

The Alleged Increase of Insanity. By HENRY MAUDSLEY, M.D.

Six years ago I endeavoured to show, in a paper read before a quarterly meeting of the Medico-Psychological Association,* that there were not sufficient reasons to warrant the popular opinion, shared by some who had done more than accept a common notion without inquiry, that insanity was steadily increasing upon us year by year in this country; that, in fact, the undoubted great and rapid increase in the registered insane population of England was in the main to be attributed to other causes than an actual steady increase in the production of insanity. As the result of the enquiries, it seemed very uncertain whether we manufactured more madness now than formerly, but very certain that we take more care of, and know a great deal more about, the madness which we do manufacture. The conclusions reached were these:—

1. There is no satisfactory evidence of an increase in the proportion of occurring cases of insanity to the population, and no satisfactory evidence, therefore, of an increased liability to insanity.

2. It was not necessary to assume the reality of such an increase in order to account for the undoubted great increase in the number of registered insane persons.

3. The difference between one insane person in 802 of the population in 1844 and one in 400 of the population in 1870 is mainly, if not entirely, owing to the fact that in the former year the official returns included only about half the actual insane persons in the country, while in the latter year, registration having been made gradually more complete, the official returns included a great many more of them.

4. Some part of the difference was owing probably to the fact that certain patients were registered as lunatics then who would not have been thought, and certainly would not have been classed as lunatics a quarter of a century before.

5. A lower rate of mortality, and a lower percentage of recoveries on the admissions, might account for a part of the increase in the total amount of the registered insanity.

6. The proportion of admissions to the population, which represents approximatively the occurring cases of insanity, did not, when the necessary allowances were made for disturbing causes, yield evidence of any serious increase.

* Published in the "British Medical Journal," January 13th, 1871. See also "The Alleged Increase of Lunacy" by Dr. L. Robertson, "Journ. Ment. Sci.," 1870.

Five years having passed since these conclusions were formulated, it becomes interesting to apply the same line of examination to their records, and to enquire whether the results tend to support or to subvert them. At the outset the large and steady increase which has gone on in the total number of registered insane persons is startling enough. In 1844, when the returns were confessedly so incomplete as not to warrant safely any deductions, the number was 20,611; in 1859 it was 36,762; in 1865 it was 45,950; in 1870 it had risen to 54,713; and on the 1st January, 1876, it was 64,916. Or, to put the matter in a hardly less striking form, the proportion of total lunatics, including idiots, to the population was—in 1859, 18·67 to 10,000 persons; in 1865 it was 21·73; in 1870 it was 24·31; and on the 1st January, 1876, it was 26·78. Broadly speaking, then, we may say that there is now one insane person to 375 of the population, while in 1859 the proportion was about one in 540 of the population—unquestionably a sufficiently rapid, if not an alarming, increase for a quarter of a century; for it is clear that if it goes on with the same ruthless speed for the next half century matters will look very formidable. In fact, those who would explain the increase by a greater liability of the population to go mad run no small risk of proving a great deal too much; for if the alleged increased liability is to continue in action in the same ratio in the years to come as they assume it to have done in the past twenty-five years, it is quite evident that the population of the country must be so widely infected that the sane people will be in a minority at no very distant day.

When we look more carefully into the matter, however, we find cogent reasons to conclude that much, at any rate, of the very great increase in the number of insane persons is owing to the successive Governmental regulations which have been made and enforced for the better supervision and care of the insane. Each new Act of Parliament concerning them has been an instant and effective means of swelling their numbers. The effect of the Lunacy Act of 1845, which enjoined on counties to build asylums in order to make suitable provision for their insane poor, was at once to increase largely the number of those who were registered as lunatics. Before that Act, they had in most counties been kept at home, or farmed out by their relatives, or taken care of in some other way of which there was no official knowledge. When the asylums were built, they were sent there; the result being not only to bring them thus upon the register, so that they were

known, but in most cases probably under better care, so that their lives were prolonged. There can hardly be a doubt that the insane poor live longer now in well-conducted asylums, where they are well fed, well clothed, and well housed, than they did in their former neglected state, when they were ill-fed, badly clothed, and miserably housed. If we take one only of the conditions of proper care—namely, a liberal diet—we find that it exercises a great effect upon the average mortality of an asylum. In the late Dr. Thurnam's work on the "Statistics of Insanity" there is an instructive comparison between the mortality of three asylums in which the diet was liberal and that of four asylums in which it was poor and insufficient. In the former the mean annual mortality was 9·35 per cent., while in the latter it was as much as 14·54 per cent. The contrasted experience of the once notorious York Asylum, before and after it was reformed, yields a more striking illustration of the influence of proper care and treatment of patients upon their mortality; for the mean annual mortality for six years before 1814—which was the year in which the great abuses of its management were exposed—was 14·8 per cent., while it did not exceed 7·24 per cent. for a quarter of a century after the reform. We are warranted, then, in the conclusion that, to some extent, the numbers of the insane have risen because they have not been kept down so much by death as was the case formerly.

There was another Lunacy Act which, passed in 1853, had the effect of increasing the number of registered lunatics. It was an Act which prescribed a quarterly return of the pauper lunatics not in asylums by the medical officers of the unions. While very few of those who were residing with their relatives and with others had been returned before the Act came into operation, there was a considerable increase afterwards; the number in 1871 being 7,331. On the 1st January last it was less, being only 6,526. There is no reason whatever to believe that the increase was owing to the fact that more pauper patients were residing in private houses in 1871, or are so residing now, than was the case twenty years ago; on the contrary, we are perfectly sure that fewer pauper patients are placed under private care now than then, the whole tendency of recent legislation having been to force them into asylums. The increase was due to the more complete system of registration which was enforced by the Lunacy Act of 1853. It will be seen, by and by, that the effect of recent legislation has been to remove any motive for retaining pauper patients in private houses, and to furnish strong motives for sending

them to the workhouse or to the asylum. We need not wonder, then, that the numbers in private houses have diminished somewhat since 1871, but may justly expect that they will diminish still more. Whether they are in the asylum or out of it, however, matters not to our present purpose; so long as they are registered, they will go to swell the increase which is to be attributed to the Act of 1853.

Although the registered number of private insane patients living with their friends or others is not large—being only 439 on the 1st January last—the registration of that number is due to the enforcement from time to time of the statutory provisions of the Lunacy Acts by the Lunacy Commissioners. Years ago few or no returns of these cases were ever made, and it has required many prosecutions of those who have received single patients without complying with the proper legal forms to diffuse the imperfect knowledge which yet exists of the illegality of receiving an insane patient for profit without the proper order and two medical certificates. The Commissioners take credit, in their Annual Report, for the zeal with which they hunt out these cases; and the institution of a criminal prosecution in a “sensational” case from time to time serves to foster public appreciation of their activity and usefulness.

If we look at the numbers of the admissions of patients of all sorts during a series of years, we shall have better evidence of the number of occurring cases of insanity than we get from looking at the total number under care. The following table records the admissions from 1859 to 1875* :—

	1859.	1860.	1861.	1862.	1863.	1864.	1865.			
County and Boro' Asylums	6228	6629	6268	6145	6212	6570	7468			
In Registered Hospitals, Licensed Houses, and under Private Care	3063	2863	3061	2933	2608	2675	2841			
Total	9310	9512	9329	9078	8815	9245	10309			
	1866.	1867.	1868.	1869.	1870.	1871.	1872.	1873.	1874.	1875.
County and Boro' Asylums	6889	7406	7870	8115	8587	9792	8837	9426	9693	11020
Registered Hospitals, &c.	3119	3150	3153	3047	3002	2703	3269	3292	3534	3255
Total	10008	10556	11023	11162	11589	12495	12106	12718	13227	14275

* The admissions into Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum not being counted.

During the first six years the admissions of pauper patients did not vary much, the variations certainly not being such as to indicate a steady increase in the rate of the production of insanity; an inference which will appear the more conclusive when it is remembered that in those six years the total population of the country had risen steadily from 19,686,701 to 20,883,889. Notwithstanding the increase in population, the admissions in 1864 were less than in 1860; in 1863 less than 1859; and least of all in 1862. In 1865, however, the number mounted up suddenly and considerably from 6,570 to 7,468. What extraordinary cause can we discover for so abrupt and exceptional an increase other than an extraordinary outbreak of madness in the population? In 1862 an Act of Parliament was passed which rendered pauper lunatics chargeable upon the common fund of the union of parishes instead of, as had formerly been the case, upon the particular parishes to which they belonged. It was natural that the parishes, so soon as they realised the meaning of the Act, should lose all desire to spare themselves expense by taking care of their harmless lunatics, imbeciles, and idiots at home, and should be eager to throw the burden of them upon the common fund. Other parishes would not spare the fund if they did, they would argue. The economical motive for keeping the patients out of asylums was gone; and the consequence was that numbers of them were sent to asylums. No sooner was a poor person's mind affected so as to prevent him from following his work and to throw him upon the rates, than it became an object to get rid of him, in order to save the trouble and share the expense of his maintenance, or from a vague apprehension of the responsibility incurred by his detention out of an asylum. The reports of the Medical Superintendents of County Asylums soon began to express dissatisfaction that their wards were filled with chronic and incurable cases, which might well be taken care of elsewhere, to the exclusion of acute and curable cases which specially needed the appliances of the asylum. Dr. Thurnam, alluding in one of his reports to the supposed increase of insanity, said:—"Part of this 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 their 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." The repetition of complaints of this kind on all sides led to the proposal, which has been carried out in some instances, to establish less expensive buildings, intermediate between the workhouse and the asylum, for the care and treatment of harmless lunatics and imbeciles. Of the effect of the Act to increase largely the admissions there can, therefore, be no manner of doubt. Nor can we reasonably suppose that its effect was exhausted by the large increase which it produced in 1865; it began to take effect then, and has continued to affect, in less degree, no doubt, the number and character of the pauper admissions since. It will account, probably, for much of the gradual increase from 1865 to 1874, which, when we allow for the increase of the population, is hardly of a character to warrant the supposition of an increased liability to insanity; for while the ratio of pauper admissions to the entire population in 1865 was as 1 to 2,831, it was in 1872 as 1 to 2,610—certainly not a very serious increase.

As showing the character of the pauper admissions in the year 1865, when there was the abrupt increase, I may point to the fact that the percentage of recoveries to the admissions that year was evidently below the average, being in County and Borough Asylums 33·88, against an average of 35·61 for the years 1859–1875. Parish and workhouse officers willingly saw lunacy in forms of imbecility and illness in which they would never have dreamt at one time of doing so; and their one idea, once they had made the discovery, was to get rid of the responsibility attaching to the care and treatment of the patient, by sending him to the asylum.

Looking back to the table of admissions, it will be seen that the number made a more than usual rise in 1875, having previously made an extraordinary rise in 1871. The explanation of the increase in 1871 is to be found, probably, in the opening of the Metropolitan asylums for imbeciles at Leavesden and Caterham; for the removal to them of many chronic patients from the county asylums made room in the latter for the reception of a number of pauper patients who had been previously resident in licensed houses as private patients paid for by their unions. The consequence was an

extraordinary increase in the number of admissions into county asylums for that year, and a diminution of the patients in some licensed houses. There is some reason, too, to think that the opening of the Metropolitan asylums specially for imbeciles led to the removal from workhouses of many who had not previously been discovered to be lunatics; but as this cause would not directly affect the number of admissions into county and borough asylums, it is of interest to us here only as an indication of the growing habit of mind to widen the area of certifiable insanity.

What was the cause of the extraordinary increase of pauper admissions in 1875? An Act of Parliament passed by a Conservative Government in 1874, in order to redeem the pledges to relieve local rates which its supporters had made when touting for votes at the general election. By that Act it was enacted that 4s. a week of the cost of maintenance of every pauper lunatic in an asylum should be defrayed by the State. The effect has been to empty the workhouses of all the cases which it was possible, by any device, to send to the asylum, and to remove the last vestige of desire which there might be to retain a pauper patient under any sort of care outside an asylum. The Government has, in fact, said to parish officials—"We will pay you a premium of 4s. a head on every pauper whom you can by hook or crook make out to be a lunatic and send into the asylum." And just as in olden times a reward of so much for each wolf's head led to the rapid extinction of wolves in England, so we may expect that this premium on lunacy will tend to diminish materially, and, perhaps, to render gradually extinct, the race of sane paupers in England. Not only are unfit cases sent to the asylums, but chronic and harmless patients, who might very properly be provided for in workhouses, are detained in asylums because Boards of Guardians will not take them back once they have got rid of them. Why should they when they would lose the 4s. a head and still have to take care of them? The Act was an ill-conceived measure which no true statesman would have proposed, for it gave the local authorities power of spending money granted by the State without the State having any control over the manner in which it was spent. It was a bribe to the constituencies, and its operation, as might have been expected from its origin, has been disastrous. The admissions of pauper patients will probably continue to increase in consequence of its operation.

In confirmation of what has been said concerning the admissions of 1875, I may point, as I did with respect to 1865, to the smaller proportion of recoveries. In county and borough asylums the recoveries were in the proportion of 34·11 per cent. of the admissions, which is nearly 4 per cent. lower than those of 1874, and 1·5 per cent. below the average of the last 17 years. This smaller ratio of recoveries was no doubt due to the larger proportion of chronic cases included among the admissions, and may be represented as the measure of the success of the Act of 1874 in transforming aged and broken-down paupers into lunatics.

If we now look to the admissions of private patients, we shall not find any trustworthy evidence in favour of the opinion that, so far as regards them, insanity has undergone an increase out of proportion to the increase in the population. There have been variations, but these variations have been fluctuations, not steady augmentations. In 1859 the admissions were 3,082, and they did not, notwithstanding the yearly increase in the population, reach that height again for seven years, when, in 1866, they were 3,119; and if we calculate the ratio to the population, we shall find that in 1859 it was 1 in 6,190, and in 1866 actually less, being 1 in 6,864. In 1875 this ratio was less still, being 1 in 7,356. In fact, in the year of the greatest number of admissions since 1859—that is, in 1874, when they were as high as 3,534—the ratio to the population did not reach that of 1859, being 1 in 6,691. Certainly these figures do not point to an increased production of insanity in the non-pauper class; if they prove anything, it is rather an actual decrease. And they will appear more striking when it is remembered that the more numerous and powerful causes of insanity which are supposed to be at work in these latter days would presumably operate upon the class from which private patients come to at least as great an extent as upon the pauper class. No doubt insanity is sometimes a pauperising disease, and many persons who, while in health of mind, would be above the rank of paupers, are compelled, when struck with insanity, to fall into that rank; but that is a consideration which need not greatly affect our conclusion, seeing that it is a cause of increase of pauper insanity which has always been at work.

Unless there lies hidden some fallacy in the foregoing general and somewhat hurried considerations, it would seem fair to conclude—first, that there is no evidence of an increased production of insanity amongst the non-pauper class; and, secondly, that the undoubted increase of the admissions

into pauper asylums is to be attributed mainly to the successive statutory regulations by which persons have been steadily forced into asylums. At any rate, it would seem right that those writers who speculate upon the reasons why so many more persons go mad now-a-days than in the days of our grandfathers, and who grow melancholy over the supposed decadence of the race, should take more pains than they do to establish the fact before theorising concerning its causes; for at present they are very much like the learned philosophers who, when Charles II. propounded to them the solution of the problem why a vessel full of water weighed no heavier when a fish was put into it than it did before, set out various ingenious explanatory reasons without ever thinking of trying the experiment. In the before-mentioned paper, which I read in 1871, I ventured "a prophecy that, twelve years hence, the ratio of admissions to the population will not be greater, if it be not less, than it is now." The prophecy seems to be in a fair way of satisfactory fulfilment as regards private patients, but it does not seem at all likely to be fulfilled in regard of pauper patients. The danger of prophecy, even when based upon tolerably definite data, is that one cannot exclude intervening causes of disturbance which cannot be calculated upon. How was it possible to foresee in 1871 that a Conservative Government would come into power and forthwith put a direct premium on the manufacture of lunacy? It was impossible. The great educator and guide of the Conservative party, speaking from his long and intimate experience, himself on one occasion enunciated solemnly the dictum that it was impossible to foresee and baffle "the unconscious machinations of stupidity." It was a plagiarism, but only too true—*Mit Dummheit kämpfen die Götter selbst vergebens.*

If we were asked whether we cure more insane persons now-a-days, when we treat them well, than our uninstructed forefathers cured when they treated them ill, we should be disposed to declare offhand that we certainly do. And yet there is no evidence that we do. In Dr. Thurnam's valuable work on the "Statistics of Insanity," which was published in 1845, just after the non-restraint system of treatment and other reforms had been introduced into asylums, and which deals, therefore, with their statistics under the old dispensation of mismanagement, it is stated that, as regards asylums that have been established during any considerable period—say twenty years—a proportion of much less than 40 per cent. of the admissions is, under ordinary circumstances, to

be regarded as a low proportion, and one much exceeding 45 per cent. as a high proportion. Now, the average percentage of recoveries of all sorts of insane patients for the last 17 years was 34·03, and in county and borough asylums 35·61; so that when our results are measured by Dr. Thurnam's standard, they yield nothing to boast of. It would be wrong, however, to attribute the lower percentage of recoveries to the ill-success of our present mode of dealing with insanity; it is no doubt owing in great part, if not entirely, to the greater proportion of chronic and incurable cases among those who have been admitted during the last twenty-five years. Formerly acute and violent cases only were sent to asylums, and they would yield a larger percentage of recoveries, as well, probably, as a larger percentage of deaths. Of the admissions, fewer recover and fewer die each year now than then; the result being the steady accumulation of a residue of chronic and incurable insanity beyond what occurred then. It is a question, however, deserving attention whether the present practice of crowding the insane of all sorts into large asylums, where the interests of life are extinguished, and where anything like individual treatment is well-nigh impracticable, is so much superior to the old system in effecting recoveries as some persons imagine.

Note on the Comparative Mortality of different Classes of Patients in Asylums. By T. A. CHAPMAN, M.D., Medical Superintendent of the Hereford County and City Asylum.

I.—It is well known that the very different death-rates obtaining in different asylums depend much more on the different classes of patients they contain, than on any differences in the hygiene, or other conditions of the asylums themselves. Very little has, however, been done to obtain any accurate measure of the mortality rates that obtain amongst different classes of patients. The statistical tables of this association, which have now been used in the annual reports of asylums for a dozen years, contain much material that may be used for elucidating the matter. It is somewhat surprising that the valuable statistics contained in these tables have not been made use of to any extent either for this or any other purpose; the impediment, probably, is the considerable labour involved in any extensive analysis of their numerous data.