

*Remarks and Notes upon the Branch Asylum at Newark, U.S.,  
for Adult Imbecile Women.* By WILLIAM W. IRELAND.

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It was only when special attention was paid to the training of idiots, that an idea began to be formed of their actual number, and it is only within a few years back that in the census of civilized nations idiots were distinguished from lunatics, or as it is generally put, born insanity was distinguished from acquired insanity. Even yet to some people it will be startling to hear that in most countries there are as many idiots and imbeciles as there are lunatics, and that in some countries there are more. According to Koch\*, there are for every hundred lunatics in Prussia 158 idiots; in Bavaria, 154; in Saxony, 162; in Wurtemberg, 97; in Austria, 53; in Hungary, 140; in the Canton of Berne, 117; in France, 66; in Denmark, 58; in Sweden, 22; in Norway, 65; in England and Wales, 74; in Scotland, 68; in Ireland, 69, and in America, 79. Large as this proportion is, there are many reasons for believing that it is considerably understated, both in our own country and in America. In France I have already pointed out that, although in the census of 1872, there were only 35,133 idiots given, it was found by a special commission to inquire into the diffusion of cretinism, that there were about the same time in the country 122,000 cretins and idiots, that is, 230 idiots for every 100 lunatics. Moreover, from the known unwillingness of parents first to believe and then to admit that their children are imbecile, we may fairly assume that there must be a large number of idiots under five years of age, who are never returned as such in any census, and of whom a large proportion die in early years. Koch found that in Wurtemberg only 43 idiots were returned under 5, while between the ages of 6 and 10 years there were 294 returned.

Long ago, when the first hospitals and infirmaries were established, contagious diseases were confounded with one another, and non-contagious diseases were confounded with those which were really contagious, while maladies requiring separation were treated in one common ward. It is said that

\* "Zur Statistik der Geisteskrankheiten in Wurtemberg und der Geisteskrankheiten überhaupt," von Dr. J. L. A. Koch. Stuttgart, 1878, p. 62.

in the vast dormitories of the old Hotel Dieu in Paris, patients suffering from fevers, insanity, and all sorts of diseases, were crowded together along with the destitute wanderers who needed a night's lodging. In the process of time a rude division was made, and increased subdivision went on along with all improvement in the study and treatment of disease. Contagious diseases were discriminated, and separated from the non-contagious diseases, the incurable were separated from the curable, and lunatics were taken out of the hospitals and gaols where they had been confined, to be treated in special asylums. The segregation, however, ought not to stop here, and it seems to me that an essential condition in the further treatment of insanity must consist in a more thorough-going separation of the insane into various classes, and that to gather into one monstrous pile of building all forms of mental aberration—the maniac and the idiot, the general paralytic and the melancholic, the dement and the puerperal, the curable and the hopelessly incurable—is to spend money in raising a structure which, in some respects, is as well adapted for the perpetuation of insanity as for its cure. For my part, the spectacle of a vast asylum, with its population of a thousand or two thousand lunatics, its miles of corridors and monotonous rows of cells, is something fit to un hinge the mind of any one who does not possess unusually firm nerves. It may be a triumph of administrative skill, but there is not sufficient room or time for the physician to study individual cases, and to infuse kindness and sympathy into the treatment. If we consider how extremely sensitive many of the insane are, and, indeed, how many of them have become insane simply because they are too sensitive, because they feel too keenly what they believe to be harshness and injustice, and loathe too deeply what they think disgusting, it seems to me no greater improvement can be made in the asylums in which they are confined than the removal of companions whose presence can only add to the sense of their degradation, and disturb the process of their recovery. To hang engravings on the walls and draperies above the windows, and deck the rooms with neat bits of furniture and haberdashery, while nothing is done to remove from their sitting-rooms and dormitories the unsightly idiots and dotard old creatures whose presence is not suffered in an ordinary poorhouse, is surely zeal which does not nicely estimate the relative importance of things. It may be a good thing to substitute door-handles for locks

in an asylum, but it would surely be a greater improvement to let out those who should never have been there.

On the other hand, idiots suffer much injury from being shut up in district or pauper lunatic asylums. Naturally gentle, timid, and defenceless, they suffer much from the violence of maniacs, and, inexperienced in evil, but imitative and prone to yield to debasing influences, they learn in a few days indecent practices, curses and oaths, which they never unlearn in the rest of their lives. Thus, an imbecile child, who has been a short time in a lunatic asylum, is often very troublesome and unmanageable when shifted into a training school. The whole scheme of the ordinary lunatic asylum being designed for the treatment, care, and retention of the ordinary insane, all that is done for the idiotic and imbecile is to attend to their bodily wants, and to let them wander about. It is almost superfluous to repeat these remarks to such an audience, and no superintendent of an ordinary asylum for lunatics views the admission of an idiot with anything less than dislike.

Something is done by private charity for the imbecile, though it becomes every year more and more apparent that if this class is to receive sufficient care and training, it must be done, as lunatics are provided for, at the public charge. Considering how numerous they are, it seems very strange there is no asylum for grown-up idiots and imbeciles in Great Britain and Ireland, save those belonging to the Metropolitan Asylum Board of London. For such institutions there is an urgent want. Many imbeciles are kept by their parents, either out of shame to send them to a training school, or in the hopes of possible improvement, until they get grown up and troublesome, or their parents being removed by death, their brothers and sisters will not take the same charge of them. They are very much perplexed at finding no place where their charges can be put under proper care. Moreover, I believe it is the opinion of most of those who are well acquainted with idiots and imbeciles, that it would be much better if they could spend their lives in an institution especially intended for their reception. Some may return to their homes if suitable after a lengthened education in a training school, and a few may earn their bread out of doors, under the care and protection of their friends; but a large proportion of them ought to be all their lives in an establishment where their work can be utilized, their evil tendencies re-

pressed, and their weakness protected. The condition of grown-up imbecile girls of the poorer classes, is most unfortunate. If they are at all healthy, to seduce them is a mere question of opportunity, and, unless they be very narrowly watched, they are all seduced at one time or another. Many prostitutes belong to the class of simple-minded women. Luckily imbecile females are not very prolific, but I have seen a good many children whose mother's imbecility had been transmitted to them. Cases of this kind cannot be unknown to you. When an imbecile pauper has given birth to one or two illegitimate children, the parochial boards generally take fright and send her to a lunatic asylum, where she is immured for life.

There are three classes of idiots—the uneducable idiot, often a very heavy burden upon a family, who is susceptible of no instruction, save, perhaps, what has been called “habit teaching,” the educable idiot, for whom a training school is needed, and the adult idiot. The first two classes can be cared for in the same building, but the idiots of the third class had better be treated in a separate establishment, though they could all be under the same superintendence, if the buildings were at a moderate distance from one another. The two sexes had better be widely apart, not necessarily in a separate asylum, but in compartments well arranged for segregation.

In Upper Canada, which I visited last autumn, I found that the separation between idiots and lunatics had been already made, all the idiots having been taken from the asylums at Toronto, London and Kingston, and sent to Orillia. Through the kindness and hospitality of the Superintendent, Dr. A. H. Beaton, I had an opportunity of thoroughly seeing this asylum. The patients were lodged in a building which had once been an hotel, looking upon a wide and beautiful lake. Dr. Beaton was making the best of his accommodation until a new asylum should be erected on the ground close by. It was thought that it would be built in about a year. The inmates, about 150 in number, consisted of idiots, young and old, with a few demented. Many of them were recent arrivals. They looked healthy and contented. The food seemed to be excellent, and the patients well cared for. There was a governess who was giving lessons to the children, but I understood it was contemplated, in the course of time, to erect a training school elsewhere, and to make

Orillia the asylum for adult idiots. In Hamilton Asylum two wards have been set apart for idiots, 27 of whom have been received.

The asylums in Canada are supported by the Government. The Inspector of Asylums, Prisons, and Public Charities for the Province of Ontario, Mr. J. W. Langmuir, does all the work distributed in England and Scotland amongst the Central Lunacy Boards, the Visiting Commissioners, and the District Lunacy Boards. He accepts all the contracts for provisions as well as for buildings, inspects the asylums and audits the accounts. As far as the asylums of Toronto and Orillia went, everything seemed to move well, and, strange to say, for a man with so much influence and authority, every one spoke well of him.

On my return through the States I spent ten days in the New York State Asylum for idiots with my friend Dr. H. B. Wilbur. It gave me much pleasure when Dr. Wilbur told me of the new Asylum at Newark for grown up imbecile women, and offered to take me to see it. The State Legislature has done wisely in placing the new institution under the care of one so well fitted by ripe experience and proved ability to organize it in a proper manner. It is fifty miles to the west of Syracuse; but in the States they make very little of distances. We went by rail, and on arriving at the village of Newark we found the resident Superintendent waiting to drive us to the asylum. It is a three-storied building on the top of an eminence looking down on the Erie canal. The building was originally intended for a boarding-school, and is large and roomy, with an inside corridor of cruciate form, which, I daresay, is useful enough in a country where the winter is so cold. On entering the court-yard we saw the inmates returning from a walk. They were mostly young women. The great majority were evidently imbeciles, though a few might be harmless lunatics. Erotic tendencies were noticed in a few instances, otherwise the whole tone was quite different from that of a lunatic asylum. There were no petulant complaints or violent language, or attempts to get hold of the visitors to pour out into their ears accusations against the officials or to get assistance to procure their liberty. Every one seemed in good humour and in good health. The women were all clean and neat in their dress and persons. The staff consisted of a resident superintendent and his wife, one teacher of ordinary lessons, and one of industrial occupation, one cook, one baker, one

laundress, six other attendants, and one man of all work. As far as I remember there were about 86 patients, but the asylum could hold about 110. The year's pay bill was 3,100 dols.=£600. The staff is evidently a sufficient one, but it includes attendance for the superintendent and the teachers; and the asylum being newly formed, probably many of the imbecile women had not yet learned to do work. Some of them, however, had been pupils in the Syracuse Training School. In an American Asylum we might expect the cost of servants to be greater, but that of food to be less since provisions are cheaper. The dietary is generally very liberal and of astonishing variety, for the Americans are not at all inclined to be mean and stingy in such matters. There seemed very little ground belonging to the asylum; though no out-door work could be expected of American women, one might think keeping a dairy or some such occupation would be of advantage for the inmates.

The builders of the house had not provided for a sufficient supply of water, and the Superintendent told me that he had been getting water carted for washing purposes from the Erie Canal, but Dr. Wilbur assured me that he had no doubt measures would soon be taken to obtain a good supply of this element so necessary to the health, comfort, and safety of an asylum.

There is no doubt that here we have a difficult question solved in a simple manner. Such an asylum as that at Newark must be a very useful and beneficent institution, and one which can only be supported at the expense of the State. The money, however, is only money spent in a good way which would, in other circumstances, be spent in a bad way, for most of these females must have been supported in one way or another by the community, whether in asylums, poor-houses, jails, or hospitals. Viewed in a money point of view alone, the cost of neglecting them is likely to be greater than the cost of taking proper care of them.