THE MENTAL HYGIENE MOVEMENT.

BY

WILLIAM L. RUSSELL, M.D.,
WHITE PLAINS, N. Y.
Medical Superintendent, Bloomingdale Hospital.

REPRINTED FROM
THE
MEDICAL RECORD
July 20, 1912

WILLIAM WOOD & COMPANY
NEW YORK
THE MENTAL HYGIENE MOVEMENT.*
By WILLIAM L. RUSSELL, M.D.,
WHITE PLAINS, N. Y.
MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT, BLOOMINGDALE HOSPITAL.

The Mental Hygiene Movement is an attempt to bring about broader social organization for dealing with disorders of the mind. Thus far the interest of society in these disorders relates almost entirely to providing institutional care for the grosser forms, and to the relation of mental disease to responsibility for crime. Little organized effort is made to deal with the less obvious though frequently the more dangerous types, or with the earlier stages of even curable cases, or to apply to the problem of prevention the known facts relating to causation. A broader and more efficient organization seems now to be possible. The remarkably rapid increase of the number of cases under institutional care, quite out of proportion to the increase in the general population, and the enormous appropriations required from State legislatures in providing for them, furnish a practical illustration and argument which have gone far to arouse in even the densest of the taxpayers some concern in regard to the possibilities of cure and prevention. The information concerning disorders of the mind, and the relation of mental states to various forms of ill health and their cure, which has, in varying degrees of accuracy and clearness, been spread abroad, has also helped to

*Read at a meeting of the New York Psychiatric Society, March 6, 1912.

Copyright, William Wood & Company.
prepare the public to regard favorably attempts at
greater efficiency in the organized methods. There
is also available an increasing mass of scientific
knowledge which may be applied to bringing these
about.

In Europe the movement has not yet assumed as
definite form as in this country, though various
agencies are at work to accomplish the same objects.
There is an International Committee, which was or-
ganized with a view to systematic effort, but it has
not yet been in a position to begin active work. In
this country the movement has with characteristic
rapidity, advanced to the point of definite organiza-
tion and there are already four principal centers of
activity: Three of these are State organizations;
the fourth is the National Committee for Mental
Hygiene. This committee was formed in 1907,
principally through the efforts of Mr. Clifford W.
Beers of New Haven, and Dr. Meyer. There are
63 members, 23 of whom are physicians, several of
them being members of this society. The announced
objects of the committee are: (1) to work for the
protection of the mental health of the public; (2)
to help raise the standard of care of those threat-
ened with mental disorder, or actually ill; (3) to
promote the study of mental disorders in all their
forms and relations, and to disseminate knowledge
concerning their causes, treatment, and prevention;
(4) to obtain from every source reliable data re-
garding conditions and methods of dealing with
mental disorders; (5) to enlist the aid of the Fed-
eral Government so far as may seem desirable; (6)
to coordinate the existing agencies and help organ-
ize in each State in the Union an allied but inde-
pendent Society for Mental Hygiene.

Until quite recently active work has been limited
by lack of means. These have now been provided,
however, and plans for practical work must be made
and carried out. The field is so wide, and the prob-
lems which must be dealt with are so complex, that
it seems advisable to plan on broad lines with a view
to stimulating and guiding, rather than actually un-
derstanding to bring about specific practical improve-
ments in local or State conditions or methods. The
work will come under two divisions corresponding
to the two main objects aimed at. One class of
work will be for the purpose of bringing about im-
provements in the prevailing provision and methods
for the care and treatment of the insane and other
types of mental disorders. The other will have ref-
ence to prevention. For various reasons the first
task that will be undertaken will have special refer-
ence to improvements in the present methods of
dealing with mental disorders. Among these rea-
sons may be mentioned that the funds available were
given explicitly for the purpose of applying them
to the amelioration of the condition of the insane.
The other work of the committee can, however, and
no doubt will, be carried on as ways and means are
provided.

As a first step to bringing about improvements,
a sub-committee of the National Committee has been
appointed to make a study of the conditions in sev-
eral States. This sub-committee has engaged an ex-
perienced physician and the work will be commenced
at once. The study is not undertaken simply with
a view to statistics or publicity, but is intended as
a preliminary to constructive work in forming State
and local organizations which, under the advice and
guidance of the National Committee, may be led to
take up the task of bringing about needed improve-
ments.
Considerable time and labor have been spent by members of the committee, especially Dr. Hoch and Dr. Mabon, in formulating plans for the study of the conditions in certain States. The field is, however, too wide and the problem too complex to permit of more than a general working outline being followed. The work must be developed step by step as the way opens, though the main object aimed at must be clear and everything undertaken must contribute to its accomplishment; otherwise in such a wide field, and with the kind of material which must be worked with, it would be very easy to scatter our resources and to waste our energies in fruitless, and even in harmful, ways.

The work which will be taken up at once includes: The preparation of summaries of the laws relating to insanity in every State; investigation of the provision for institutional care and treatment, and the methods and standards of administration in several States; also of the organized methods of dealing with cases of mental disorder which are not in institutions, and of the way in which mental disorders in delinquents are dealt with. The provision for instruction in psychiatry in the medical schools, and the attention which is given to the proper management of abnormal children in the public schools will also be ascertained. The facts will be obtained by inquiry and by observation by competent persons, and will be carefully studied with a view of turning them to account, in the most judicious and effective ways possible, towards bringing about organized State and local efforts to improve conditions. The investigations and studies planned will also furnish a foundation of facts relating to the whole situation in regard to mental disorders, which should be of great value in the further work of the committee.

Opinions will, no doubt, differ as to the value of the plan of work outlined, depending on the point of view and the relative importance which one or another may attach to the various activities in which a National Committee for Mental Hygiene may properly engage. And, in such a broad work there is sure to be differences of opinion. It may be said, however, that ever since the National Committee was organized all the plans of work proposed, of which I have knowledge, included among the first tasks to be undertaken, the collection of reliable information relating to the present conditions and methods in the care of the insane.

The State organizations which have been formed are the Mental Hygiene Committee of the New York Charities Aid Association; the Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene and the Illinois Committee for Mental Hygiene. The New York Committee is a development in the work for the better care of the insane in which the State Charities Aid Association has been engaged for many years. In 1906 an After-Care Committee was formed to assist patients who had been discharged from the State hospitals. Later this committee broadened its activities so as to include work for the prevention of mental disease, and the title was changed to “The Committee on Prevention and After-Cure.” In 1910 the title was again changed to the present one and a paid assistant secretary of the association was assigned to the work, and broader activities were undertaken.

The work is being developed along four lines:
1. Spreading abroad information relating to the more clearly understood causes of insanity.
2. Promoting the establishment of outpatient departments, psychiatric wards and depart-
ments in general hospitals, and psychiatric or observation hospitals with a view to better treatment of the early stages of mental disease. (3) Assisting individual cases who need advice and direction in obtaining proper treatment. (4) Promoting desirable legislation. Over 400,000 copies of pamphlets and circular letters have been distributed during the past year, and over twenty lay audiences have been addressed on the subject of the better management and prevention of mental disorders by the assistant secretary and by psychiatrists who are interested in the work.

At a recent meeting of the committee it was decided to appoint a social worker and to open a bureau of information to which applicants might be directed by charity workers and others. The experience of the past year has shown the need of these features. The sub-committee was appointed to take up the question of better provision for dealing with abnormal children in the public schools.

The Connecticut Society has about 600 members and employs a social worker who is engaged principally in furnishing advice and assistance to mental cases who are at large, or to patients who have been discharged from the State hospitals. The Illinois Committee employs four social workers and the work is like that in Connecticut. This committee is also working for the better provision for mental cases under observation with reference to the need of commitment.

To bring about greater efficiency in the organized methods of dealing with cases of mental disease is to take a step towards greater intelligence in the management of the whole problem, and should not be looked upon as something quite apart from work for prevention. The lines of direct approach in a campaign for the prevention of insanity are not very clearly defined. The problem is so complex that an attempt to deal with it directly seems almost like undertaking an attack on the causes of disease and misery in general. The methods employed must be principally educational in character. The few fairly definite issues, such as the relation of general paralysis to previous syphilis and of alcohol to certain psychoses, cannot be dealt with as directly and as simply as the acute infectious diseases or tuberculosis. What the mental hygiene organizations can do in regard to these is to disseminate information where it will do most good. The arguments employed in the efforts which are being made for venereal prophylaxis and for intelligent dealing with the alcohol problem will be strengthened if they include what is known concerning the relation of syphilis and alcohol to insanity.

A more special, and probably not an unpromising, field for mental hygiene may be found in applying what has been learned regarding the mechanism of the development of certain types of psychoses, and regarding the types of individuals in whom abnormal reactions are likely to occur, to bringing about better management in the training of children. The observations made in regard to heredity and the laws of its operation, may also furnish helpful data which can be employed in a campaign of education and may possibly be used also more directly in promoting effective action for the welfare of future generations.

The facts concerning the relations of immigration to the prevalence of insanity in this country may also be used in an effort to improve the methods employed for keeping out the unfit. Altogether there seems to be a considerable body of facts and
information which can be used to good purpose by the organizations which have taken up work for the prevention of insanity and for more efficient methods in dealing with mental disease in individuals. The more intelligent public is already interested and ready for better organization and system in dealing with the problems at issue. If this interest is to be directed along sound and profitable lines the members of the medical profession, and more especially the psychiatrists, will have to take a hand in leading and informing.
A CORRESPONDENCE-

MEDICAL RECORD

A Weekly Journal of Medicine and Surgery

WILLIAM WOOD AND COMPANY, Publishers, 51 Fifth Avenue, New York.

$5.00 Per Annum. Published at New York Every Saturday

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.


Papers of original articles.

NEWS OF THE WEEK.

Against Cancer in Mexico.—Oncology for the Elderly.—General Information.


Correspondence.

Our Letters to the Editor.

SOCIETY REPORTS.

Medical Society of the State of New York.

Scientific Meetings and Societies.

American Ophthalmological Society.

American Dental Association.

American Medical Association.

American Pharmaceutical Association.

Association of American Physicians.

Pharmacological Society.

Urgent Surgery.

By FELIX LEJARS. Translated by WILLIAM S. DICKIE, F.R.C.S.

From the Sixth French Edition.

Two volumes, large octavo, Vol./Rev. 811 pages. Illustrated by 453 engravings, in black and colors, and by 84 half-page plates.

WILLIAM WOOD AND COMPANY, Medical Publishers, 51 Fifth Avenue, New York.

JUST PUBLISHED

TEXT-BOOK OF ANATOMY

By D. J. CUNNINGHAM, F.R.S.

THIRD EDITION.

[Royal Octavo, 1487 pages; 956 Wood Engravings of which 306 in two or more colors. Bound, $6.00 net; Half Morocco, $7.50 net.]

URGENT SURGERY

By FELIX LEJARS. Translated by WILLIAM S. DICKIE, F.R.C.S.

FROM THE SIXTH FRENCH EDITION.

[Two volumes, large octavo, Vol./Rev. 811 pages. Illustrated by 453 engravings, in black and colors, and by 84 half-page plates. Bound, $6.00 net; Half Morocco, $7.50 net.]

WILLIAM WOOD AND COMPANY, Medical Publishers, 51 Fifth Avenue, New York.