

JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE, JANUARY, 1931.



DR. HENRI COLIN.

Born September 22, 1860.
Died October 19, 1930.

Honorary Member
since 1920.

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THE
JOURNAL OF MENTAL SCIENCE

[Published by Authority of the Royal Medico-Psychological
Association.]

No. 316 [NEW SERIES
No. 280.] JANUARY, 1931. VOL. LXXVII

HENRI COLIN.

HENRI COLIN, Honorary Member of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, died at Châtenay, near Paris, on October 19 last. The cardio-renal affection from which he suffered had not kept him from his usual activities during the year, and many of his friends were unaware of his ill-health. All were anxious to pay him a last mark of respect, and on October 22, in spite of a heavy down-pour, there was a numerous assembly at his grave, in which for two years there had rested the remains of one of his sons, a medical student, who died from the remote effects of gassing during the war.

He was born in Paris in 1860, and was eleven years old when his stepfather was compelled to leave France for political reasons, and came with him to London, where they stayed till 1878. After completing his medical studies in Paris, he was for two years, as a hospital extern, the pupil of Charcot at the Salpêtrière. It was his duty to collect the series of lectures published under the title of *Leçons du Mardi*, and his relations with the Master were close. He has described Charcot in these words: "Of medium height, he impressed by his superb features, illuminated by two wonderful black eyes, with their dark, sunken orbits, and their penetrating look. His mouth had a slightly disdainful expression."

Having successfully competed, in 1887, for an asylum internship, he spent a year under Paul Garnier, at the Infirmierie Spéciale of the Paris Dépôt de Police, where all arrested persons showing signs of mental disturbance are sent for medical examination. Later, at St. Anne, he was a pupil of Bouchereau, a friend of Hack Tuke, and was also able to attend lectures by Magnan, and to take part in the latter's clinical work.

The title of Colin's M.D. thesis, presented in 1890, was "An Essay on the Mental State of Hysterics." In 1891 he was appointed an

Assistant Physician in the Asylum Service, after competitive examination, and was sent to Sainte-Gemmes, near Angers. The following year he was transferred to the Lafond Asylum, near La Rochelle, and in 1894 he was placed in charge of the Special Medical Service at the Maison Centrale of Gaillon. Here were to be found, not insane patients who had committed criminal acts, but criminals who had become insane while serving their sentence; it was, in fact, a prison infirmary. Although Colin had already written (in collaboration with Paul Garnier) an article on "Homicidal Monomania" for Hack Tuke's *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, he had not yet gone very deeply into these questions, and his new sphere of activity was of absorbing interest to him. But his stay at Gaillon was not very lengthy, for in 1901 he was called to Paris to organize a department for the vicious and criminal insane at Villejuif Asylum.

He favoured the segregation in special institutions of all criminal lunatics, whether under sentence or not, and he divided them into two classes. In the first, the most frequently seen, two states, insanity and criminal tendency, were simultaneously present; these were the really dangerous criminal lunatics, and included homicidal persecuted patients, fire-raisers, sexual offenders, etc. The other group was that of patients who acted under the influence of some delusional idea about which their mental state rendered them incapable of reasoning; this was the case with certain persecuted patients, some epileptics, general paralytics, demented, etc. But he refused to regard as criminal lunatics the vicious and lazy, the drunkards and vagabonds, and certain of the hysterics and epileptics—"all that mass of individuals designated, often wrongly, as cases of moral insanity, who are incapable of adapting themselves to their social environment, and are insufferable on account of their degraded instincts, their violence, brutality, coarseness and lack of discipline; but who, nevertheless, have been careful not to commit any criminal acts, and have only found their way to the prison or the asylum as a result of minor offences." For these he thought it sufficient to provide special wards attached to the ordinary asylums.

We owe to Colin numerous articles and papers on the criminal vicious and troublesome insane, as well as two volumes written in collaboration with Pactet on *The Insane in Court and in Prison*; but all questions concerning mental disorders were equally objects of his attention. He favoured the open-door system, not for all patients, but for all who were capable of benefiting by it; he thought

it indispensable, if this system were to be applied successfully, that the physician should have a thorough knowledge of all his patients—an impossibility if the number of patients was too great. He also worked for the improvement of the professional education of the nursing staff.

He was a corresponding member of the Société Médico-psychologique from 1892, and a full member from 1905; in 1918 he was President, and in 1920 he succeeded Ritti as Secretary-General, at the same time taking over the direction of the *Annales Médico-psychologiques*. In addition to his other occupations, which already filled so much of his time, it was his duty to visit prisoners charged with criminal offences, and to draw up reports on their mental state.

During the war his department was taken over for the use of soldiers suffering from mental disorder. He pointed out the danger of retaining in the Army unrecognized cases of imbecility and general paralysis, and some years later he had occasion to stress the importance of the psychical sequelæ of the war.

On January 1, 1922, he left Villejuif to take charge of that Admission Department at St. Anne to which Magnan had devoted nearly forty-five years of his life. In the spring of the same year was held the celebration of the centenary of Bayle's thesis; the arrangements for this event meant much additional work. When called upon in 1923 to preside at the Congress of Alienists and Neurologists at Besançon, he chose as the subject for his Presidential Address "The Evolution of Ideas upon Insanity During the Last Century." According to him, the reason why the great mass of the psychoses eludes histological investigation is that there is no histological lesion present. "To insist on attributing all disorders of the mind to either cerebral lesion, or biological changes, or psychological disturbances, must in my view be fruitless: it is starting from a preconceived idea, and trying, unreasonably, to make the observed facts fit that idea." He considered direct study and clinical examination to be the true basis of all observations. "But," he added, "psychiatrists cannot be improvised. One can only learn to become one after many years of practice."

Under the age limit he had to leave St. Anne at the end of 1925. But he remained just as active, and the present writer was able to observe, when working with him in organizing in 1927 the Pinel Centenary Celebrations, how much spirit he brought to the task, and how skilfully he could overcome all difficulties. His loss leaves us in deep sorrow, for he was a man of great learning, sure judgment, and upright nature.

RENÉ SEMELAIGNE.