

A CITY OF THE INSANE.

Every fifth person in Gheel, Belgium, a lively market town of 10,000 inhabitants is a lunatic, yet a tolerably observing person may remain here a week without even suspecting the great enterprise carried on—the wholesale treatment of the insane by the simplest and most natural methods, guaranteed to be effective by five centuries of good results.

As Brooklyners take intuitively to boarding-houses and church-going, so are Gheel men and women born mad-house keepers, and the youngsters take to the task of managing, employing and amusing maniacs as naturally as to their native diet of potatoes, bacon and coffee. In fact to give up part of one's house of bedroom accommodations to crazy strangers is as much of an industry here as agriculture, tanning and cloth and sabot making. And no wonder, for the town owes its origin to the mother-protectress of the mentally diseased, St. Dymphna, who has had a shrine on the spot where the city now stands since time immemorial.

The burgomaster told your correspondent that long before the present town was thought of, in the thirteenth century, a bishop of Antwerp recommended pilgrimages to the saint's tomb—then situated in a waste country—as a means of securing the holy Dymphna's intercession for insane relatives and friends at the shrine of the Almighty. The mother-protectress seems to have worked miracles in those days, but, as a general thing she took her time about them.

As the pilgrims had to remain with their charges in the neighborhood until a cure was effected, they waited often months and years in some cases their whole lifetime. Thus a temporary settlement grew up around the shrine, then a village. The latter has developed into a town whose community achieved fair success in various industries, yet withal stuck to the occupation of the earliest settlers.

St. Dymphna herself is almost forgotten now adays, but the legend of her powers lives among the people, and wherever in Belgium or Holland a lunatic bobs up, his folks' first thought turns to Gheel, where insane man, woman or child can find board and lodging at the rate of \$10 to \$100 dollars a month, and be cured into the bargain if there is the slightest chance for recovery.

A patient brought to the old town loses that depressing title of character the moment he enters his new surroundings. Whether the State Medical Board controlling the classification of new arrivals send him to one of the upper districts where "dangerous" cases, according to medical parlance, are kept, or whether he is at once assigned to ordinary lodgings, the Gheelers call him "innocent" or "friend." Such words as lunatic, insane or madman are not in the town's vocabulary; common consent banished them from conversation, and the superintendent of schools told your correspondent that his teachers never allude to expressions of the sort.

The doctors' work ceases with the act mentioned. Knowing as they do each family's capacity for handling certain forms of insanity, they dispose of new cases by giving each madman the keeper his peculiar condition demands, and there, as a general thing, the matter ends, though for appearance sake, a sort of professional supervision is occasionally exercised.

The Gheelers, then, are the real medicine men in this mental resort today, as their ancestors were before them, but, their success notwithstanding, they remain simple-minded peasants as of old. Common sense is their strong point, and medical is so much out of their line that there are not more than two native doctors in the place. On the other hand, they pride themselves on two never-failing household remedies, simplicity and patience.

As to each family's specialty, there are the Steens for instance. For the last two or three centuries they have made a specialty of taking care of epileptics, the experience gained in the treatment descending from father to son. They could give points to many a college professor, you may be sure. The Vrooms are just as well up in the mania of persecution as the Steens are in the other branch of suffering. And so it is with the Van Zakens, hereditary attendants of delirium tremens; the Brealmonts, the Bergeres, the Boulangers, Bruits, and Maasns, who have a reputation for managing victims of melancholia, monomania of fear, or suspicion or pride, and of emotional madness respectively.

But while all Gheelers are professional mad-house keepers, more or less, none are allowed to engage in this business exclusively, each family, no matter how high its reputation in any special branch may be receiving only as many boarders as their house can hold without being turned into an asylum. The authorities calculate thus:—Henrik Steens has five rooms besides those he needs for his family and servants. That entitles him to two male and two female boarders, and epileptics, willing or able to work in a tannery and the household respectively, apply for quarters. Or Boulanger, the baker, who owns a big house, can have over a dozen melancholia friends capable of working at bread and cake making, or on his farm. For every crazy man, woman, or child living in

the shadow of St. Dymphna's shrine must work with his or her hands, or go to school. That is one of the conditions of their acceptance as patients. It is, moreover, an integral part of the successful Gheel cure. Complete absence of coercive measures, plenty of good nourishing food, of fresh air, and of sunshine and temperance are the other remedies prescribed and insisted upon. But these rules are enforced in the gentlest manner. Friends or innocents must never be irritated, else cure becomes impossible and the peasant-doctor loses caste with his fellows. As a further consequence the authorities immediately shut down on his supply of "milk cows," that is, crazy boarders.

The entrance of a lunatic in a Gheel family is marked by a feast. A tablet with the word "welcome" in glaring colours is hung over the street door, and all members of the household dress in their best. Paterfamilias, styled Oom (uncle) for that occasion, introduces the new-comer as a distant relative, cousin or brother, and the reunion is celebrated with many cups that cheer after the manner of the country. In the evening neighbours call, who keep up and emphasize this delusion, which henceforth and for all practical purposes become a fact.

Immediately after breakfast next morning the friend is assigned to an occupation in his Oom's household, the shop, or on his farm, the choice of duties being left to him. He accompanies his pseudo brothers, and sisters, and cousins, among them usually several afflicted like himself, to the scene of usefulness and all begin to work in earnest. The friends are encouraged to sing and to play practical jokes on their comrades, but the sane among the latter never repay in kind.

At noon all return home, where a bountiful meal awaits them. For the newcomer there are tit-bits, and Oom pulls him into a corner for an extra drink; in short, everything is done to make the friend like his new surroundings. Yet this indulgence never goes far enough to permit dispensation from work. Six to eight hours of manual labour is the minimum, and if a friend doesn't take kindly to it he is persuaded by the Heer Oom's paternal authority or by presents in kind or money. Many lunatics like to work sporadically, but that won't do at all. Gheel's doctor-population knows that its earliest crazy settlers got cured, with St. Dymphna's aid, by working for their living at farming, house-building, etc., and with the perseverance that is one of the chief characteristics of the Flemish character, chronic lazybones are barred from the resort. "We can't cure loafers," they say. "Let them go to an asylum. We don't want hopeless cases unless they can be made useful in a way."

Two hundred of Gheel's lunatic population receive regular wages from their keepers and have money in the savings bank; five hundred more earn their tobacco and drinking money. Among those paid in kind are numerous women who receive premiums in the shape of jewelry, trinkets, ribbons, and the like.

Aside from their regular employment, the friends enjoy almost unrestricted liberty. They may visit saloons, and if one announces his intention to travel the landlord willingly helps pack his grip and send him to the station with many good wishes. The ticket-seller, of course, recognizes his customer and sells him either a worthless ticket that the ticket-taker confiscates or keeps him waiting until the train is gone.

The saloonkeeper follows a similar mode of conduct. He has always one glass of beer, or wine, or Schnapps for a friend but no more. "We have just run out of the stuff, and the next barrel won't be tapped till tomorrow." The whole population works hand in hand to give the insane the illusion of being entirely unrestricted, and these unhappy people stop yearning for their liberty because it seems always at their elbow.

The result of this treatment, or absence of treatment, is astonishing. An officer of the State Medical Board told your correspondent that quite 60 per cent. of friends are cured, while all, almost without exception, find relief and comfort in Gheel. Those that at home were raving maniacs become harmless after a two or three weeks' stay.

"The fact that we treat the insane like reasonable beings impresses itself upon their sense of honour," continues the doctor. "They make it a point to behave, and many give themselves up in the 'dangerous' district as soon as they feel an attack coming on. After that is over they return to their boarding-house and to their daily labours as cheerfully as ever, and no one remarks upon their absence."

The tact of these peasants is indeed wonderful. Even in conversation with your correspondent they refused to admit that there was anything abnormal about the mental condition of their charges. When told that maniacs are generally regarded with fear they couldn't understand it. "Why," they said, "all the friends carry knives, while axes, sledge-hammers, hoes, etc., are their everyday tools, and yet the town annals have no record of any act of violence committed by a friend in two centuries."

"Occasionally," said the town pastor the Rev. Mr. Hoogstraeten, "we have a violent fellow, and then call in the assistance of the

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children. A neighbour of mine once had a friend-guest who insisted on smashing all the available crockery every day or two. When persuasion failed, the woman gave him her baby to hold the moment she saw an attack of frenzy coming on 'Mind your little sister well,' she said; 'don't break it or God will punish you.' It worked like a charm, and though since, then hundreds of babies have been employed in the same fashion none ever got hurt."

Other children are frequently used to help cure mischievous friends by assisting them in their crazy pranks and afterwards receiving mock punishment for the trouble they had taken. That works upon the lunatic's feelings, and many have reformed for the children's sake.

Gheel has numerous lawn tennis and bowling clubs composed almost entirely of lunatics; insane people perform every Sunday of the year on the city's amateur stage, and there are several good actors and actresses among them. A philharmonic society, the leader of which is an intermittent maniac, gives most creditable concerts, and the male and female choir of St. Dymphna's church is celebrated throughout the province for its wonderful voices, all lunatics.

It may not be amiss to emphasize in conclusion that the methods now in vogue are those adopted by the earliest settlers five hundred and more years ago. While all Europe was hunting insane people like wild beasts—a practice legalized in England by act of Parliament in 1573—while Germany, in particular, treated her insane Kaiser Rudolph to irons and set the public executioner and sworn tormentor to mount guard over him, while thousands of victims of melancholia and hysteria were burned and flayed and broken on the wheel in all corners of the world as witches and devil-possessed—the last died in Madrid at the stake as late as 1826—the pious and good-hearted peasants of Gheel adopted humanitarian principles in dealing with their mentally diseased brethren and sisters. The textbooks do not record this, but it is true, nevertheless.—Correspondence of the Boston Transcript.

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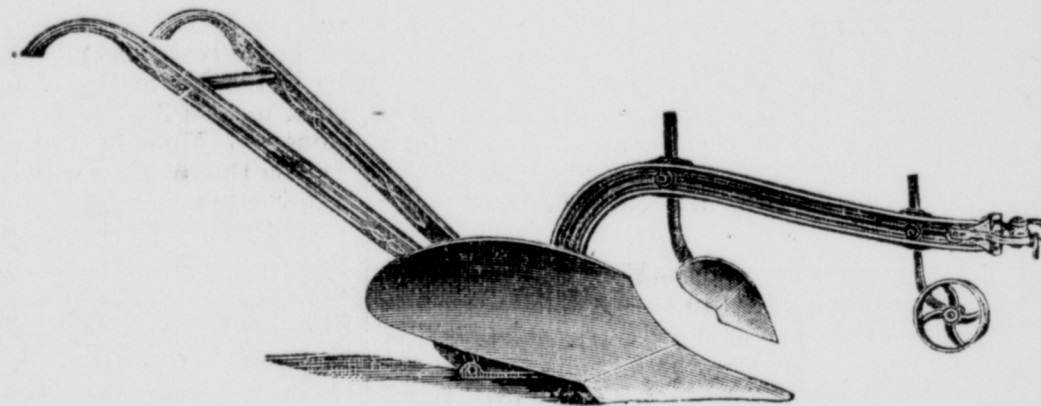
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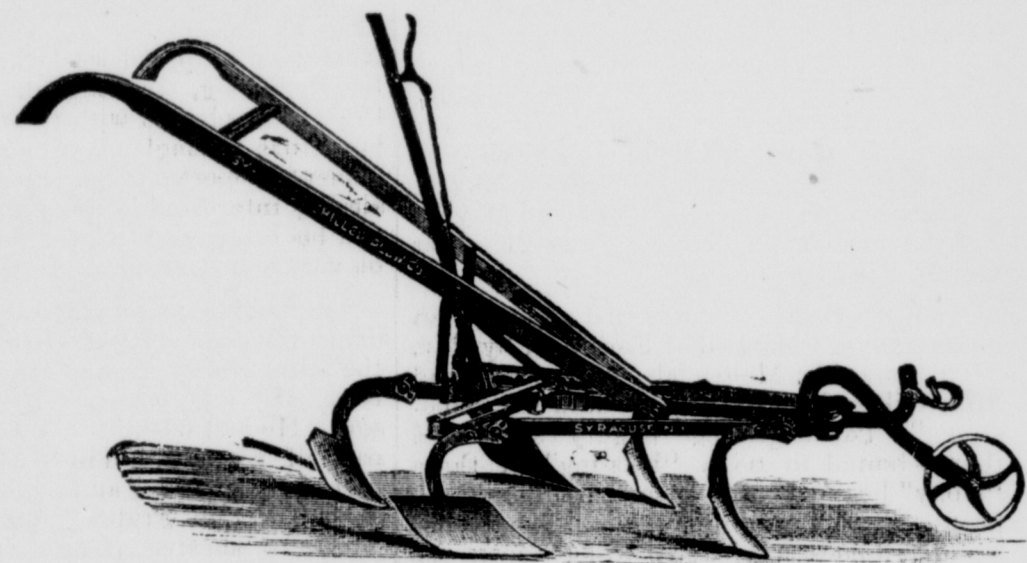
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A modest youth may become a confident man, but never an impudent one. Indeed modesty appears to be the minority of confidence, and confidence the maturity of reason. Anger is the most impotent passion that accompanies the mind of man; it effects nothing it goes about, and hurts the man who is possessed by it more than any other against whom it is directed.

Great minds may, by repeated ill-treatment be brought to a state of indifference, but even the extensive powers of insolence, or wickedness, cannot excite personal animosity in them.

Neglect the first opportunity of liquidating your debts, and another may never occur. Pride hurries many a man to get out of debt; fear prevents as many from getting into it.