

Mental Hygiene—Continued

this book I have several definite purposes. First, I hope to rob insanity of many of its terrors—at least those which do not rightly belong to it. Most children are afraid of the dark until they learn that its hidden monsters are imaginary. But this childish fear is a sublime mental process compared with the unreasoning dread of insanity that prevails in the minds of most adults throughout the civilized world. Under certain conditions an insane person is, without doubt, the unhappiest of men, but I shall prove that sometimes he is not less happy—is indeed happier—than a sane person under the most favorable conditions. To a startling degree the unhappiness of the insane is directly due to the perhaps unconscious lack of consideration with which they are treated. This is fortunate; for these external contributory causes can be eliminated; and no one thing will go so far toward eliminating them as the universal adoption and continued use of the humane and equally scientific principle of Non-Restraint in the treatment of insanity. As the reader will come to know—doing to the insane as the sane would be done by is the essence of Non-Restraint.

Secondly: Books alone can never produce the desired results. But a society founded and endowed for the sole purpose of solving this stubborn problem can at least raise the standard of treatment to such a level that existing short-comings will be forever done away with. A campaign of education carried out under the auspices of a National Society should lead to effectual reform, make even petty abuses appear heinous, and thus insure, upon discovery, the correction of all abuses.

Thirdly: It is my hope that the beneficent rich may be prompted to come to the aid of the States and Nations by supplying funds for the erection and endowment of model institutions wherein mental and nervous diseases, in their incipient and curable stages, may be treated with the maximum efficiency. With such institutions—hospitals and sanatoriums—in operation, thousands of those who now are committed indiscriminately could be restored to health and society, without having suffered the unfair stigma of legal incompetence; and patients in our State Hospitals could then receive that individual treatment which will insure the recovery of so many of them and, at the same time, enable those who do

not recover to lead comfortable, even happy lives. . . .

Conclusion

The field is before us! The disgrace of the facts (of which I have related but a few) still cries to Heaven. Though the days of dungeons, manacles, shackles, ropes, straps, and chains have, in the main, passed, it should yet be borne in mind that our great hospitals, with their beautiful grounds, are too often but cloaks wherewith a well-intentioned but blind civilization still covers a hideous nakedness. This cruel and deceptive cloak must be torn off. Let these mysteries be converted into open Truth and Fairness. That the public has long been deceived by appearances is not surprising. For, even I, in walking casually through the wards of such a hospital, find it well-nigh impossible to realize that many of the inmates are subjected to even mild abuse. Even I, who have suffered the most exquisite torture from "muffs" and straight-jackets (camisoles), have, in my several tours of inspection at State Hospitals, looked upon a patient so bound with a feeling rather akin to curiosity than sympathy. So innocent do these instruments of restraint appear when one views a victim for the few moments it takes to pass him by, it is little wonder that a glib-tongued apologist of "Restraint" may easily convince one that the bound patient is, in fact, better so. Nevertheless, he is not better so. The few seconds that the observer beholds him

are but an infinitesimal fraction of the long hours, days or weeks, that he must endure the embrace of what soon becomes an engine of torture. There is but one remedy for the evils attending the mechanical restraint of the insane. At once and forever abandon the vicious and crude principle which makes its use possible.

The question is: Will the reader help to bring about improved conditions? If so, let him take his stand as an advocate of Non-Restraint. So will he befriend those unfortunates whose one great need may best be epitomized in these words—the words of a man who for a score of years worked among the insane in the capacity of an assistant physician, and later as superintendent of a state hospital. His simple though vital remark to me was: "After all, what the insane most need is a friend!"

Clifford Whittingham Beers (1876-) began his life's work on June 23, 1900. He says, "The events of that day, seemingly disastrous as then viewed, but all for the best as the issue proved, forced me along paths travelled by thousands, but comprehended by few." After the two years of madness which began on that day, Mr. Beers emerged sane and devoted to the cause of helping those most helpless of unfortunates, the insane. To this end, he started in 1908 the Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene, and in 1909 the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. In 1918 he helped extend the work to Canada, and the next year began plans for an International Committee. The First International Congress for Mental Hygiene will meet in Washington, D. C., next spring.

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How Men Learn

Psychology

How the human brain learns not to do things, which is as important a branch of education for life as learning to do other things, has been probed by experiments conducted at Cornell University by Dr. A. L. Winsor, of the Rural Education Department.

Using the procedure of collecting saliva, which the Russian physiologist, Prof. I. P. Pavlov, first used to show that a dog's mouth will water more freely when it hears a bell and associates the sound with eating, Dr. Winsor placed food before a hungry man and measured the increased flow of saliva which the sight of food caused. When the man continued to look at the food and was given no chance to eat, the saliva flow diminished. The brain had recognized that the food signal was false.

The same negative learning process occurs when a child jumps at the sound of a nearby train whistle. After hearing the whistle many times, instead of jumping more intensively his muscles no longer respond to the shrieking noise. The alarming sound is recognized as boding no harm.

From a series of experiments, Dr. Winsor concludes that psychologists have heretofore underrated the significance of the negative learning process. The law of learning assumes that repeated stimulation of the eye, ear, nerves, or glands will cause a response to become more firmly fixed. Yet repetition in many circumstances serves to decrease or inhibit the response, so that a habit is formed but it is the opposite of what would ordinarily be expected.

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