

SURGICAL GYNECOLOGY AMONG THE INSANE: RIGHT OR WRONG?

BY A. T. HOBBS, M.D.,
Asylum for the Insane, London, Ont.

Some four years ago the medical staff of the Asylum for the Insane, at London, Ontario, were impressed with the idea that among the women congregated in that institution there must exist many cases of hitherto unsuspected pelvic disease. The only reliable method to ascertain the correctness of this impression was by actual examination of the most likely cases. After close scrutiny of the history of many of the women a number were selected and underwent a thorough examination while under the influence of an anesthetic.

The numerous pathological lesions diagnosed by this mode of investigation surprised us, and the good results following appropriate treatment of these diseases exceeded our most sanguine expectations.

The presentation of this surgical work and its sequences before various medical societies, has aroused bitter opposition from a section of the profession devoted to the care of the insane. The motives of the investigators have been impugned, and the object of the surgical work has been so persistently misrepresented that an erroneous conception of the whole subject has gained credence, to some extent, among a number of our Canadian physicians. The purpose of this essay is to place the pros and cons of the subject before the profession at large, the proper judges to decide as to whether we are right or wrong in the course we have been pursuing.

Among the objections made to the work are these: "*Wholesale mutilation of helpless lunatics,*" "*Criminal to impose such a risk upon an irresponsible being,*" "*It is high time for the profession to call a halt in its mad career of pelvic mutilation.*" We are characterized as "*Meddlesome gynecologists,*" "*Wages his most relentless surgical fury on the ovaries,*" "*Never fails in his diagnosis for he always finds what he searches for,*" "*Statistics published prior to a two years' test of their efficiency are comparatively worthless,*" "*There is no room for such a fad,*" "*We have no gynecologists connected with this hospital; if we had we would certainly have more cases of disease of the female genitals,*" "*Do not know of any case of insanity due to disease of the genital organs,*" "*The mania for removing ovaries is a crying evil.*"

These objections have been directed at the gynecological surgery done among the insane at the London and other asylums. Such criticisms are illogical, because they are foreign to the subject; unfair, because they misrepresent what has