

THE CANADA LANCET,

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF

MEDICAL AND SURGICAL SCIENCE.

VOL. XIV. TORONTO, SEPT. 1ST, 1881. No. 1.

Original Communications.

ON ASYLUM MANAGEMENT.*

BY JOSEPH WORKMAN, M.D., TORONTO.

With your kind permission I would now avail myself of this final opportunity of speaking a few words on some matters of much interest to yourselves, to the afflicted ones consigned to your care, and to society at large. I must, however, frankly forewarn you that my observations may, to some of you, savour more of the leaven of censorious comment than of gratifying approbation; yet, remembering the indulgence awarded to me by the the association in past years, with whatever freedom I may have expressed myself on every subject under discussion, and feeling perfectly confident that the highest recommendation to your polite attention is your reliance on the sincerity of the speaker, I dismiss from my mind every apprehension of severe criticism, and addressing you as reflecting and liberal men, who thoroughly comprehend the truthfulness of the proverb, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy," I shall endeavour to tell you, with becoming frankness, what I think of some of the harmful exuberances, and a few of the defects, of your general asylum administration; and I wish it to be kept in mind that I desire not to be understood as restricting my disapproval of existing errors or faults to institutions south of the great boundary line, but as falling on those of my own land, wherever they may chance to present.

I start with the general proposition that much government is, in all departments of life, a fundamental evil, and too much government is, in all human affairs and relations, a blunder that invariably and inevitably defeats the true purpose of all

government; and when government is not only redundant in quantity, but also hurtful in quality, I can conceive no shorter or surer road to anarchy and corporate ruin. It is my belief that no small proportion of American asylums are too much governed, and that some of them have been sadly misgoverned. I am not blind to the fact that in any country which has achieved free popular institutions, and in which all public affairs must be conducted in conformity to the dominant suffrage of the electoral body, there must be great difficulty in convincing the multitude that there are some affairs in which they may be lacking in that cautious discrimination and stability of purpose which are essential to final success; and I freely admit that the conservation of the grand central blessing of national liberty must have paramount consideration. It rarely, however, happens that consciousness of the possession of power does not prompt to its exercise, and too often power is exercised merely for the sake of demonstrating its possession. In all such instances there will be much government, and very certainly not a little misgovernment. Some of you may have heard of the precocious little girl of eight years, who one morning said to her mother, "Mamma, may I be married?" The surprised dame answered, "What makes you ask that foolish question?" To which the bantam woman rejoined, "O, because I wish to let the children see a wedding." And just so it is with many bantam men, "dressed in a little brief authority," that do strut and cackle most vociferously. If they do not make the "angels weep," they certainly draw huge groans from many a poor devil under their authority. One of the greatest evils connected with the administration of your asylums is that of the uncertainty of the tenure of office of superintendents. It is impossible to glance over the lists of a series of years without being struck with the appearance of the many new names, and the disappearance of old ones, presented. It is, however, very gratifying to me to find the names of so many old friends still lingering in the Eastern and Middle States. I rejoice to see that New England and her old neighbours appear to cherish so much of the conservatism of the Mother land. I feel well assured that the asylums of Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, by their so long retaining their well-tried men, have consulted the best in-

* Abstract from a paper read before the Association of Medical Superintendents of American Asylums for the Insane, in Toronto, on 14th June, 1881.