

THE CANADA LANCET,

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SCIENCE,
CRITICISM AND NEWS.

The LANCET has the Largest Circulation of any
Medical Journal in Canada.

TORONTO, JANUARY, 1896.

Original Communications.

SOME LIMITATIONS TO CURATIVE
WORK IN STATE HOSPITALS FOR
THE INSANE. A CRITICISM OF PRE-
SENT METHODS, AND A PLEA FOR
A BETTER SYSTEM OF TREATMENT
OF THE ACUTE CURABLE INSANE.*

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Among the objects for which this Academy was organized, we find the relief of human suffering, and under this purpose the methods pursued in the treatment of the acute curable insane may properly be considered. In the paper which I am about to present for your consideration, it is my object to bring before you certain reasons why the present system of treatment of this most unfortunate class does not accomplish the best results, and to suggest certain modifications in our methods, which have occurred to me as a result of my experience in the treatment of these cases, and which I believe would very materially advance their interests. Knowing, as I do, that in this discussion I am about to criticize time-honored customs and methods which have the sanction of age, and knowing further, that some of the positions which I shall take will not receive the approval of those to whom the greatest honor is due, not only for their long experience and knowledge of psychiatry, but also for their life-long work in relieving the sufferings of those mentally afflicted, I am nevertheless so firmly convinced of the correctness of the views set forth, that I bring them before you with the

* Read before the American Academy of Medicine at Baltimore.

feeling that, however they may be received, I have given you the results of a thoughtful consideration of the conditions essential to a satisfactory method of treatment of the curable insane.

The question which first confronts us at the outset of our discussion, is as to the results of treatment in our State hospitals. Are they the best possible? Are as many of the curable insane brought to a normal mental condition as possible? Questions of this nature are never absent from the mind of the alienist, and, indeed, were his conscience so calloused, and his sympathies so hardened, by his contact with the insane, and his observation of their mental distress, as to cause him to forget them, he would be quickly aroused from his lethargic state by the adverse criticisms to which he is constantly subjected. The results of the alienist in the treatment of the indigent insane, always a question for adverse criticism, have been brought prominently before the public by the recent severe criticisms of eminent neurologists. Some of these are just, and strike the key-note of the situation, some are without foundation in fact and show an utter failure to appreciate the faults of the present system, and some are frivolous and unworthy of consideration.

Taking as the criterion of success the actual restoration of the curable insane to a normal condition, I believe the above questions should be answered in the negative; the results are not as good as they could be made. As a justification of this apparently damaging admission, I invite your attention to some of the different elements which act as limitations to curative work in hospitals for the indigent insane.

For the first of these limitations the general physician is responsible. The care of the patient during the invasion and early stages of the disease devolves upon him, and as to him is largely left the question of hospital treatment and the proper time for its adoption, he is responsible for the condition of the patient at the time of admission. The period of invasion of insanity is the most critical part of the course of the disease, and its treatment exercises a determining influence upon the subsequent course and prognosis of the case. Believing, as I firmly do, in a physical basis of a large part of the