

enlarged where they exist. No one, we suppose, can doubt the great usefulness of our New York Board of Health, but if they could be armed with powers that would enable them to act more directly upon the prevention of disease they could be much more useful. If they could have authority to dictate the plumbing and ventilation of every structure, private as well as public, erected in this city, they could save the city a large percentage of its cruelest mortality. If they could have the control of the cleaning of the streets, does any one doubt that they would greatly improve the health of the city? We talk about the adulteration of food as if that were a great thing, and our Board of Health busies itself about it in the absence of other work, but the adulteration, the absolute poisoning, of the air we breathe, is of almost infinitely more importance.

Doctor Roosa speaks of what is done in the way of preventive medicine by our wise system of quarantine, by which the city has been saved from destructive epidemics. With our yellow fever les-

son of last year fresh in memory, it really seems as if towns should learn something. There is no question that all these epidemics become fatal in the degree in which the air is vitiated by poisonous odors. When yellow fever or cholera visits a place, it becomes a terrible or a mild visitation, according to the conditions which it finds. If it finds a people already poisoned with foul streets and bad drainage, it finds food for a great and grave mortality. If it finds a place where everything is pure and sweet, it does not stay long or work such mischief. There are some states which have a Board of Health, or may have one, in every town, armed with a considerable amount of power—with the power, at least, of holding inquest on private premises, and determining what shall be done to remedy evils; but what we really want most is a wider power of prevention, such as shall make it incumbent upon every builder to secure the approval of such a board before he can live in his house himself, or offer it for sale or rent.

COMMUNICATIONS.

Are Our Insane Retreats Inhuman?

EDITOR OF SCRIBNER'S MONTHLY:

DEAR SIR—There is no doubt a more or less wide-spread public impression that great cruelties are not uncommonly practiced at our insane retreats. The stories which give rise to this impression are mainly started by the patients themselves. Are these stories true, or are they false? Having had some practical experience at two of the leading institutions of the country, I will endeavor to give an answer to this question.

On the first day of July, 1878, I embarked on the steamer *Mary Powell*, from Kingston on the Hudson, for New York City. During the passage, for reasons which need not be here detailed, I broke forth in a most pronounced condition of mental derangement. The next evening I found myself an inmate of the Bloomingdale Asylum, situated in the upper portion of the metropolis. There I remained until the tenth of October, when I was removed to the Hudson River State Hospital, located at Poughkeepsie.

When I left Bloomingdale, I not only believed but would have solemnly sworn in any court of justice that I had been the victim of the most diabolical treatment. I would as soon have doubted my own existence as doubted that no effort had been spared to compass my destruction. I had been purposely left, for example, an entire week without food, but I could not be starved. I had been given every poison, and every conceivable combination of poisons, but I could not be killed. Moreover, scheme after scheme had proved abortive, the object of which had been my assassination. I was proof against even silver bullets. Not

that I was the devil, for was I not the great Original and Supreme, even Brahma?

It is needless to say that I am now speaking only of certain enormous delusions which took possession of my mind at Bloomingdale. But I have spoken of these delusions in order to illustrate the undoubted general fact that, to a great extent, the cruelties which the insane are so prone to charge upon the asylums which shelter them, are as much a part of their hallucinations as is any other aspect of their insanity.

It would not be to tell the whole truth, however, did I stop here. It is no mere imagination that I was roughly handled during the more violent stages of my sickness. I was, for instance, put in strait-jackets of the stoutest linen, and in muffs and manacles of the strongest leather. I was likewise beaten, choked and stamped upon. Yet this is a mere statement of the treatment irrespective of the reasons. Were the reasons sufficient and even imperative?

I did not indeed develop any tendency to inflict upon myself personal injuries of the graver character; though to do so is not at all uncommon among the insane. But I did develop a most marked mania for tearing and breaking things in general. What, for example, was bedding for, or clothing for, or furniture for, except to be devoted to destruction? Take a single illustration. One day a special meal had been provided for me in the hall. I walked up with the utmost nonchalance and kicked the table over. Had you been the attendant in charge would you have first dealt with the patient, and then cleared away the *débris*; or first cleared away the *débris*, and then dealt with the patient?

I was at times dangerous. Thus, one day I

was out in the exercise-yard with the other patients, when I suddenly began to sweep about the grounds with great rapidity and power. After the first fury of the outburst had somewhat spent itself, I seized a huge stone, and, taking my position near a certain tree, held the entire posse of attendants at bay, as if I had been a cannon loaded to the muzzle.

Now this dangerousness of the insane is of very frequent occurrence. Thus, my second morning at the Hudson River State Hospital came very near proving fatal to me. I had been placed upon what may be appropriately termed the Wild Ward of the institution. One appearing like a human demon came rushing into my room, and almost before I could realize that he was there, struck me three full blows with a heavy chair. I caught the first two blows upon my hands, and managed to protect myself against the third by throwing myself upon my back and holding up my feet. At this juncture, an attendant came to my relief and rescue.

This then suffices to show that in the more furious cases of insanity, rigorous personal restraint and, on the part of the hospital officials, vigorous personal resistance are often not only permissible, but necessary.

Unfortunately, however, it is only too common among convalescents to remember—often with the greatest bitterness—their restraint and sterner treatment, while they utterly forget their destructiveness and dangerousness. Not a few cases of this character have come under my own observation. I remember, for instance, one stalwart giant, who was my fellow-patient at Poughkeepsie. He was a rough—standing six feet four inches in his stockings—muscular and heavily proportioned. When we were in the Wild Ward together, I used sometimes almost to tremble to see him go about with glaring eyes, his arms bared to the elbow, and breathing out threatening and slaughter. Still at that time, he was not even confined to his room. Judge of my surprise at afterward hearing him, in the Convalescent Ward, denouncing the institution with the utmost vehemence for the outrages previously perpetrated upon him, without the slightest provocation. He referred to the days before I had met him, when he must have been at his wildest, and when the personal safety of those about him must have required that he should be kept in a condition bordering closely on intimidation.

Now, it is only in these extreme instances that anything even approaching to severity is ever visited upon a patient at either of the institutions of which I was an inmate. As a general thing, the patients are treated with marked forbearance, courtesy, and kindness. Nevertheless, the entire atmosphere of an insane retreat is more or less overlaid with fault-findings and complainings. This one should never have been placed there at all. That one is being detained there in violation of every principle of humanity and justice. This one is slighted and neglected by the physicians. That one is being deliberately deprived of the proper diet by the authorities in general.

Not that there is in all this any conscious and

intentional falsification on the part of the complainants. It is simply a condition of things inevitably resulting from their disordered nervous and mental state. Thus, one man will eat a hearty meal, and yet, because of his impaired memory, forget within an hour that he has done so. Another will eat enough to satisfy a glutton, and yet, because of his abnormal appetite, have no other burden to his conversation than that he is hungry, hungry, hungry.

In the female wards of the retreats of which I am speaking, as I have had no personal experience, so I have had no personal observation. It is a well-known fact, however, that in certain forms of insanity peculiar to women, as in puerperal mania, the patient, however virtuous and chaste when sane, appears to be given over to the very devil of obscenity and lustful accusations, both toward herself and all about her. Under these circumstances, a physician at an insane asylum is pre-eminently liable to the gravest but most baseless charges on the part of the female inmates, and, as a consequence, is pre-eminently entitled to be considered innocent until clearly proven guilty. As a rule, the evidence of their accusers is as crazy as it is truthless.

The design of this paper is not, of course, to suggest any relaxation of vigilance in connection with our insane retreats. If any class of unfortunates need protection, the insane do. If any class of institutions could be converted into the most awful of human hells, did they chance to fall into the hands of cruel and lustful men, our insane retreats could be thus converted.

Neither is it the design of this paper to bear testimony whether for or against any retreat, except the two above, at which I was a patient. I am credibly informed, however, that the Bloomingdale Asylum and the Hudson River State Hospital are not exceptional, but merely typical of the better class of institutions scattered throughout the country. For some reason or another, I have, on the other hand, gained the impression that certain of our minor retreats, and notably all such as are subject to political management and manipulation, require a constant watching and a frequent overhauling. But all this is merely hearsay and impression, and constitutes no sufficient ground whether of vindication or accusation.

What I have to say, therefore, is simply this: For reasons at once suggested, no insane retreat can be conducted to the satisfaction of the insane themselves. If it were the ideal institution of its class, only too large a proportion of its inmates would denounce it. And it is with peculiar pleasure that I herewith bear personal witness that there are at least two retreats in this country which reflect the highest credit on our Christian civilization, of which they are among the most benignant outcomes. To these, and to kindred retreats, friends may commit their loved insane ones with the fullest confidence that they will in every respect be placed under conditions most conducive to their physical convalescence and mental restoration.

Very truly yours,

AUGUSTUS BLAUVELT.