

THE JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE

[Published by Authority of the
Royal Medico-Psychological Association]

No. 447 [NEW SERIES
NO. 411]

MARCH, 1961

Vol. 107

Original Articles

THREE NOTABLE NINETEENTH-CENTURY PSYCHIATRISTS OF WARWICKSHIRE*

By

EDWARD S. STERN, M.A., M.D., M.R.C.P., D.P.M.

Medical Superintendent, The Central Hospital, Hatton, Warwick

I AM going to give sketches of the lives of three notable nineteenth-century psychiatrists who were associated with and lived in my own county of Warwickshire.

I. JOHN CONOLLY

John Conolly was born in 1794 at Market Rasen. His father died when he was six, and he had an unhappy childhood and schooling, boarded out with a widow. His step-father was a political *émigré*, who taught him French.

When eighteen he enlisted in the Cambridge Militia. Four years later he married and then spent an idyllic year in a cottage on the Loire. When they had a baby he had to earn a living, and so in 1817 he entered Edinburgh as a medical student, and later studied in Paris.

He practised medicine at Lewes for a few months and then moved to Chichester for a year, thence to Stratford-on-Avon, where he was appointed "Inspector of Lunatic Houses for the County of Warwick", and founded the local Provident Dispensary. Though active civically, being Alderman, twice Mayor, and one of those responsible for saving Shakespeare's tomb, he was less successful in his practice and never earned more than £400 a year.

In 1827 he was appointed the first Professor of Medicine in the University of London. It has been suggested that he was given this high-sounding appointment through the improper influence of Lord Brougham, one of the joint founders of the University. But, in fact, the men appointed to the fourteen initial chairs were all young and obscure, and mostly from over the border, since the emoluments were small—the total University outlay on all

* A Paper read (as part of an Introduction to the Historical Exhibition) to the Royal Medico-Psychological Association's Annual General Meeting on 13 July, 1960.

salaries being only £7,500—and security tenuous. Perhaps he was considered because while at Stratford-on-Avon he had been a friend of Dr. Samuel Parr, Vicar of Hatton, an eccentric, interested in the foundation of the University, who died in 1825.

Parr is a minor historical figure, sometimes described as the Whig Dr. Johnson, though he seems to have had all Johnson's bad qualities and few of his good ones, being bad tempered, clumsy, discursive, disputatious, gluttonous, inconsiderate, pedantic, and verbose.

Conolly's inaugural lecture at London University was a great success. He tried in vain to introduce the teaching of psychiatry into the medical curriculum. In 1831 he suddenly left and set up in practice at Warwick, being again appointed Inspector of the half-dozen lunatic houses.

Conolly described the conditions of patients in private mental hospitals in his books. As he has been accused of exaggeration I quote Gardiner Hill's description, which is in similar terms: "In the early part of the present century lunatics were kept constantly chained to walls in dark cells, and had nothing to lie upon but straw. The keepers visited them, whip in hand, and lashed them into obedience; they were also half-drowned in 'baths of surprise'; some patients were chained in wells, and the water made to rise until it reached their chins. One horrible contrivance was a rotatory chair in which patients were made to sit and were revolved at a frightful speed." They were chained to their beds and left from Saturday afternoon to Monday without attendance and with only bread and water within their reach.

Conolly recommended such reforms as a state-owned lunatic asylum for each town, with a medical superintendent and assistant doctors, adequate pay for attendants, occupational therapy, frequent visits by friends, and community care. In 1838, having unsuccessfully competed for the post of Resident Physician at Hanwell Asylum, he moved to Birmingham to teach at the Queen's Hospital, but shortly afterwards applied again to Hanwell, and was appointed. The Middlesex Asylum at Hanwell, with its 918 patients, was the biggest in the country, but control was divided between the committee, superintendent, two assistant medical officers, matron, and steward. Conolly, a disciple of Pinel, and familiar with the work of Gardiner Hill and Dr. Charlesworth at Lincoln two years before, was resolved to end mechanical restraint. Although the visiting justices supported him, he was worried by their noisy brawling at committee meetings, and remarked that the most disturbed patient in a distant part of the asylum seemed to know at once what had transpired. His other supporter was the matron, Miss Powell, to whom he paid a touching tribute. The rest of the staff opposed him, the medical officers on the grounds of his inexperience, so he was obliged to resort to subterfuges and declared that one of them—Dr. Button—was redundant; but as soon as he had gone he discovered that he needed a substitute, and appointed Dr. Davey. On 21 September, 1839, he abolished all mechanical restraint at Hanwell—a remarkable achievement when we consider that he had only arrived on 1 June.

His main work was now done: within twelve years he popularized his non-restraint system, which included the proper moral treatment of the patients, good buildings, occupational therapy, forbearance, and consideration for the individual. A question that arises is where he had learned his psychiatry. Probably when he stayed in Paris after qualification he spent much of his time at Bicêtre, and so was able to familiarize himself with Pinel's work.

He was a great founder of societies, e.g. the Warwick and Leamington Phrenological Society (1834), in the days when this science was preparing the ground for our ideas on gross brain pathology and localization, and before its later fashionable extravagancies; and, with Forbes and Hastings, the Provincial Medical Association, now the B.M.A. It has been suggested that he was a man of short-lived enthusiasms, but on things that really mattered he showed plenty of persistence in spite of opposition and his own poor health, for he suffered from tic douloureux.

He was a man of slim figure and attractive appearance, with dark curly hair and an interesting, sympathetic and humorous face. He had great charm, and was a fluent and lucid speaker and writer. He died in 1866 with a terminal hemiplegia.

II. SIR JOHN BUCKNILL

John Charles Bucknill was born at Market Bosworth in Leicestershire on Christmas Day, 1817. He was educated partly at the local grammar school and partly at Rugby School under Dr. Arnold, whom he did not admire. Thomas Hughes, five years his junior, has described the life in *Tom Brown's School-days*, though I do not suggest that Bucknill was the model for Flashman.

Bucknill studied medicine at University College and Hospital and qualified in 1840. At the age of 27, owing to poor health, he was advised to live in Madeira or in the West Country, and obtained the post of Medical Superintendent at the new county asylum at Exminster.

The treatments he advocated included antimony for mania, phosphorated oil for dementia, chloroform for chorea, morphia, until it was replaced by chloral hydrate, and tracheotomy for epilepsy. He was, however, thoroughly progressive, and boarded out suitable women patients. In 1852 he founded the *Asylum Journal* (now the *Journal of Mental Science*), though the first number did not appear until 1853. He edited, and wrote a good deal of it himself; it was printed in Exeter, and his son used to have to gallop with the proofs, to the printers and back, on his half-wild Exmoor pony. He took his M.D., and in 1859 was elected F.R.C.P., where he was also Censor and Lumleian lecturer. He was later elected F.R.S.

He was President of this Association in 1860. His address reviewed the position of lunacy, and he made the acute remark that "The public extends its unreasonable antipathy to the insane, to all those who are connected with insanity, even to those who wrestle with the great evil." He deplored the fact that though 18,000 pauper lunatics were in asylums, 14,000 were maintained elsewhere—under the Poor Law and outside the control of the magistrates.

He did a good deal of legal work, and in an article on medical certificates of insanity he pointed out that the certificate may have to be justified in Court. In 1860 he anticipated the mental health tribunals now about to be set up by recommending to the Select Committee on Lunatics that the patient should be examined by an independent psychiatrist. In his valedictory address to the Association, he suggested informal admissions, community care of chronic patients who had passed the acute phase of their illness, and pensions for asylum officers. He deplored the frequency of casualties to patients owing to drunken attendants, and Committee interference with the authority of the metropolitan medical superintendents, as opposed to the relative autonomy of their provincial colleagues.

In 1862 he retired from Exminster to become a Lord Chancellor's Visitor.

With Hack Tuke he wrote the standard *Manual of Psychological Medicine* (1858). He published the *Psychology of Shakespeare* (in 1859), which consisted of studies of various characters, including Hamlet, whose madness he found to be both real and assumed, in accordance with our modern view. A second edition was issued (in 1867) as *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare*. He was a joint founder of *Brain* in 1878, when he also published his *Habitual Drunkenness*. He regarded alcoholism as a cause and not a consequence of disease, and considered that an alcoholic could stop drinking by a mere effort of will. In this I think he had been unduly influenced by an early impression, for when he was at Rugby School there was a clever amusing drunkard, who used to entertain the boys with music and legerdemain in the dining halls. After a heavy debauch he made a bet of one guinea with the old school doctor, that he would not get drunk again for a twelvemonth, and he won it. He waited until midnight of the last day, pocketed his bet, and was never sober again, for he quickly drank himself to death. Bucknill also tells the story of the countryman who had hurt his eyes by drinking and went to an oculist for advice. He found him at table with a bottle of wine in front of him. "You must leave off drinking," said the oculist. "Why?" said the countryman, "You don't, and yet your eyes are none of the best." "That is true, my friend," replied the oculist, "but then I love my bottle better than my eyes."

In his *Care of the Insane* (1880) Bucknill divided the recent history into a period of abuse from 1828 to 1845, and of reform from 1845 to 1880, and advocated special institutions for dangerous patients, and the successful open door policy of two contemporary asylums. He regretted that, although up to the end of the eighteenth century only those dangerous to themselves or others were sent to asylums, now the milder cases were being admitted; but in this he was vainly protesting against a trend which has continued for the last 150 years. He advocated the single care of private patients. This book is mainly an attack on the abuses of private asylums. Our own library copy formerly belonged to Dr. Hayes Newington, the licensee of Ticehurst House, and its margins are scored with his angry comments!

Perhaps Bucknill exaggerated the abuses, for Lord Shaftesbury did not find such complaints well founded, but even the great Conolly was found in a court case to be receiving 15 per cent. of the fees paid by a private patient to the asylum to which he had sent him, and we may think that this would hardly be approved of today, but is it essentially different from the case of the doctor who sends a patient to his own nursing home?

It is impossible to appreciate the state of lunacy in the nineteenth century without some knowledge of Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) and his work for the oppressed.

The only early legislation was the Act of 1744 empowering justices to have dangerous cases apprehended, and an ineffectual Act of 1774 to regulate private asylums. But in 1808 an Act was passed to permit the building of county asylums. In 1828 Shaftesbury, then Lord Ashley, joined the fray and introduced a bill to provide commissioners for the metropolitan district; it was passed in 1829, and he became unpaid Chairman of the Commission until his death. The correction of abuses was due to him more than to anyone else, but he was a doughty champion of the managers and staffs of asylums when they were unjustly attacked. Bucknill wished a magistrate to be obligatory for the

certification of private patients, and this was provided for in Lord Selborne's Lunacy Amendment Bill of 1885, but Shaftesbury was so upset at the idea, since he preferred medical certification alone, that he offered to resign his post. However, the bill was dropped and he resumed the chairmanship shortly before his death. Echoes of this controversy were still reverberating at the passage of the Mental Health Act of 1959. It is interesting to read in Philip Massinger's play, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, first acted in 1626, that when Sir Giles Overreach goes mad, although harmlessly, no doctor is called, but the Justice says: "Take a mittimus and carry him to Bedlam," although this was a hundred and twenty miles away.

Bucknill had married Mary Ann Townsend of Hillmorton Manor, Rugby, in 1832, and on the death of his father-in-law he went to live there, whilst maintaining his town house in Wimpole Street. He was one of the Visiting Justices of the Warwick County Asylum, Hatton, from 1874 for a dozen years.

In 1852 he had founded the Exeter and South Devon Volunteers. He was the first recruit and served in the ranks throughout, refusing all promotion. It formed the nucleus of the present volunteer system, and this is probably the main reason why he was knighted (1894).

Bucknill stood 6 feet 1½ inches, and with his penetrating eyes, long beard, frock coat, top hat, and authoritarian manner, he was an imposing and forbidding figure. If a patient made a long rambling speech to him he listened in silence and then ejaculated a loud "Ah" (with rounded lips), to the merriment of his professional colleagues, though whether the patient found it equally amusing is not recorded. As will have been gathered, like Benvolio, "his head was as full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat", and he loved equally a quiet argument or a fighting and noisy debate. His family found him demonstrative in wrath but not in pleasure, and they said that he was a difficult man to understand. He died of catheter fever in 1897, and is buried at Clifton-on-Dunsmore.

III. WILLIAM HENRY PARSEY

William Henry Parsey, the son of a Foreign Office official, was born on 3 April, 1821. He received his medical education at King's College Hospital and was trained in lunacy by Conolly at Hanwell and then under Bucknill, who made him his first assistant medical officer at Exminster in 1844. In 1851 Parsey was appointed Medical Superintendent of the new Warwick County Asylum at Hatton.

In his First Annual Report to the Visiting Justices, delivered 28 December, 1853, he advised separation of mental defectives from the insane, and pointed out the importance of early treatment. He continued: "In the general management of the patients it has been my desire to carry out the system so happily commenced by Pinel in France and developed by Gardiner Hill, Charlesworth, Tuke, and Conolly in this country where its beneficial influence in adding to the tranquillity and comfort of the insane, in reducing their mortality and promoting their recovery is now almost universally recognized. This system does not consist in the mere abolition of mechanical restraint, but in the endeavour systematically to develop and strengthen the better feelings of the patients, in providing them with such occupation and recreation as are suitable to their different capacities, in stimulating them to active and useful exertion, in introducing among them social comforts and in making them as far as possible feel that they are treated as responsible

agents. By means such as these the recovery of many patients is secured with very little aid from the administration of drugs, but to secure so desirable a result the physician has to depend not so much on his personal exertions as on his being able to command the services of an efficient body of assistants able and willing to carry out his instructions." What can we add to this passage today, except to substitute "locked doors" for "mechanical restraint"?

His administration gained the approval of Dr. Conolly on his visits, and there are many statements by the Commissioners to the effect that the instruments of coercion are not to be found. I believe that Hatton was the first asylum where mechanical restraint was never used.

In 1871 he opened an Idiots' Asylum, in which he established a school two years later.

He noted the value of statistics in comparing the results at different asylums.

When the number of patients in the asylum reached 680, he opposed further extensions, preferring a separate institution so that the patients could each have enough care from the Medical Superintendent. He advocated better provision for criminal lunatics and the abolition of observation wards—a reform which I achieved for the Midlands in 1948.

In 1876, in his long and thoughtful presidential address to this Association, he commented that Pinel and his disciple Conolly had established that environment did affect patients, and that although occupation and humanity were now the rule, the giving of responsibility to the patient followed tardily. He advocated the abolition of locked doors, a reform which I only completed for him eighty years later.

Parsey was a well-proportioned, bearded man of just below middle height, to be seen wearing a dark suit and flat-topped bowler hat. Naturally he was proud of his achievements, and there is a tradition that, on his return from holidays, he arranged for the asylum brass band to meet his carriage at the gates, and play him up the drive to the tune of, "See the Conquering Hero Comes". Members of his family have disputed this with me, saying that it was out of keeping with his modest demeanour. Perhaps he was one of those doctors who are lions in the asylum but lambs in the medical superintendent's quarters! However, he seems to have had a sound grasp of the principles of administration, for when there was a general concern at the failure to keep asylum staff for more than a year or two, his stayed with him for decades, and he was proud of having their affection, saying: "I allow every one of them to look up to myself, not as their head, but as their personal friend and adviser."

It may be asked why, as well as describing Conolly and Bucknill, who were "leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions . . . and that have left a name behind them", I have also described Parsey, a lesser figure. But he can be counted as one of those "merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten", and I think that we should praise him too lest it be said: "And some there be which have no memorial."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Dr. J. E. A. Bartlet, Medical Superintendent of Exminster Hospital, Miss Jocelyn Morris, Curator of the Warwick County Museum, Mr. Anthony Wood, Warwick County Archivist, and especially Dr. A. Walk, Librarian and President-Elect of our Association, for their help.

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