

POOR DOCUMENT  
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THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1922

MENTAL ILLNESS  
AND CRIMINALITY

To the Editor of The Times:  
Sir,—As a member of the National Committee of Mental Hygiene of Canada, and particularly interested in all that means for a better understanding of the abnormal mentalities so common among us as seen about us every day, in the shape of our mental illnesses and defects of character, commonly known as criminal, I would like to make a few statements about those local cases, and the like, to which some little publicity has been given during the last few days. The question has been asked in a general way as to what we are going to do about them. Of course the conditions are not new, far from it, and the same questions have been asked for the same length of time. We have tried to deal with these cases, in the past, and up to the present, by considering the act aside of the question only, and the act committed, and very little attention has been given to the question of the real responsibility of the chief actor from a standpoint of his or her mentality. From the view point of modern psychology, which has made great advances in the last few years in the understanding of these mental illnesses, it would appear that the main question should always be as to the mentality of these individuals. What they are really trying to do and why? What are the impulses and compulsions that are forcing them to remain or regress into social individuals? In other words, to study these so called and legally labelled criminals for what they really are and not for what they are not. The latter way has been the common way in the past, and because it happens to be the sanctioned traditional way not to have up to now been content to conform to it in spite of all the evidence of failure in its pursuit. The question is how much longer are we going to stumble along judging our mental illnesses as criminal and administering punishment to men and women, human beings like ourselves, because they are suffering from these mental illness over which they have as little, yes less control than we have of our frequent physical illnesses without outside help. I can only conceive of a lack of a true knowledge of the real conditions of these poor creatures as a reason for our apparent blindness. These individuals are under the compulsions of impulses the foundations of which were laid in childhood and we can never come to any just understanding of them and their social acts by any amount of investigation of the conditions which are at the moment present, but only by a proper study of the present condition and an exact history of the individual and an enquiry into the very beginning of the existing condition. Are we who claim to be normal, and who in our normal conditions could not do these social acts, going to continue to so unintelligently and illogically judge and treat these poor unfortunate mental illnesses, or are we going to attempt to find out for ourselves the real truth of the matter? There is plenty of material about, without seeking far, for those who are in earnest in this matter. I am referring particularly to many mentally ill individuals who have come under the eye of our revenge dispensers, who represent you and me and pass our judgments and our punishments on these, some of our numerous mentally ill. I only request investigation and a little clear thinking on the part of our normal thinking citizens, for any persons who are in a normal mental condition cannot fail to see that our old way of in-

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vestigation and treatment, punishment, of these mentally ill individuals has not only not accomplished much, if anything, in the reduction of the vices, or aided these individuals in the control of their defects of character. Instead, each year we are called upon to make additions to our machinery and buildings necessary for carrying on this unholy warfare against our defenceless mentally ill, whose difference to ourselves is not a matter of kind, but only one of degree. To come to any reasonably true answer to these questions we must learn to read back into these lives and learn the strength of the childhood tendencies to follow pleasurable paths of the least resistance, whose foundations are laid generally in the earliest childhood; for this strength may be vastly diminished or increased by the fact that the immense forces of social custom, by prescribing what should and what should not be done, help to deprive the child of his own sense of responsibility, while at the same time they seem to relieve the parent from the necessity of seeking to discover what is really passing in the child mind. We talk of independence, but in fact the community is almost frantic in its demand for conformity, irrespective of the individual's mental capacity to conform. It will not require any great amount of introspection for any of us to see that these unfortunate individuals are really our companions in arms in the great march of social progress, and we will awake to the fact that we are akin, perhaps with those we had called sinners—and have pitied at long range. A little knowledge will teach us that these mental illnesses or faults of character arise largely as the primary or secondary results of the failure of the forces of our civilization as brought to bear on this or that individual child during the stage of development.

It would appear that it was about time that street clubbing, court-room beating, jiu-jitsu handling of our mentally ill were a thing of the past, of the dark ages to which we must all agree they truly belong; and that a regime of true understanding be instituted in their place. This question of the mental illnesses of our city and province should be considered seriously and promptly by our public health board; for after all it is the by far larger part of the question of public health in any province, for it is far more widespread and far reaching than the physical side of the question, important as the latter really is, and the hiding away in homes, jails, reformatories and asylums of these poor unfortunates does not do away with the condition nor prevent the new crops that are ever coming to the fore.

A FRIEND OF THE MENTALLY ILL.

THE FIGHT AGAINST  
TUBERCULOSIS

The Society for the Prevention of Tuberculosis, at its meeting yesterday afternoon, had two interested visitors, Dr. R. E. Wedhouse, secretary of the Canadian Association, and Dr. D. Carmichael, superintendent of the River Glade Sanatorium. A. C. Skelton presided, in the absence of E. L. Rising. The reports presented told of a busy month. One hundred and forty-seven adult and sixty-five children patients had been

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cared for. There were nine clinics for adults and five for children. Fifteen prescriptions were filled and eight patients were receiving milk. The total number of nurses' visits was 202. The doctors' reports showed that Dr. A. E. Logie had examined eleven patients and Dr. H. A. Farris had examined six patients. Dr. Doris Murray had examined sixteen patients, children. Dr. Murray's children's work was a feature of the month's activities which received specially favorable comment. Dr. Carmichael was greatly pleased with the arrangements made by the society to hold a case finding campaign in St. John in April.

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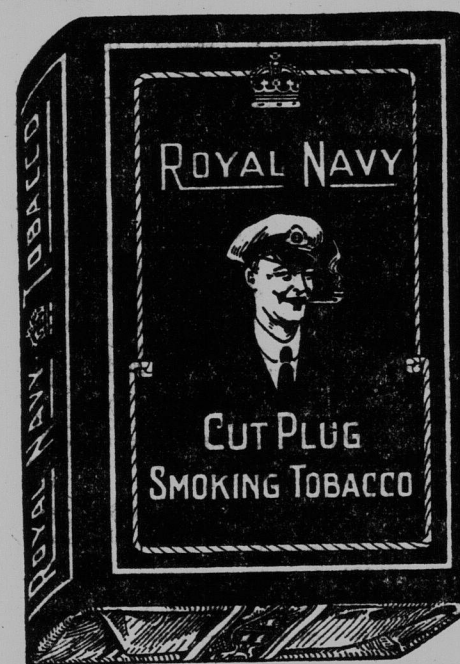


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