387
Bucks . . . . .	170,127	312	130	442	„ 385
Leicester . . . . .	240,963	367	278	645	„ 374
Oxford . . . . .	171,196	292	199	491	„ 349
Gloucester . . . . .	336,777	594	395	989	„ 341
Berks . . . . .	179,351	322	206	528	„ 340
Hereford . . . . .	127,823	204	185	389	„ 329
Wilts . . . . .	246,856	425	330	755	„ 327
England and Wales	21,135,515	24,152	18,618	42,770	1 to 494

the ratio of insanity is the lowest, not only were the Anglo-Saxon conquests and settlements very extended, but there was also a later very important inroad of Norsemen and Danes, to whom many of the best characteristics of the people of that part of England are doubtless to be traced. This, however, is a view the extent and validity of which may, perhaps, be regarded as uncertain.

*Diminishing  
Population of  
Wiltshire.*

There can, in any case, be little doubt that the efficient cause of the large relative amount of insanity in Wiltshire and some of the adjoining counties, is to be found in the emigration of many of the more able-bodied and energetic of the labouring population; who from time to time leave their homes for Glamorganshire and other counties of England and Wales; or who cross the seas to the United States and to the Colonies, in search of higher wages than they can earn at home. Wiltshire is remarkable among the counties of England for its decreasing population; there being only two others (Cambridge and Rutland) in which there was any noticeable decrease in 1861 as compared with 1851. The decrease in Wiltshire was at the rate of about twenty in the thousand, or 2 per cent. in the ten years.\*

The diminution in North Wiltshire was, however, much greater than in the South division of the county. In the former, between 1851 and 1861, it was at the rate of about thirty-five to the thousand, or  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. In South Wilts, indeed, the numbers shew a slight increase (315), but this is more than covered by the increase in the population

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\* From 254,221 in 1851, to 249,311 in 1861. In Cambridge and Rutland, the diminution was at the rate of about 5 per cent. North Devon and South Lincoln are examples of decreasing population; but taking the whole of these counties there was a decided increase. Huntingdon, Oxford, and Suffolk were almost exactly stationary.

of the two boroughs of Salisbury and Wilton. Separately considered, South Wilts must be placed among stationary, rather than decreasing populations. When it is remembered that the rate of increase for all England, in the years 1851-61, was not less than 10 per cent., or one hundred in the thousand, what is to be understood by a population being stationary or diminishing will be at once seen.

In the population tables for 1861, there are footnotes referring to 34 Wiltshire Parishes and Districts, in which reasons for the decrease of population are assigned. In one-third (11) of these, "emigration" is the assigned cause; in another third "migration" to other places, some within, but mostly to large towns beyond, the county; amongst which Southampton is twice named, and the mining districts once. In two instances the entry of young men into the army is the cause given. In five places a more remote cause is mentioned; viz., the use of machinery in the place of handlooms in the towns of Westbury, Bradford, Trowbridge (Hilperton), in Bromham, and apparently Melksham.\* In one place, Figheldean, the use of agricultural machinery, in Market Lavington the removal of a foundry, and in Stapleford the discontinuance of road traffic consequent on the facilities of railway communication, are the causes assigned. In three places, Cherhill, Urchfont, and Maiden Bradley, the diminution is ascribed to the removal

*Causes of  
Decrease.*

*Emigration.*

*Migration.*

*Use of  
Machinery.*

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\* All these manufacturing towns show a decreasing population. The only Towns in Wiltshire in which the population in 1861 was not a diminishing one, were Salisbury and Wilton in the Southern Division, and Devizes, Chippenham and Swindon, in the Northern. In all, however, excepting Swindon, the increase was trifling. There was a trifling increase in Wootton Bassett and Pewsey, but these are little more than villages.



of dilapidated houses and cottages, or to insufficient cottage accommodation. It is almost certain that in nearly all these last-named cases emigration or migration must have been the result, and that, during the ten years 1851-61, there was a very considerable exodus of the labouring population. As it would, as a rule, be the more healthy and energetic men who would leave their homes, there would result an increase in the relative proportion of the bodily and mentally weak; and the effect could hardly be other than that of filling the Union houses, and indirectly augmenting the proportion, perhaps even the numbers, of the insane.

*Large ratio of Pauperism in Wiltshire and other Agricultural counties.*

Dr. Bacon, of the Cambridge Asylum, has recently pointed out "the close relationship of poverty to the rate of insanity;" and states that in those counties in which there are the most insane, pauperism is also greatest. Here again Wiltshire maintains a bad eminence, having a larger proportion of pauperism than any other county; the ratio being as high as one in every twelve of the population. According to the last report of the Poor Law Board,\* the following was the relative amount of pauperism in six agricultural counties, chiefly in the South-West of England, on January 1st, 1868 :—

Wilts	..	..	1 in 12
Dorset	..	..	1 in 13
Oxford	..	..	1 in 14
Gloucester	..	..	1 in 15
Berks	..	..	1 in 16
Hereford	..	..	1 in 16.

*Smaller ratio in Manufacturing counties.*

But in the northern and manufacturing counties the

\* Twentieth Annual Report, 1868. p. 282-8.

ratio of pauperism was little more than one-half of the above, viz. :—

Durham	..	..	1 in 23
Stafford	..	..	1 in 23
Lancaster	..	..	1 in 25
York, N.R...	..	..	1 in 25
York, W.R.	..	..	1 in 26
Chester	..	..	1 in 27
Derby	..	..	1 in 33.

It would result from the whole of these comparisons, that the position of the farm labourer by no means exempts him from that liability to insanity, which is sometimes regarded as the especial penalty of a more ambitious career. We may, indeed, almost conclude, with an able and original investigator, that, on a large scale, "insanity is an upshot of mental inactivity;" and that our "uneducated cloddish populations" are its chief breeders.\*

*Liability to  
Insanity.*

It is no libel on the North Wiltshire peasantry to class them to a great extent under this head. John Aubrey, himself a Wiltshire man, long since observed that "In North Wiltshire (a dirty clayey country) the *indigenæ* speake drawlinge, they are phlegmaticque, skins pale and livid, slow and dull, heavy of spirit; hereabout there is but little tillage or hard labour; they only milk the coves and make cheese. These circumstances make them melancholy, contemplative, and malicious; by consequence whereof come more lawsuits out of North Wilts, at least double to the southern parts. And by the same reason they are generally more apt to be fanatiques. In all changes of religion they are more zealous than other. The rich wet soil makes them hypo-

*Aubrey's  
characteristics  
of Wiltshire  
populations.*

\* Dr. B. W. Richardson, *Journal of Mental Science*. Oct. 1869. p. 632.

chondriacal ; their persons are generally plump and feggy ; gallipot eies, and some black ; but they are generally handsome enough. On the Downes, viz., the South part, where 'tis all upon tillage and where the shepherds labour hard, their flesh is hard, their bodies strong. Being weary after hard labour, they have not leisure to read and contemplate, but goe to bed to their rest, to rise betime the next morning."\*

*Are any of the  
local causes of  
Pauperism  
and of  
accumulation  
of Lunatics  
preventible?*

Exception may be taken to some of these statements of the old Wiltshire antiquary, and circumstances are certainly much changed since his time, but no doubt they contain a considerable amount of truth. And hence, as many of the local causes of insanity are but little preventible, there is the more reason to battle with those which are in any degree to be obviated. A well-known poet says,—

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

The statistics of the accumulation of wealth may be beyond our appreciation, and they may present

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\* Aubrey, *Natural History of Wiltshire*, pp. 11, 12. Some phrases are transposed, and a few omitted. "In Malmesbury hundred" (the wet, clayey parts), Aubrey says, "there have ever been reputed witches." In the middle ages and later, the effects of insanity were often confounded with the supposed crime of witchcraft. Aubrey apologizes for his "account of the severall humours of his own county as too sarcasticall," and wishes it for a time to "lye concealed as a sacred arcanum." His quaint jottings are contributions to a rude sort of treatise, *De Aere, Aquis et Locis!* He asserts that according to the severall sorts of soil the natives of the different parts of England, and all the world over, "are respectively witty or dull, good or bad." He tells us that "in the rich vales they sing clearer than on the hills, where they labour hard and breathe a sharp ayre." "The difference," he says, "is manifest between the vale of North Wilts and the South." In the former, and "in Somersetshire, they sing well in the Churches ;"

nothing disproportionate or excessive; but if the emigration of the best and boldest of the peasantry of any given district be a cause of pauperism, and, indirectly, of an accumulation of cases of insanity, it becomes an important economic question how far such tendency to emigration may be diminished. The Wise King points out that to withhold more than is right and fitting tends to poverty. So it may perhaps be now. It at least occurs whether the low wages, lower probably in Wiltshire and Dorsetshire than in any other county,\* might not be advantageously increased with the possible effect of reducing the poor-rates, and so obviating some of those evils, of which Wiltshire seems to have a large share.

In the foregoing observations reference is made

*Ratio of  
Private  
Patients.*

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and "in North Wilts the milkmayds sing as shrill and clear as any swallow sitting on a berne"—(quoting Chaucer). Part of the difference which he traces between the people of the North and South parts of Wiltshire, he attributed to the food, and not all to the air and soil. Here we see the influence of a crude humoural pathology, now deservedly exploded. In North Wilts, he says, they "feed chiefly on milke meates, which cooles their braines too much, and hurts their inventions." Again, Aubrey tells us, "it is a woodsere country, abounding much with sowre and austere plants, as sorrel, &c., which makes their humours sowre and fixes their spirits." It must be observed that at the present day the peasantry of North Wilts get no "milk meates," unless a very little salt butter, and now and then a bit of cheese. Their staple and very unvaried diet is wheat bread and potatoes, perhaps a little bacon on Sundays. It is much the same throughout the county.

\* The average wages of the agricultural labourer in Wiltshire is 9s. per week; shepherds, 10s.; and carters, 11s.: there are a few extras in harvest time, &c. The condition of the Wiltshire labourer and that of the "Dorsetshire hind" are nearly the same. Both, there can be little doubt, are "under-fed." See the interesting paper in "Good Words" for February, 1870, p. 94,—“Our Working People, and How they Live.”

only to the Pauper Insanity of Wiltshire. The number of private patients cannot be ascertained, except as regards those detained in Asylums, and not accurately even as to these for individual counties. If the ratio of private patients in Asylums be the same in Wiltshire as in the rest of England, the number requiring to be added would be about 60. But this number is far short of the reality; taking, as it does, no account of those boarded out in private houses and under the care of friends. Insanity, however, without doubt sooner or later reduces many of its victims to pauperism; and its ratio among those who retain their places in the upper and middle classes is much less than might be anticipated. On the other hand, it is certain that the returns of pauper lunatics and idiots in workhouses and with their friends are considerably swollen by cases not properly classed as insane. It is the custom, in many Poor Law Unions, in making up these returns, to include in them all who have once been treated for mental disorder or have been confined in Asylums; notwithstanding that symptoms of insanity no longer exist, and that the individuals are known merely as paupers who were once insane and are receiving relief in consequence of age, infirmity, or disease. The extent to which the numbers are thus enhanced, though varying according to the judgment and fancy of the returning officers, can be by no means insignificant.

*Erroneous Returns.*

*Liability to Insanity.*

The question of the *liability to insanity*, it must be remembered, is not here treated of. It is a large subject to which neither time nor space can now be devoted. It may, however, be allowed to quote the following sentences written twenty-five years ago.

*Tested by occurring cases, not by existing ones.*

“The numbers of *existing cases* of insanity in different communities (or districts) are no test of the relative liability to the disorder. They would

only constitute such a test, provided the duration of the disorder before terminating in recovery or in death, were the same in the communities compared. It is the proportion of *occurring cases* to the existing population which really constitutes the test. 'There may be ten times as many lunatics in civilized as in barbarous countries and times; not because the tendency to insanity is greater, but because the lunatics live ten times as many months or years. The tendency to insanity in a class is expressed by the proportion that become insane.' '\*

It is quite possible, notwithstanding the large amount of existing insanity in Wiltshire, that, on a fair comparison of the occurring cases, this county might compare favourably with others in which the accumulation of pauper insanity is less.

*Any extreme liability to Insanity in Wiltshire not proved.*

And so likewise the supposed increased liability to insanity in England at the present time, as compared with the earlier part of the century, may, to a great extent or even altogether, be imaginary; when the increase in the general population is considered. No doubt the numbers brought together in Asylums have very much increased. In the Wilts County Asylum, within fifteen years, the numbers have been raised from 289 in 1855, to 457 at the beginning of 1870.†

*Increase of Insanity in England not proved.*

These numbers are sometimes thought to imply a fearful rapidity in the increase of insanity. But, on turning to the annual admissions, which roughly correspond with the occurring cases, it is seen that these are on the whole very uniform, and even show a slight decrease. For the entire fifteen years, the

*Large number in the County Asylum explained.*

\* Thurnam, *Statistics of Insanity*, 1845, p. 171. Farr, *Statistical Journal*, 1841, iv., 20.

† *Annual Reports*. Table 3. The Asylum, constructed for 286 patients, was opened in 1851. It has since been three times enlarged.

admissions have averaged 115, but, during the last five years, have amounted only to 110 *per annum*. In 1869 they were 108. So long as the recoveries (or discharges) and deaths are less numerous than the admissions, the numbers in the Asylum must progressively increase. During four of the last five years the deaths have been below the average; which, whilst speaking well for the sanitary arrangements, fully explains the augmentation in the actual numbers under care.

*Facilities for  
sending  
Patients  
abused.*

Part, however, of the increase must be referred to the facilities afforded by recent legislation to the admission of patients, many of whom are sent labouring under slight and transient forms of mental disorder, such as in former days would never have been removed from their homes. Some are brought who ought to be cared for elsewhere, in Workhouses, or even in Prisons. Not a few superannuated and paralytic old people, when they become troublesome in the wards of the Workhouse, are at once removed to the Asylum. In other instances men are brought who should be regarded as offenders against the laws, and punished accordingly. It is an abuse of an Asylum to send to it a man who, maddened by drink, assaults his wife or child, or commits some other vagary or act of violence. It may not be easy in every case to discriminate the excitement of intoxication, acting on a violent temper and coarse nature from mania; but a day or two would generally suffice to decide the question. The journey to the Asylum and the warm bath on arrival often suffice to dispel the excitement; and, it is obvious, that in place of a residence in our comfortable wards, there are cases in which a month's discipline at the treadmill would in every respect be the more appropriate treatment.