

The report of the Committee of Visitors and Medical Superintendent of the Devon County Lunatic Asylum.

Contributors

Devon County Lunatic Asylum.
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DEVON EASTER SESSIONS, 1859.

THE REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE OF VISITORS,

AND

MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT

OF

THE DEVON COUNTY LUNATIC
ASYLUM.

EXETER:

WILLIAM POLLARD, NORTH STREET.

1859.

**List of the Committee of Visitors,
1859.**

Chairman: S. T. KEKEWICH, Esq., M.P.

EARL. FORTESCUE
VISCOUNT EBRINGTON.
THE HON. W. W. ADDINGTON.
SIR E. S. PRIDEAUX, BART.
SIR JOHN KENNAWAY, BART.
SIR J. T. B. DUCKWORTH, BART.
SIR J. L. DUNTZE, BART.
SIR STAFFORD H. NORTHCOTE, BART., M.P.
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JOHN MILFORD, Esq.
R. L. PENNELL, Esq.
JOHN SILLIFANT, Esq.
AUGUSTUS STOWEY, Esq.
E. A. SANDERS, Esq.

T. E. DRAKE, EXETER,
Clerk to the Visitors.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF VISITORS.

The state of the asylum, during the past year, has been in all respects most satisfactory. The patients have not suffered from any epidemic sickness, and the number of deaths shews an average of about 9 per cent., which is rather below the usual average in County Lunatic Asylums.

The decrease in the contract prices of the necessary articles of consumption has enabled the Visitors to reduce the rate of maintenance from 9s. to 8s. per week.

The new building was completed in August last, and contains 100 patients. The situation is airy and cheerful, and the arrangements in every respect most satisfactory; more particularly the large day room, which, by giving the patients space for exercise, contributes greatly to their health and comfort. The cost of the building and fittings has been £3,349, and of extras £495 2s. 10d., making a total of £3,844 2s. 10d.

The sum granted by the Court of Quarter Sessions was £3,600, leaving a deficiency of £244 2s. 10d., which has been defrayed out of the building and repair fund.

The balance in hand on the 31st December last was £2,113 16s. 11d., and £22,000 of the building debt has been paid off, which is now reduced to £27,000.

The number of patients admitted during the past year has been 157, including re-admissions. The number discharged 92. The number of deaths 51. The greatest number of patients at any time during the year in the asylum has been 577, that is, 251 males, and 326 females; and the average number 566, that is, 245 males, and 320 females.

There has been no change in the officers of the institution, except that of Mrs. Charlotte Townsend, who has been appointed housekeeper in the room of Miss Rawlings resigned.

We have again to acknowledge the efficient and valuable services of Dr. Bucknill, the Medical Superintendent, and remind the Court, that at the present Sessions they have to appoint the Visitors for the ensuing year.

SAML. TREHAWKE KEKEWICH.

January, 1859.

THIRTEENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT.

During the past year, 157 patients have been admitted, of whom 83 were men, and 74 were women.

The number of patients at the commencement of the year was 555. The average number resident has been 566; and the number resident on the last day of the year 569, of whom 247 were men, and 322 were women.

Fifty-one patients have died, of whom 34 were men, and 17 were women.

Ninety-two patients have been discharged, of whom 45 were men, and 47 were women.

Eighty-six were discharged cured, being 55 per cent. on the the number admitted; of these two only have been readmitted.

The total number of patients under treatment during the year has been 712, of whom 325 were men, and 387 were women.

The mortality has been in the ratio of 9 per cent. to the average number resident, and in that of 7.1 per cent. to the total number under treatment.

It will be observed from these numbers, that, during the past year, the services of this Institution have increased. A large number of the patients admitted have been restored to the blessings of mental and bodily health; others have had their mental sufferings assuaged, and the bed of physical sickness attended, until death came to terminate a life, whose continuance, too frequently, could not be desired. Still, the duties in this Establishment are so similar from year to year, that I have felt a dearth of material upon which to write a Report, and have delayed to do so beyond the proper time. An important question, however, has recently been mooted, upon which I shall avail myself of the present opportunity to make some remarks.

At the Epiphany Sessions of this year, a Justice moved for a return of all lunatics in this Asylum, "who are incapable of being cured, and are harmless to themselves and others;" and, in speaking to this motion, he stated his opinion, that such persons might more conveniently and economically be maintained in union houses. I have been directed by you to prepare a list of patients coming under the above description, and to state to you my opinion on the general question, which I take the present opportunity of doing.

In the Report of this Asylum for the year 1849, I made the following remarks upon so-called harmless lunatics:—

"I beg here to make a few remarks on the question, as to whether it is desirable to discharge incurable, and as they are called, harmless patients, or in the words of the statute, those 'not dangerous to themselves or others.' This term, I believe, to be inapplicable to any insane person who is not helpless from bodily infirmity or total loss of mind: it can only with propriety be used as a relative term, meaning that the patient is not so dangerous as others are, or that he is not known to be refractory or suicidal. It should not be forgotten that the great majority of homicides and suicides, committed by insane persons, have been committed by those who had previously been considered harmless; and this is readily explained by the fact, that those known to be dangerous or suicidal are usually guarded in such a manner as to prevent the indulgence of their propensities, whilst the so-called harmless lunatic or idiot has often been left without the care which all lunatics require, until some mental change has taken place, or some unusual source of irritation has been experienced, causing a sudden and lamentable event. In an asylum such patients may truly be described as not dangerous to themselves, or others, because they are constantly seen by medical men experienced in observing the first symptoms of mental change or excitement, and in allaying them by appropriate remedies; they are also placed under the constant watchfulness and care of skilful attendants, and they are removed from many causes of irritation and annoyance to which they would be exposed if at large, in villages, or union houses.

"It not unfrequently happens that idiots who have lived for many years in union houses, and have always been considered

harmless and docile, under the influence of some sudden excitement, commit a serious overt act, and are then sent to an Asylum. One of the most placid and harmless patients in this Asylum who is habitually entrusted with working tools, is a criminal lunatic, of weak intellect, who committed a homicide on a boy, who teased him while he was breaking stones on the road. If this is the case with those suffering only from mental deficiency, it is evidently more likely to occur in those suffering from any form of mental disease, which is often liable to change its character, and to pass from the form of depression to one of excitement. For these reasons I am convinced that all lunatics, and many strong idiots, can only be considered as "not dangerous to themselves or others," when they are placed under that amount of superintendence and care which it has been found most desirable and economical to provide for them in centralized establishments for the purpose."

For the above reasons, I am unable to express the opinion that any insane patients who are not helpless from bodily infirmity or total loss of mind are *unconditionally* harmless to themselves and others. I have, however, made out a list of sixty patients who are incurable, and who are likely, *under proper care*, to be harmless to themselves and others.

Of the patients in this list who are lunatic, only nine have sufficient bodily strength to be engaged in industrial pursuits. The remaining twenty-three are so far incapacitated by the infirmities of old age, or by bodily disease, or by loss of mental power, that they are unable to be employed, and require careful nursing and frequent medical attendance. The patients who have sufficient bodily strength to be employed, are also with the least degree of certainty to be pronounced harmless to themselves and others. As the result of long training, they willingly and quietly discharge certain routine employments under proper watch; but it is probable that if removed from their present position, any attempts made to employ them by persons unaccustomed to the peculiarities of the insane, will be the occasion of mental excitement and danger.

The twenty-eight idiots have, with few exceptions, been sent to the asylum from union houses, where it has been found undesirable to detain them, on account either of their violent

conduct, or of their dirty habits, or some other peculiarity connected with their state of mental deficiency; habits of noise or indecency for instance. Many idiots who are reported to have been violent and unmanageable in union houses, become perfectly tranquil in the asylum; a result to be attributed partly to the influence which the attendants, who are constantly with them, exercise over them, and partly to the influence of a liberal dietary.

Idiots are also broken of dirty habits by a system of training, which leads them to pay attention to the wants of nature, at intervals of not less than three hours during the day and night. The result is, that most of the idiots in this asylum are both tranquil and cleanly. Unfortunately this improvement is not permanent, and, indeed, only endures so long as its cause is in operation; a fact which has been painfully evident from the condition in which idiots who have been discharged from this asylum have been brought back to it.

The difficulty of managing idiots in union houses appears to arise:—

1st. From the absence of paid and trustworthy nurses and attendants in union houses, and the management of the idiots being left to the pauper inmates, who are for the most part incapable from infirmity, or untrustworthy from character, to discharge a duty requiring good health, patience, and temper.

2nd. From the dietary in union houses being too low for the proper sustenance of idiots, whose feeble powers of assimilation require a larger amount of nutriment than would be required to keep an ordinary person in average health. A full diet not only supports the health and strength of idiots, but has the most marked effect in rendering them tranquil and easily manageable. The fact ought never to be lost sight of, that the good diet of an asylum is not only needful to keep the inmates in bodily health, and to promote the recovery of those who are curable: but that it is also required in the mental management of the incurable, whether idiots or lunatics, who under a good diet are tranquil, and under a low one are excitable and dangerous. The explanation of this fact is, that in a large proportion of idiots and chronic lunatics the defective state of the nervous system renders the functions by which food is converted into

blood so torpid, that from a given quantity of food a much smaller quantity of healthy blood is produced in them than in persons enjoying good health. It results that a dietary, which is just sufficient to support a healthy person, is often so inadequate to the proper sustenance of an idiot or chronic lunatic, that he would suffer under it from partial starvation, which would manifest itself in excitement and violence. A good dietary, therefore, is essential to the tranquil condition of many idiots and chronic lunatics, and is, without doubt, a principle reason why idiots are easily manageable in this asylum, who have been found to be unmanageable in union houses. The Royal Commission which has recently reported on the Lunatic Asylums in Ireland states this fact broadly, that "the ordinary workhouse dietary is unsuited and insufficient for any class of the insane." It is, therefore, my opinion, founded upon the above considerations, that neither the lunatics nor the idiots in the list presented are likely to retain their present state of tranquillity, and to be harmless to themselves and others, if they are placed in union houses, unless they are provided with those means which are found by experience to ensure the tranquillity of the chronic insane, and especially with a sufficient number of trustworthy attendants, and with a dietary adapted to their state of health. I have thought it desirable to ascertain the practise of charitable institutions especially devoted to the training of idiots, and I find that a fuller dietary is used in them than in this asylum. By the courtesy of Dr. Down and of Mr. Millard, I am able to state the expenses of the two great idiot asylums at Red Hill and Colchester. At Red Hill the expense of each patient, inclusive of instruction, is £35 a year. In the Eastern Counties Asylum for idiots, the cost of each inmate, exclusive of office expenses and instruction, is 10s. a week.

At the last Epiphany Sessions a comparison was drawn, by the Justice who moved the return, between the rate of maintenance of an ordinary pauper in an union house, and that of lunatic paupers in the county asylum. The circumstances of the two cases are, however, very different, and require to be noticed, in order that the comparison may not mislead.

The expenses incurred in an union house are, as it is well-known, divided into those for maintaining the establishment,

which are charged upon the union at large, under the name of "averages," and those for the maintenance of the pauper inmates which are charged upon the parishes to which these inmates belong. In asylums on the other hand, the establishment charges are added to the maintenance rate.

The population of union houses at all times comprises a large proportion of infants and children, upon whom the maintenance rate is averaged with the adults. The inmates of county asylums on the other hand are, with very few exceptions, adults.

In order, therefore, to calculate the actual cost of an adult pauper inmate of an union house, in such a manner as to compare it fairly with the actual cost of the inmate of an asylum, it is necessary to consider it apart from that of infants and children, and to add to it the establishment charges. In order to ascertain the actual cost of an adult sane pauper in an union house, I have obtained, through the kindness of Mr. Bidwill, Clerk to the Guardians, the following particulars relative to the house of the St. Thomas' Union in which this asylum is placed: an union, the population of which is forty-nine thousand, and which has the reputation of being one of the best managed in the kingdom. The cost of the maintenance of paupers in this union house is 2s. 6d. per head per week, namely, 2s. 2d. for food and 4d. for clothing. The establishment charges are 1s. $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per head per week, making a total of 3s. 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for each inmate. The total number of pauper inmates during the twelfth week of the present quarter was 246; and of these 116 were infants and children, and 130 youths above sixteen and adults. A gentleman, intimately acquainted with these accounts, some time since calculated for me that each adult pauper in the St. Thomas' Union House cost 5s. a week. Now, the average cost of all patients in the Devon Asylum at the present time is 7s. 7d., but of this at least 2s. must be set down to the extra wages, diet, and other expenses, needful in the treatment of the sick and of violent and acute cases, leaving the cost of the great body of chronic patients at not more than 5s. 7d. a week. Now if a sane adult pauper in an union house costs even 4s. 6d. a week, is it probable that an insane one would cost less than 5s. 7d? For either extra cost must be incurred in his care, or he must disturb the discipline of the establishment, and every such disturbance is a

source of expense. If the officers of union houses were requested carefully to estimate the direct and indirect cost of lunatic inmates in these establishments, I think it highly probable they would arrive at the conclusion that the separation of the sane from the insane is desirable on the strictest principles of economy.

The economical and moral mischief resulting from the intermixture of sane and insane paupers, may however be averred to afford no argument against the establishment of lunatic wards in union houses, in which this intermixture would be prevented. But would a number of small asylums, under the denomination of lunatic wards, be more economical than one central asylum? The great probability is that they would not be; 1st, on account of the larger proportion of officials they would require; 2nd, on account of the derangement they would occasion to the severe economy which is required by the aim and purpose of union houses as tests of destitution. Where lunatics do exist in union houses in consequence of the want of accommodation in the county asylum, the Commissioners in Lunacy insist upon the provision of what they consider things essential to the proper care of insane persons wherever they be placed. The following are the requirements which they insisted upon as *essential* in the Liverpool Workhouse: a sufficient staff of responsible paid nurses and attendants; a fixed liberal dietary sanctioned by the Medical Superintendent of the asylum; good and warm clothing and bedding; the rooms rendered much more cheerful and better furnished; the flagged court yards enlarged and planted as gardens; the patients frequently sent to walk in the country under proper care; regular daily medical visitation; the use of the official books kept according to law in asylums. If the direct cost of such essentials be computed with the indirect cost of their influence upon the proper union house arrangements, it will require no argument to prove that workhouse lunatic wards so conducted would effect no saving to the ratepayers. The measures needed to provide in the union house kitchen a liberal dietary for the lunatic wards and a restricted one for the sane remainder, to control the staff of paid attendants, to arrange frequent walks into the country for part of the community while the other part was kept strictly within the walls, these

would be inevitable sources of disturbance to the proper union house discipline which would entail an amount of eventual expenditure not easily calculated.

It must never be forgotten, that, wherever the insane may be housed, their care and maintenance, as a class, is inevitably expensive, and not justly to be compared with the amount which, under the stringent and necessary economy of the Poor-Law, is found to be sufficient to provide for the sustentation of a pauper not insane: and it is to be remarked that this expense is not avoidable by deprivation of liberal care and treatment; since the cost of increased destructiveness and disease would counterbalance much of the saving effected by the limitation of comforts. The cost per head for the maintenance of the insane poor, before county asylums were established, when restraint was commonly used as a cheap substitute for proper care, was, at least, as high as at present. The greatly increased expenses now incurred, result from the great numbers under care and treatment; but these very numbers afford an unanswerable proof that this care and treatment is appreciated and approved.

It may be broadly stated, that in the management of the insane, the choice lies between a system which provides only for their detention and sustenance without regard to their comfort and satisfaction; and the contrary one, whose primary object is the well-being of the patients. There is less difference in the cost of the two systems, than may at first appear possible; and I have little doubt, that taking into consideration the result of dirty and destructive habits, and of violent conduct and general derangement of discipline resulting therefrom, the majority of idiots who are in this asylum, actually cost less than they did in the union houses from whence they were brought. It is a remarkable fact, that with few exceptions, the idiots in this asylum have been brought from union houses where from the want of the management they needed, they had been dirty, destructive, and intractable. They have very generally been sent here in consequence of the representations of the officials of the union houses, and by the desire of the Boards of Guardians; and it would scarcely seem advisable to reverse this act of the Boards of Guardians, by sending them back again to the union houses,

to be there placed under exactly the same circumstances as those from which it was thought right to remove them.

From time to time several idiots have indeed been returned from this asylum to union houses, and they have been, almost without exception, brought back to us after having been the occasion of no little trouble and annoyance. This experience accords with that of other asylums. The result of an experiment to relieve overcrowded wards is thus recorded in the last report of the Nottingham asylum: "Fifty-nine harmless lunatics were transferred to their respective workhouses, twenty of them have already been returned as unmanageable. I understand that some of the others have given trouble to the authorities. The experiment has relieved the asylum temporarily, but these results tend to discourage its repetition on the same scale."

But, in estimating the cost of lunatic paupers in asylums, the important consideration must not be omitted that the charge made for the care and maintenance of lunatics in county asylums, is averaged upon those whose actual cost is much greater, and those whose actual cost is less than the mean; so that it would be unfair for the overseers of a parish to say of any single patient that he could be maintained for a smaller sum than that charged, when the probability is that there are or have been patients in the asylum from the same parish, whose actual cost to the asylum has been much greater than that charged to the parish. I have shown, that the actual cost of chronic patients in an asylum exceeds that of adult paupers in union houses to a much smaller extent than has been stated: but if all patients of this description were removed from the asylum, the inevitable result must be that the average cost of those who remained would be augmented, so that the pecuniary result to the parishes in the county would be much the same. The actual cost of an individual patient, if all things are taken into calculation, is often three or four times greater than the average. Leaving out of consideration the welfare of the patients, it would be obviously unfair to the community, that a parish having four patients in the asylum, the actual cost of two of whom was twelve shillings a week, and of the other two only four shillings a week, should

be allowed to remove the two who cost the smaller sum, and be still permitted to leave the other two at the average charge of eight shillings.

I have purposely considered the question of the detention of chronic lunatics in union houses in its financial bearings alone, without further reference to the comfort and welfare of the patients, than the question of their economical maintenance involves. It must not, however, be forgotten, that the detention of a single lunatic in an union house is devoid of all legal sanction, and would be unjustifiable in the face of an action for false imprisonment. A lunatic is only admitted into an asylum under strict legal forms and guarantees: the officers having charge of him therein, act under severe penal enactments; and he is further protected by a strict official visitation. The union house, established for an entirely different purpose, provides for none of these things, and the detention of any person supposed to be insane in an union house against his will and consent, is as obvious an infraction of the law as if he were incarcerated in any private dwelling. The law is rightly jealous of any subject being deprived of liberty under the vague imputation of insanity, and if union houses are to be used as asylums, it cannot be doubted that they ought to be brought, to all intents and purposes, under the law of asylums. The only manner in which this is feasible is the one recommended by the Royal Commission on Irish Asylums, namely, that in districts where union houses are more numerous than the legitimate purposes of the Poor-Law now require them to be, and asylum accommodation is in request, there should be a redistribution of union districts, so that an union house may be purchased and converted into an auxiliary asylum, and as such placed under the law relating to asylums. Hitherto the accommodation provided in this asylum has been sufficient for the wants of the county. The new building erected in 1857 was only rendered necessary in consequence of the reception of patients chargeable to non-contributing boroughs, of whom the asylum at present contains 110, for whose accommodation the boroughs pay a fair rent, which is employed as a building and repair fund, and thus becomes an important relief to the county rate. The admission of these patients is also a relief to the poor's-rate, since the expenses

of the establishment are distributed over a larger number of patients, and thereby reduced to each. There has been no addition to the asylum for the purposes of the county proper, since its original construction.

Still the mode of providing proper accommodation for chronic patients in the most economical manner, is a question which already presses upon many counties, and cannot be long deferred in this one; for while writing these observations the number of inmates of this asylum is 595, of whom only a small proportion present hopes of cure.

The patients who are cured, are those who come in during the year. The old residents are chronic and incurable. Two years ago, in order to relieve the crowded state of the female wards, the Visitors, through the intervention of the Boards of Guardians, dismissed a number of chronic and apparently harmless cases to be placed under the care of their friends. The result of the experiment was not satisfactory. Instances came to my knowledge in which it was attended with great misery; and I have been informed by Relieving Officers, that it was attended, on the whole, with but little if any saving to the poor's rates.

In connection with the subject of expense, I may, perhaps, be permitted to draw attention to the successful economy upon which this asylum is conducted. The last report of the Commissioners in Lunacy [see Appendix C.] shews that the cost of patients in this asylum during the year 1857 was £1 11s. a year on each patient, below the average of all the county asylums in England, making a total of £840 on the whole number of inmates. This result would have been more favourable but for an extraordinary outlay in providing bedding, clothing, and furniture for one hundred additional patients. It has been obtained without, it is believed, in any way sacrificing the interests of the patients, and without the aid of those pecuniary advantages which enable some other asylums to maintain a low maintenance rate. Thus in the asylum for one adjoining county there are a number of private patients, whose payments diminish those of the paupers; in another, a benevolent gentleman left a sum of money in the funds, the interest of

which is devoted to the payment of the salaries of the asylum officers, and in some others large and profitable farms are attached.

The present cost of each patient in the asylum is 7s. 7d. per week, of which 3s. 8d. is expended in provisions, 1s. 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. in clothing, bedding and furniture, 1s. 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in salaries and wages, 9d. in necessaries, coal, light, &c, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in drugs, wine and spirits, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. in garden, farm and piggery, and 2d. miscellaneous, less about $\frac{1}{2}$ d. from receipts.

JOHN CHARLES BUCKNILL.

March, 1859.



