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A THEORETIC MEDDLER

He Needed a Lesson, and He Received It

By F. A. MITCHEL

Professor Van Winkle, an authority on brain diseases, had a theory that the greatest liberty should be granted to insane patients. The professor claimed that shutting up a patient aggravated the disease. It happened that the college in which Van Winkle lectured was located in the same town with the state lunatic asylum, and, as was natural, considering his specialty, his opinions on the treatment of the insane confined there had great weight with the townspeople, from whom they were reflected upon the board of directors of the asylum.

Dr. Swinburne, the superintendent, not only had the confidence of the staff of doctors and nurses—indeed, all the employees—but was very much beloved by them, and they were always in terror lest some visitor to the institution witnessing a necessary severity should, with the aid of Professor Van Winkle, cause the doctor to be reprimanded and that he would resign. Finally this very thing happened. A mother saw her son put in a strait jacket. She complained to Van Winkle. The professor "talked." The directors fulminated a law against unnecessary severity and recommended the use of patients, so far as possible, for whatever work about the institution they were fitted. When these orders were received by Dr. Swinburne he handed in his resignation.

During the professor's visit he was given every facility for the performance of his work. The staff were not disposed to regard his presence there unfavorably. He had been there about half an hour when he was shown to a padded room wherein was confined a man who showed no signs of mental or any other disease. The professor asked him why he was there.

"I can't understand," replied the patient. "Why I am detained here. The management might better avail themselves of my services and save some of the money they have been wasting. I was for years chef in one of the largest hotels in America and could do all the cooking required here. Instead of that I am being driven really insane by being confined alone with no occupation."

Nothing could have conformed more nearly to the professor's theory.

"Why don't you give the man a chance?" he asked of the attendant who was conducting him.

"He has been under surveillance, professor," was the reply, "and we have about concluded to grant his request. What do you think about it? If you say the word we will put him in the kitchen at once."

"I will assume the responsibility of your doing so," replied the inspector. The patient was at once let out of confinement and went below while the professor continued his inspection.

There was great relief felt by the staff when the great mental experimenter finished his work and was ready to depart. While standing in the hall waiting for his carriage to drive up to the door the patient he had released from the padded room in the white apparel of a cook stepped up to him and whispered in his ear that if he would come to the kitchen he would show him something he should see. The professor went with him to the kitchen. They had no sooner entered than the patient locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"I don't propose," he said, "that any of these villains who have kept me a prisoner shall interfere with my showing you what miserable rotten stuff they have been feeding us. If I gave them a chance they would come in here and on pretense that I show signs of relapse take me back to that mad room. Mad room! That's what it is—a room in which to make some people mad. Come here!"

Now, the locking of the door was in itself not especially grateful to Professor Van Winkle, but when he saw the chef getting excited he felt a cold chill run down his back. He went with the latter to the enormous range, capable of cooking meals for a couple of hundred persons. There was a hot fire within, and the noon meal was being prepared. On the range a large cauldron of soup was boiling.

"How many cooks do you suppose they had here when I came in?" the patient asked excitedly. "There were

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H. A. JUKES.



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ten cooks, and each cook had an assistant. Besides these fifty cooks and assistant cooks, there were twenty scullions. Just think of it—a hundred cooks and scullions to get the meals for not over 150 persons, and the people of the state taxed to pay 'em! I seized this—taking up a cleaver—and drove 'em all out."

Professor Van Winkle had a theory as to the management of lunatics when they became dangerous. It was to humor them. The chef was growing more and more excited, and the professor thought it high time to invent some way of getting out.

"What door did you drive them through?" he asked.

"That one," said the chef, pointing to a door opposite the one through which they had entered.

"Let us go and find them," said Van Winkle, starting for the door. But when he reached it his heart sank within him. It was locked. Turning, he saw the chef holding up the key, laughing and dancing.

"You didn't think I would let 'em come back, did you? Not I. Suppose the whole lot of 'em should come down on me armed with carving knives. I'd have to cut their heads off with the cleaver." And he brought it down fiercely on a huge block used for cutting meat on.

The professor looked at the windows with a view to bolting through one of them. The sashes were all down and before he could get one of them up the maniac could split his skull with the cleaver.

"If I ever get out of here alive," said the caged man to himself, "I'll stick to my studies and let others work out my conclusions in practice. I've had enough of this. This fellow is mad as a March hare."

"Come here!" thundered the chef, "and see what kind of meat this devil Swinburne feeds us on."

Van Winkle obeyed, and the man, opening the door of one of the ovens, pulled out a pan containing a large roast of sizzling beef.

"Smell it!" cried the chef.

Van Winkle, not daring to disobey, bent over the roast.

"Close!"

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Van Winkle bent lower. The maniac put his hand on the other's head and rubbed his nose on the beef. When he permitted his victim to arise, a red spot appeared on the top of the professor's nose.

"You've come here to make an inspection and you've got to do it. You can't smell anything unless you poke your nose into it. What do you think it is?"

"Roast beef. It smells very bad," stammered the terrified scientist.

"Roast beef! Why, man, that's not roast beef; it's unicorn."

"Certainly it is."

"And it's rotten."

"Very rotten."

"Not fit to eat."

"Indeed it's not."

"What'll I do with it?"

"Throw it away."

"No; I'll burn it to a cinder." And above the meat back into the oven, he shut the door with a bang.

"Do you know, professor, what kind of meat I believe in feeding insane persons on?"

"No."

"Human meat. There's something in human meat to nourish humans. Why not? The waste is replenished by the same tissue that is lost. These crazy persons suffer from a want of brain food. What's so good for the brain as the brain. If I could give all these sufferers in this asylum one dinner of brain food I could cure 'em."

"Suppose," said the professor, trembling—"suppose we go out and get some brain food for them."

"Go out? Why should we go out when we've got it right here? You, who have done so much for brain sufferers will certainly do one thing more."

"What?" faltered the professor, knowing well what the man meant.

"Give your brain to the cause. It would be worth a dozen common brains. Its theories would be taken in to the system as well as the organic matter. Like cures like. Come, lay your head down on that block. I'll take it off with this cleaver and boil it in that cauldron."

The professor, white as a sheet and trembling at the knees, looked about for an avenue of escape.

"Down on the block!" roared the maniac. "It's nothing more than many eminent men and women among our British ancestors have done. Think of Anne Boleyn, the Earl of Strafford, Archbishop Lawd, Lady Jane Gray, Charles I. and hundreds of others. They gave their heads for no cause; you will give yours for mental sufferers."

The maniac seized the professor by the arm, at the same time raising the cleaver. Van Winkle could stand the strain no longer. He raised a cry that reverberated throughout the building. Persons were heard trying to open the doors. Then one of the windows was thrown up, and an attendant jumped into the room, followed by others. They reached the maniac in time to save the professor, took the cleaver from the former and led him away struggling. Six strong men were engaged in the removal.

Van Winkle on reaching home, as soon as he had recovered from the shock he had received, wrote out a statement to the directors of the state asylum for the insane in which he admitted that there were cases of insanity needing rigorous treatment and that the experienced persons in charge of them were the best judges of when to apply such treatment. The superintendent's resignation was withdrawn.

The brain theorist did not again visit the institution for two years, when Dr. Swinburne had retired. In the new superintendent Professor Van Winkle met with a surprise. He was none other than the maniac chef who had so nearly chopped the inspector's head off. The superintendent smiled.

"Professor," he said, "we were obliged to eliminate your interference with Dr. Swinburne's management or lose the doctor. When you came on your tour of inspection I was then a physician on the staff, but you had never seen me and I concluded to play the part of an uncurable patient. I meant no harm. Your scientific deductions are valuable, but we must be the judges as to testing them."

Professor Van Winkle never told the story as to how he had been duped and eliminated.

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