'Good Old Days' of Psychiatry

SIR: As a junior psychiatrist, without the benefit of hindsight, I was surprised by some of the comments of Dr Crammer in his article "Twenty-Five Years of the British Journal of Psychiatry" (*Journal*, October 1988, **153**, 434–436).

I hope I misunderstood his passing reference to the uncertain equivalence of male and female psychiatrists: is this really still an issue among our seniors? He merely hinted at his regret for the passing of paternalism and the growing need to explain and justify ourselves in public, but he left us in no doubt about his views on the anti-psychiatry brigade. Not having been around at the time, no doubt I missed much of the acrimony and debate, but surely his accusations of tunnel vision are equally applicable to all those who simply dismiss as emotional and irrational the advocates of alternative medicine, psychoanalysis, and other 'non-medical' therapies.

I chose to specialise in a field which I hoped would welcome an eclectic approach and a free exchange of opinion; perhaps it is just as well I missed out on the 'good old days'.

JUDY HARRISON

Gaskell House
Manchester Royal Infirmary

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Medico-Psychological Association

The quarterly meeting of this Association took place at the Retreat, York, on Thursday, March 14th, under the presidency of Dr Clouston, of Morningside, Edinburgh.

Dr Clifford Allbutt read a paper on the Insanity of Children, as distinguished from Idiocy and Mental Weakness. He pointed out that the form of the insanity depended on the degree of mental development, and that as the infant was all movement, so the insane infant was all restless action. The older child was more affectively insane. There was a want of method and reflexion in all the mental disorders of children. Suicide, and even homicide, might occur, but they were impulsive, thoughtless acts, suicide seeming to be the only door open for escape from what appeared to be a serious calamity to the child. Dr Allbutt gave a more favourable opinion of such cases than is commonly held. – The President referred to delirium arising in neurotic children with very slight bodily cause. – Drs Beach, Savage, and others also spoke.

Dr Baker, of the Retreat, read a paper on Ten Years' Experience of the Turkish Bath in the Treatment of Mental Disorders. He demonstrated its use in all cases of blood pollution, such as alcoholism and the chloral and morphia habit, as well as in cases of mental weakness due to gout or similar causes. In defective excretion, in hepatic congestion, and the like, the bath is invaluable; it assists convalescence, as after puerperal insanity, and quiets and relieves even in epilepsy and chronic insanity. Besides all this, it acts as a tonic for the medical officers and general staff. The opinion of those who have tried it, among medical officers of asylums, was strongly in its favour as a rapid and easy way of washing patients, as well as for medical treatment.

A paper by Dr Watson was read on the Use of Sulphonal, and Dr Percy Smith contributed his experience at Bethlem. The result seemed to be that this drug was useful and harmless, one drawback being its insolubility. Dr Yellowlees had seen giddiness produced by it.

The record of a case of attempted suicide was given by Dr Urquhart.

In the evening the members and their friends dined together, and the chairman, Dr Clouston, spoke fully of the present, past, and future of lunacy, showing how much of the humane treatment of the insane had its origin at the Retreat, York, under the direction of the great-grandfather of Dr Hack Tuke.

On Friday a visit was paid to the new asylum for the West Riding at Menston. This asylum has cost £240,000, and is of very substantial construction, with all the newest improvements.

Reference

The Lancet, 23 March, 1889, 581.

Researched by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Surrey

https://doi.org/10.1192/S0007125000225439 Published online by Cambridge University Press