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MORAL INSANITY—WHAT IS IT?

Read at a meeting of Toronto Med. Soc., Dec. 14, 1882.)

BY J. WORKMAN, M.D., TORONTO.

(Late Superintendent of Toronto Asylum for Insane, etc.)

(Concluded.)

In a very valuable work on the subject of moral insanity, published in 1878, by Dr. Bonfigli, of Ferrara, a concise review of the declared opinions of 46 eminent alienistic writers on this subject, is presented. These authorities may be divided as follows:—

7, terminating with the epoch of Pritchard, uphold the doctrine of absolute, or pure and distinct, moral insanity; of these 3 were French, 3 German, and 1 English.

17 admit the term conditionally; that is to say, they recognize moral insanity as a conventional or convenient, but not as a distinct or pure form of mental disease. They hold that it is always associated with some degree of intellectual infirmity, or that it is the forerunner of insanity of the intellect. Of these 17, 7 are French, 6 German, 3 Italian, and 1 English.

22 absolutely, or impliedly, reject the doctrine *in toto*. Of these 9 are German, 7 are French, 5 are Italian, and 1 is American.

Had Dr. Bonfigli been more largely versed in the literature of English and American alienism, he could have much augmented the numbers assigned to the latter two countries; and, undoubtedly, the classes of conditional advocates and of

utter repudiators would have had almost exclusive admission to his catalogue. He, however, introduces into his book a brief report of a discussion on moral insanity, which took place at the Annual Convention of Medical Superintendents of Asylums in New York, in the year 1863. I had the pleasure of being present and of taking part in this discussion, which was conducted in the most courteous and frank manner. Dr. McFarland gave it as his conviction that, "in all the cases of the so-called moral insanity, a real intellectual disorder was present." He was followed by the other members in rotation, including the distinguished and very long experienced Dr. Kirkbride, the President of the Association, and the veritable Nestor of the fraternity,—numbering in all present some 40 representatives of the United States and Canadian Asylums. Of all this assemblage only two or three declared their belief in the actuality of moral insanity, and even these declined to define it as a distinct and independent form of the disease. Dr. Gray, Superintendent of the New York State Asylum at Utica, said that in 5,000 cases of lunacy which had passed under his observation, he had not met with one of pure and distinct moral insanity. Dr. Chipley said he had not found one in 1,800 watched by him, and I made a similar statement as to 2,000 observed by myself. It is not, however, to be overlooked, that asylum physicians generally become first acquainted with the insane only after their malady has